

Caves, Rivers, and Burial Mounds Around St. Paul, Minnesota

This story was collected as part of a collaborative effort to record the state of American lakes, rivers, and waterways as well as an attempt to uncover what water means to Americans. Listen to other stories recorded by the Minnesota Humanities Center for the Stories from Main Street project, an initiative created by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service for its traveling exhibition "Water/Ways."

Background music by Adhithia Sofyan, "I Won't Go to Bed," courtesy SoundCloud. Photo courtesy Minnesota Humanities Center.

"Hau Mitakuyapi. Anpetu kiŋ de, čaŋte waštaya nape čiyuzapi do. Hello my relatives I speak to you today with a glad heart, offering you my hand. My dad was Sisseton Dakota of the Seven Star Fire Nations. Očeti Šakowiŋ Oyate. My name is Jim Rock in English. Waŋbdi Haŋyetu emakiyapi do. I am called Waŋbdi Haŋyetu in Dakota.

I was born at Imnizaskadaŋ ed imačage. I was born at "St. Paul" near a place called Wakaŋ Tepee, the cave in which we have the drawings that tell something of our cosmic origins. So what I do is in a planetarium. I was, you know, trained in western science but always kept our own ways of thinking here and the two legs have really come together well in that word

nucleosynthesis — it just means that atoms are made in stars. And we've always said, we come from the stars and to the stars we return. We come from the earth and to the earth we return. The iron in our blood, the carbon in our body had to come from a sun before this sun. So we're recycled stardust.

"Star stuff are us", I like to say. The Milky Way is like a river, not just any river, but Ĥaĥa Wakpa...Wakpa Taŋka...Wakpa. Haŋska, the big long river, the river of the waterfalls. We find burial mounds near rivers. It's very intentional. It's not random. Our elders, those that have passed on deserve the highest place near water to go back up to the stars, a place of honor, by the water that flows. Čaŋ Wakaŋ...the sacred tree, the Sundance tree, the cotton wood tree is filled with stars. That tree full of stars connects between sky and earth along rivers — it likes its feet wet, it's roots.

It's a bridge between the river down here with sparkling lights on it and the sparkling stars above. The Wanaġi Tačaŋku - the spirit road -The road of spirits that we come from, and go back to. And we need to be living in a good way so that we go back to that place that we come from with integrity, with generosity."