

Aha hanwe pi

When I first arrived in Iowa, I made contact with Joyce Big Soldier of the Iowa tribe of Oklahoma, to find out how to say hello in the loway language. She told me that loway women speak a different greeting to the men. Women say Aha Hanwe pi. Men say Aho hanwe pi. This use of differing languages for men and women is new to me as an English speaker. She told me that if a male child is raised by his mother or grandmother, then he will grow up around her form of the language and you can tell when he speaks that women raised him. Culture is contained in language and I try to honor the Iowa people, by speaking their greeting. I don't know if I get it right, but it is all I can do.

There are no sea gulls in Iowa. Coming from New Zealand, a skinny island nation in the South Pacific, where you are never further than 120 kilometers from the sea, it is a little strange to live for three months in a landlocked state, and never see or hear sea gulls.

But there are squirrels in Iowa. It's a fair trade off. I see squirrels in Iowa City every single day and I worry about where they will go in the winter. I will miss the furry little creatures. It seems that squirrels are part of IWP culture.

While I have not been close to the sea, I have come to know rivers, great bodies of water that have followed me and entered into the language of my writing. The Iowa river, the Chicago River, and the immense Mississippi river.

Since I have been here I have been surrounded by the languages of the 27 other residents. I also learned that even though I speak English, sometimes Americans cannot understand me.

But I hope you understand me when I say that I have experienced nothing but kindness from the people of Iowa and the amazing crew of the International Writers Program and all the other residents. Thank you for your hospitality and for the amazing opportunity to spend time here in Iowa. And thanks to all the amazing writers I have met for your friendship, and community in the love of language.