



Starla Thompson

Indigenous Educator. Scholar. Advocate. Jingle Dress Dancer.

My spirit name is "Waben Gizhek Kwe" (First Light That Breaks the Night Woman). I come from the Otter Clan of the Forest Potawatomi and Santa Ynez Chumash Nations.

Bosho ~ Greetings

My roles as an educator, scholar, advocate, dancer, and mother are shaped by my lived experiences as an indigenous woman born and raised in Chicago, ancestral Potawatomi land. I am an enrolled member of the Forest Band of Potawatomi residing in northern Wisconsin. A long line of matriarch relatives that survived removal, assimilation (boarding schools), relocation, and other federal policies aimed at our genocide, enlighten my work, power my passion for truth, and inspire my commitment to healing in our communities. Deepening the understanding of my indigenous history and culture is a treasured legacy.

My immediate family's history took a devastating turn when my mother contracted tuberculosis as a toddler. While recovering in a sanatorium, she was stolen, illegally adopted, and removed to Nevada, completely severing her tie to our people in the Great Lakes. She was raised with unspeakable abuse and without the love and support of her people and traditional ways.

We navigated homelessness, poverty, and abuse during the first seven years of my life. My deep connection to my culture and the Native American community in Chicago provided strength and resiliency in the face of adversity. Then, as the oldest adult child, I took on the sacred responsibility to reconnect our familial tie to our tribe and culture, which became a life-long gift. This journey led me to my traditional role as a healer and profession as an intermediary and educator. I sat with my elders, relatives, leaders, and knowledge keepers to understand our culture and history through indigenous perspectives. These teachings, coupled with my life experiences and fortitude, shape how I approach relationships to bring about truth, understanding, and appreciation of the contributions of Native American people.

From the beginning, I vowed not to allow the cycle of trauma to perpetuate in my sons. To find strength and direction for my family, I once again looked to our culture. All of my children have spirit names, they all attend the Indian Community School for Native American children, and they practice and protect our ancestors' ceremonies. Beyond our spiritual foundation, I know a secure future for my children necessitates education, which remains a family priority. I immersed myself in university studies and graduated Cum Laude as a first-generation graduate in my family.

I perform the traditional Native American ceremony called the "Jingle Dress Dance" or "Healing Dance." The century-old tradition constitutes a prayer in physical form and motion. The reverence of the ritual, rites of passage, and faith alive within its existence and present-day practice are evidence of the wisdom and resiliency in our ancestral ways.

As a diplomat, connector, and truth-seeker, I dedicate my life to serving communities and entities through Native American history, cultural awareness, and education. My intimate and astute understanding of Native communities led me to create a nationally recognized leadership development program for Native American populations in reaching their education, career, and life goals.

My life mission is to use my story, passion, and skills to effectuate positive change, amplify voices, and expand justice for marginalized populations. I seek to develop transformative relationships within businesses, governments, and the broad community to support and further tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

Migweth ~ Thank you, kindly.

Starla Thompson

Indigenous Consultant

Current Appointments

•Neubauer Collegium for Culture and Society, The University of Chicago | Chicago, IL | 2021-2022

Principal Investigator/ Research Fellow - "Native Chicago"

Burpee Museum of Natural History |Rockford, IL | 2022

Curator "Of This Place" Exhibition

•Uncovered.com | 2022

Consultant and Facilitator - Missing and Murdered Indigenous People

•Chicago Blackhawks | Chicago, IL | 2020-2022

Cultural Educator and Consultant

•Lake Forest College | Lake Forest, IL | 2021 - 2022

Historical and Cultural Consultant

•Women's Fund of Greater Milwaukee | Milwaukee, WI | 2020-2022

Board Director, Facilitator, and Programming Chair

•Trickster Cultural Center | Schaumburg, IL | 2020-2021

Cultural Consultant, Artist, and Grant Writer

•The Way Out | Milwaukee, IL | 2020-2021

Chief Learning Officer and Cultural Consultant

•The Floating Museum | Chicago, IL | 2019-2022

Cultural Consultant, Panelist, and Performer

Engagements (abbrev. list)

• Women Developing Wisconsin Conference |Milwaukee, WI | 2022

Featured Presenter

•Associated Bank | Great Lakes Region | 2021

Cultural Consultant and Presenter – Honoring the Truth: Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day

•Story Medicine: Breaking Stigmas Through Storytelling| Milwaukee, WI | 2021

Featured Storyteller

•University of Illinois | Chicago, IL | 2020

Panelist - Chicago's Founders and KitiHawa

•Tribal Leadership Development Roundtable | Tucson, AZ | 2019

Featured Presenter

•Indigenous Peoples' March | Washington DC | 2019

Speaker & Interviewee

•Indigenizing Colonized Spaces - Adam Sings In The Timber | Chicago, IL | 2019

Artist and Performer

•Forest County Potawatomi Community | Crandon, WI | 2019

Educator - Tribal Leadership Development Program & Summer Youth Program

•Women Empowering Women for Indian Nations (WEWIN) | Milwaukee, WI | 2018

Presenter- Leadership Development

•University of Wisconsin | Milwaukee, WI | 2015-2019

Graduating Class Speaker: Persevering Through Adversity

Panelist - Life Impact Scholarship

Presenter - Diversity in Business

•Anishinaabemowin Teg, Inc. | Great Lakes Region | 2014

Teacher - Ojibwe Children's Language Program: Anishinaabe Aabinoojiiyag Program Children's