

Janet Goldner
Homer Jackson
Rana Sindhikara

Memory Mine



3 artists
tell the stories of
1 community
Nicetown-Tioga, Philadelphia
January-June 2003

a project of COSACOSA art at large, Inc.

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Memory *Mine* was supported by a grant from Artists and Communities, a program of the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, made possible by major funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, The Vira I. Heinz Endowment, Johnson & Johnson, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, The William Penn Foundation, and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Additional funding for **Memory *Mine*** was provided by the Cricket Island Foundation, the Samuel S. Fels Fund, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, The Valentine Foundation, and the Philadelphia Arts in Education Partnership with support from The William Penn Foundation, The Stockton Rush Bartol Foundation and the Philadelphia Cultural Fund.



"The community is not alone, there are still people willing to make the streets a better place to live." -neighborhood youth

Nicetown-Tioga's namesake streets

StoryART by Elizabeth Ann Terry

"They told stories...with effortless art and technique. They were natural-born storytellers in the oral tradition."
-Paule Marshall

Daddy tell me a story!

My father, John Alexander Terry, Jr. was the best storyteller! He loved telling stories of his youth in the peaceful woods and gentle streams of Western Pennsylvania and the vibrant and jazzy streets of The Bronx. Big John's stories told of his ancestors in Virginia and Antigua (British West Indies), detailed mythical escapades in far away lands, and proudly acquainted us with the thrilling victories of Jesse Owens in Hitler's stadium. Telling stories with "art and technique," he was his generation's Griot, the Terry family's storyteller. Sometimes his narratives were made even more delightful with embellishments of singing and dancing. He shared stories that he had been told as a boy, those that he had read, and others that he just made up.

What I was really yearning for with my eager "Daddy, tell me a story!" was for him to make art in my head. My child's mind wanted him to paint me a brilliant picture or to shape me a sleek sculpture or to weave me a cloth of many textures and colors. Like the best of Griots, he always delivered.

Daddy crafted words that formed a rugged framework -- one vibrating with an intensity of color beyond the two-dimensional, monochromatic markings in a book. His Bible stories leapt off the page like a Henry Ossawa Tanner painting of a trek through the hot, dry, treeless desert -- you became thirsty and could feel the sun's blazing temperature. Ghosts formed like Barbara Chase Riboud multi-textured sculptures of bronze, gold, and silk -- the cloth would sneak up behind you on a cold breeze and twist its way around your body in a scary caress. A Brer

Rabbit tale flowed like a painted story quilt by Faith Ringgold with Big Joe Turner singing the blues in the background.

So adept was my father at creating art in my mind with his tales that once I learned to read on my own, I filled my life with books and stories. My exploration of the living word -- both written and oral -- became a full, rich and beautifully rewarding experience beyond the mental images made possible by mere flat, black squiggles on a white page.

My lifelong passion for stories has led me into the community at large sharing epics and anecdotes -- stories large and small -- as a way to effect social change. Sharing stories empowers communities. As we have for generations, we heed the call of the Griot -- we come to listen, to contribute, and to learn.

COSACOSA's *Memory Mine* project gathered residents of Philadelphia's Nicetown-Tioga community to tell their own tales and those of their shared

community. Three artists of three disciplines made art from the experiences of community elders and the dreams of neighborhood youth: a giant book of hopes and fears, an interwoven tapestry of sound and story, an interconnected web of words and visions.

Our stories preserve memory and express identity. We must carefully tend and pass on those stories which define us, both as individuals and as communities. I will be forever grateful to my father for weaving me enduring narratives that I could put on and wear for my lifetime. Thanks for the stories, Daddy!

Elizabeth Ann Terry is a Philadelphia-based storyteller and activist for progressive social change. She is founder of NIAwork, an organization exploring innovative ways for individuals and communities to grow and achieve their purpose through art and social action.

As we have for generations, we heed the call of the Griot -- we come to listen, to contribute, and to learn.

"There's a spirit in this place -- a courage and commitment to the community that continues across the generations." -neighborhood elder

Community Memory

Legend has it that the European settlement at Tioga began with a “land grant” in 1680 from a Lenni Lenape chief -- symbolically given at the dawn of a new day. “Rising Sun” village thus was established. By the mid-1800’s Philadelphia renamed many of its streets for Pennsylvania counties, including Tioga, deriving from the Lenape *tavego diahoga* -- the place where two rivers meet. The Reading Railroad stop at Tioga Street gave the Tioga neighborhood its name.

