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Like Mother, Like Daughter

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LIKE MOTHER. LIKE DAUGHTER

Growing up I was inspired by my mother, Claudia Fox Tree, who raised me with many traditions from her First Nations (Native American) Culture. Being indigenous to the Americas, our nation (tribe) stems from the Caribbean and, before that, probably South America. The Arawak are the people who greeted Columbus. Ever since I was young, I was influenced by my mom, our Native Culture, and also my European ethnicity of being German on my mother's side and Irish and Finnish from my father's side.

My motivation for this piece was to shed light on what it is like growing up with a heritage, knowing it from your experience and family, and yet, having people challenge you your whole life to prove it. No one questions my German, Irish, or Finnish ethnicity, but, since I don't match the stereotype of a Native American, I am constantly challenged. The image on my painting depicts my twin sister, Indigo, the only one of us five kids to have blonde hair and blue eyes, from my mother's mother and my father's mother and father. Having a mother who was not my skin color, raised questions. This is an inevitable part of the multiracial (and also adoption, though this was not my case) experience. I have noticed over the years that even other natives can be prejudiced when it comes to native-only spaces, like pow wows, where there are competitions of different styles of dance. Picking the winner sometimes rests on who looks the best to represent the part, not necessarily based on dance skill.

My personal connections to this piece is that I feel similarly to my sister, especially because she is my twin. I can see through her eyes, the same as she sees through mine, when it comes to our culture. We educate others a lot, because of their ignorance. People raised in America, whether they are indigenous or not, grow up in the country that does not teach us accurate information about indigenous people, our history, and our contributions. This image depicts my mother and sister standing tall - proud of who they are, where they come from, and representing the diversity of indigenous lives.

This piece is connected to Roger Williams campus, a predominantly white community, where I have educated many people about my culture. This includes my time in senior seminar class discussing the issues of cultural appropriation and telling the story of my culture.

This painting connects to issues of social justice because Native Americans are still fighting to be heard, to be seen, to keep our culture alive, and to change the narrative. I hope this piece will encourage people to ask questions. Let's talk about your culture, the stereotypes, and ways to improve everyone's understanding of diversity.

