

May 2019

Giiwe

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Recommended Citation

Kuczaboski, Skyler (2019) "Giiwe," *I2*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/i2/vol1/iss2/6>

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Giiwe

If you ask me where I'm from, if you ask me "Aandi wenjibayaan?", I'll reply "Gaa-zagaskwaajimekaag nindoonjibaa, miinawaa ashkibagaziibing nindaa noongom." And I didn't tell you where I was born and grew up first, I was taught to tell you about the borders that the government confined my family first

But if you ask me that question, only a story could truly explain

A story older than me, older than this country, a story of a migration from the Atlantic shores to the Great Lakes, a story about a five year old girl who escaped poverty and unemployment by running 200 miles south with her mom

A story about that little girl who waited on a porch for hours until she realized her friend wasn't allowed to come out and play

Not with her, anyways

About her son, who escaped violence from the Catholic schools he attended, who ran while praying to a god who justified his genocide that they wouldn't catch him. They screamed, "Go back to where you came from" at him, throwing rocks

I wonder where they meant. Back to the rez? Back to the Atlantic shores? Or somewhere other than here because his skin was darker than theirs?

I wonder if those boys knew about the prophecy our ancestors followed, if they knew about the shell that led us to the food that grows on water, if they knew about the treaties and policies that forced us off home after home, carrying nothing but seeds in our pockets and tried to plant it in the cities, trying to bring pieces of home to this new one

I am the wild rice growing in the cracked concrete in East Saint Paul, the leather soles of moccasins dancing on tiled floors, a 3 hour drive from where my people were fenced in by the government,

A place I fear that does not love me back, does not care about the hoodies and jean jackets and jewelry adorned with their seal

Who does not care about the blisters from dancing or the cuts from beading or the work in learning ojibwemowin but cares more about a number on a piece of paper

A number they learned how to calculate from whites, counting drops of blood to define who we are, even though that is never who we thought we were before they came

I'm jealous of the disconnect created with distance and claim; how dare I long to be buried on my grandmother's land if the land does not know me

Where do I go if I do not belong in Saint Paul or Leech Lake?

Where do I call home?