

Mannequins

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When you walk into the Waponahki Museum and Resource Center in Perry, Maine, the first thing you see is a life-sized plaster mannequin of a man dressed in traditional Waponahki clothing—fringed pants, fringed bands around his upper arms, bare torso, long black hair. Someone has stuck a yellow Post-it note on his waist that says, “My name is Fred Moore.” The note is curled and faded like other papers in the museum: the labels Scotch-taped to the frames of eighty-year old photographs, the letter from 1947 listing artifacts that someone had dug up and given back to the tribe, the sign on an ancient birch bark canoe: “Fragile. Do Not Touch. Woliwon/Thank You.”

My father drives down here from Fredericton, New Brunswick, once a week to work with Dave Francis, language coordinator for the museum. This week I’ve tagged along. Dad and Dave met in the 1970s, when Dad moved here to teach school on the reservation. He is one of the few white people to have learned to speak Passamaquoddy, and now he and Dave are working on a Passamaquoddy–English dictionary.

Before they start work we drive out to the WaCo Diner, “Established 1924,” for breakfast. On the way there, Dad and Dave talk in Passamaquoddy while I stare out the window at the ocean and the wide expanses of seaweed exposed by the low tide. They are discussing the word *wonpeq*, Passamaquoddy for “sea smoke,” the mist that rises off the ocean when it is very cold, like today—minus 14.

Inside the diner it is warm. Two customers are watching TV with the waitress, Judy, who retired two weeks ago but is back at work again; no one knows why. Dad leads us to a table at the back of the diner, which is cool and drafty but looks out over the ocean to Campobello Island. Judy marches over with coffee.

“I don’t know why you always sit back heah, Bob,” she says to my father, who is called Bob only in Maine; everywhere else he is Robert.

“There’s no TV, that’s why.”

Judy shakes her head. “You gotta watch Fox TV, Bob. And it’s wahm over theah. And howah you, Dave?”

“Fine, fine,” he says.

“You shouldn’t let him tahcha you,” Judy tells me as she walks away, “makin’ you sit in the cold. He’s mean.”

A five-foot-tall Santa smiles at us from across the room. “He’s skinny for a Santa,” I say. We all nod. His arms look jointed. “I bet he does something,” I say.

When Judy comes back I ask her. “Just a minute.” She reaches over and presses a button, and Santa starts swaying back and forth, turning his head and swinging his arms. His mouth opens and shuts but no sound comes out. “Hang on!” Judy yells, rooting around behind the Santa. “He’s lip synching,” Dad calls. “You’re supposed to be singing, Judy.” She ignores him. “Can you heah that?” she asks. And Santa starts belting out “Up On the Rooftop.”

“Remember when Wayne made up that Passamaquoddy version?” Dad asks Dave. “Up on the rooftop, *nkotuwocokuhk!*” (“Up on the rooftop, I’m going to take a shit.”) Dave looks at the Santa. “Must be some kind of machine in theah.” Dad points out that Santa’s mouth is moving in time with the song.

Judy brings sausage and eggs for me and my father and Dave’s usual: one egg, one strip of bacon, one piece of white toast. “I wahsn’t gonna feed you today, Dave, but I changed my mind.” Dave chuckles and tucks into his food.

“Dave works from five in the morning to one in the afternoon,” Dad says. “That’s his eight hours.” Dave corrects him: “Five-thuhty now. And I stay till two o’clock.” I ask them about Fred Moore, the mannequin at the museum. “The faces on all the mannequins were cast from real people,” says Dad. “But not their bodies, right, Dave?” “No,” says Dave. “Just the faces and hands.” I suggest that the mannequins could be made to talk, like the Santa. My father says that the mannequins at the Pequot museum in Connecticut do talk, and for some reason the Pequot mannequins speak Passamaquoddy instead of Pequot. One display features two mannequins in conversation, a man sitting on a tree stump and a boy sitting cross-legged on the ground. But the conversation is actually an audiorecording of three people talking, and all three voices seem to issue from under the boy’s breechcloth, where the tape player is located.

Every time Judy walks by the Santa she sets off the motion detector and he sings another song. Two men come in and sit down at the next table. Judy greets them by

name, takes them coffee and menus and yells over her shoulder that she'll be back. They shake their heads. "She looks just like a plum puddin'," one of them mutters. Judy keeps walking. When we get up and head for the cashier, Santa sings us out. I ask Judy if I can have him but she says no. "Merry Christmas," she says, her eyes on the TV.

On our way back to the museum, we stop for a newspaper. The cashier looks out the window at Dad's car, which has snow on the hood. "Wheah you from in Canada?" he asks. He tells us they haven't had any snow here yet. Back at the museum another friend asks my father about the snow, and Dad tells him we had four inches yesterday. "Fah inches? Oh, well, that's Canadian inches, right?" He says more in Passamaquoddy and they all laugh. "I tell people it's been in the eighties heah," he says. "We have Indian summah, weah just not sharin it."

While Dad and Dave get to work, I wander around the museum and look at the photos and artifacts. In the Basket Room I find more mannequins. One of them looks familiar and I check his label. "I'm the same guy you saw out front," it says. "Fred Moore."

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