

# SEW BEAUTIFUL

## A Q&A WITH ARTIST ELIZABETH MORRISON

Elizabeth Morrison '82 is one of hundreds of Lakota artists who utilize The Heritage Center's online store to sell their art and crafts. Red Cloud Country sat down with Morrison to get a bit more insight to the stories behind her work.

"Art has always been a part of my life."



**Red Cloud Country: When did you develop an interest in making art?**  
**Elizabeth Morrison:** Growing up here in the desolate beauty of our reservation, you can see the beauty all around us. Usually our first experience with art is being wrapped in a baby star quilt at birth. Then we receive such a quilt for each milestone throughout our lives; naming ceremonies, graduations, weddings, births, deaths...they play such a huge role in our lives.  
My mother, Jessie Bear Robe, taught me how to make star quilts. I made my first one thousands of quilts ago. My inspiration comes from the different shades of colors available.  
**RCC: How has your approach to art have evolved over the years?**  
**LM:** When I first started making quilts, I conformed to the basic lone star design. Now I can get really creative in the different shades of colors I put together, and the various patterns that my sisters and I have designed over the years. Though I find it harder and harder to be able to sit still long enough to get a quilt done in a timely manner. What used to take me hours to complete now takes days. But I am truly blessed that I have my daughters to help - they also know how to make quilts! I started selling my quilts and beadwork to The Heritage Center several years ago to make extra money.  
**RCC: Do you have a favorite quilt?**  
**LM:** My favorite piece of work is the Flying Eagle quilt. I was very lonesome one day and my husband took me driving to help ease the hurt. As we approached the White River, I looked up into a tree and there were eight eagles sitting there. Eight eagles...it was spectacular! I found comfort in this and I designed this quilt to remind myself of that awesome day. I would like to be able to design more elaborate quilts and to have the ability to see these projects out.

See Morrison's artistry online at [www.redcloudschool.org/shop](http://www.redcloudschool.org/shop)

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Sharing the stories of Red Cloud Indian School [www.redcloudschool.org](http://www.redcloudschool.org) Fall 2012 Volume 4, Issue 2

At the beginning of each school year, every senior sits down with high school principal Robin Johnson to discuss their plans for the coming year and beyond. Will they pursue college, perhaps the first in their family to do so? Will they serve their community as a nurse or police officer? Maybe they feel called to stay close to home and support their family while continuing their path of education. Whatever the goal, though, they make a plan.  
When Christian McGhee '08 created his plan, he knew he would be returning to the reservation and that Red Cloud would be somewhere in that future. He just didn't know it would be so soon.  
With a college diploma in hand, the ink just barely dry, McGhee came back to the reservation this fall to accept the position of athletic director and head boys' basketball coach at Red Cloud High School. "I want to continue a strong tradition of Red Cloud's athletic program and also return to help the people and the school that I graduated from." Like many alumni who have returned to their alma mater to serve, he found it an opportunity he couldn't pass up.

## COMPLETING THE CIRCLE

As a four-year varsity basketball player, McGhee is no stranger to hard work on and off the court. He was a standout student from his first days in kindergarten, on the honor roll every quarter since the fifth grade and was awarded Academic All-State honors—along with numerous athletic awards—his senior year. And though the youngest athletic director in the state, he feels his relative youth will likely play to his advantage. "I think I can relate to our student-athletes a little bit better than someone older might be able to because I went to school here and I know what is expected. I know what needs to happen on the court and in the classroom."  
McGhee isn't the only young alumnus to join the ranks this fall. After securing her degree in sociology from Creighton University in 2002, Nakina Mills '98 found herself looking for a job on the reservation immediately, wanting to begin her career by helping in her home community. And over the years she's had the opportunity to do just that, leading to her current role as Director of Student Advancement and Alumni Support.  
Having received the prestigious Spirit of Creighton award at graduation, Mills could have continued along any number of paths to success. She first took a position in Pine Ridge as a caseworker with the Department of Social Services, assessing child abuse and neglect referrals and providing services to children and families dealing with challenges at home. Later, her focus became older youth in the foster care system and supporting their transition to adulthood. It was in this work that she began to understand the role she could play in helping her community.  
After ten years in the field, Mills says she has learned a great deal, not only in the arena of child welfare and advocacy, but also about herself. And like McGhee, her sense of commitment was fostered from a young age.

"When I was growing up I was told that education is the key to being able to give back to the community...and that it's one step closer to success. I truly believe that."

Mills went on. "The value of giving back to one's community, which the Jesuits at Red Cloud taught, is another important merit. This virtue is also a part of our Lakota faith. So these similarities helped in guiding me to where I am today." This value, Mills feels, must be passed along to her own children—four of whom currently attend Red Cloud.  
In her newest role, Mills will put to use skills developed over the last decade to support other young alumni in traversing the college selection process and transition into universities, trade schools and military stations around the country. In mentoring current students through their preparations and following them into their post-graduate studies, she is bridging a gap that exists for so many youth today. It is a role critical to helping our graduates find their footing, and then following through with, their new endeavors  
Over the last five years, Red Cloud has implemented the idea of "completing the circle". Starting in kindergarten and carrying through senior exams, Red Cloud provides students with the tools they need to achieve their greatest potential—an educated mind, body and heart. And by surrounding students and graduates with the close-knit support they received while at Red Cloud, Mills and McGhee join Principal Johnson and 175 more dedicated individuals—on the ground each morning—encouraging their further education. This support is key in fostering the perseverance needed to continue to build dreams for their futures on and off the reservation. It is also what allows current students to understand that they, too, can achieve the same.  
And McGhee and Mills are just the people to carry out this work. Indeed, this idea of completing the circle resonates loudly with McGhee, as the Pine Ridge Reservation will always be home for him. He says that even if he hadn't gotten a job at Red Cloud, he would have sought work somewhere in the community. But Red Cloud clearly holds a special place for him.  
"I couldn't say no—it was the opportunity of a lifetime."

Read more online at [www.redcloudschool.org/completingthecircle](http://www.redcloudschool.org/completingthecircle).

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