Like much of the city, Philadelphia’s Nicetown section began as a farm. In the 17th century, William Penn assigned 187 acres of woodlands to French Huguenot Jean Neisse. To the English ear, “Neisse” was “Nice,” and so Nicetown was founded. The original settlement (an inn, a blacksmith works, and a few houses) remained isolated from other communities due to often impassable trails until around 1800, when a formal roadway finally was built.

Railroads soon brought industry to Nicetown and Tioga, beginning 1867 with the arrival of Midvale Steel, founded to make locomotive wheels. The area soon was home to thriving industries of every sort: Burpee Seed Company, Nice Ball Bearings, TastyKake, and Vick Chemical Company (maker of Vapo-Rub) to name but a few. By 1930, the neighborhood’s population density was four times the city’s average, fueled by the migration of African Americans from the South to fill readily available jobs. In spite of crowded conditions, the neighborhood preserved its tidy aesthetic and strong sense of community -- a model for urban, industrial America.

By the mid-twentieth century, North Philadelphia’s decline began as the economy moved away from industrialization. Factories closed. Planning policies favored the suburbs. As the economic base of the area

disintegrated, unemployment and public assistance needs rose. Through difficult times, however, the neighborhood never lost its determination to survive and advance.

Perhaps the most inspiring example of community leadership was that of the Reverend Leon Sullivan, former pastor of Nicetown-Tioga’s Zion Baptist Church. During his tenure, Sullivan developed numerous civic programs based on a commitment to social justice that reached around the globe. In 1964, he established the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) to provide much needed jobs skills training to the North Philadelphia community. From that first OIC, housed in an abandoned police station, the program spread to more than 100 cities across the nation and 18 countries around the world. Reverend Sullivan also established the internationally recognized Global Sullivan Principles, eliciting corporate policies to support economic and social justice and “to assist with greater tolerance and understanding among peoples... helping to improve the quality of life for communities.”

Today, residents of Nicetown and Tioga continue to work together to improve the quality of life in their shared community. United by a unwavering belief in the possibilities of community cooperation, mobilization, and investment, Nicetown-Tioga citizens remain committed to the revitalization of the neighborhood.

References and Further Reading:

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- Philadelphia Neighborhood Information System* (www.cml.upenn.edu/nis), University of Pennsylvania Cartographic Modeling Lab, 2003.
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- Sullivan, Leon H., *Moving Mountains*, Judsen Press, 1998.



images (from left): Germantown Avenue circa 1910; Nicetown-Tioga’s central intersection at Broad Street, Erie and Germantown Avenues circa 1950; Midvale Steel circa 1920.

“If you defy our institutions, don’t expect us to respect yours.”
-community leader



images (from top):
community mural at Simon Gratz High School; intersection of Broad Street, Erie and Germantown Avenues, 2003;
tidy homes share a block with condemned properties along Erie Avenue; Midvale Steel, 2003.

“Our principles are lost in the principalities of social structure.”
-community artist

Memories Mined

Memory and myth, history and hope. With these four threads we weave identity -- personal, communal, national, cultural. We share the profound urge to establish, remember, and record our lives, and through our common aspiration, individual stories connect to define a time or place.

COSACOSA art at large, Inc.’s *Memory Mine* project brought three artists working from divergent disciplines into residence in Philadelphia’s Nicetown-Tioga neighborhood, each to develop a piece exploring the residents’ collective memory, history, experience, tall-tales, and folklore. The project examined story-telling as “cultural grounding” -- social interaction that discovers, delineates, and disseminates individual and community identity. While in residence, steel sculptor Janet Goldner, audio/theater artist Homer Jackson, and new media artist Rana Sindhikara engaged Nicetown-Tioga residents in dialogues about personal meaning, common myths, community values, and neighborhood history.

The practice story-telling transcends the boundaries of culture, class, and community -- as well as art form. The resulting new works are as diverse as the stories from which they originated. In *Book of Hopes and Fears*, a sculptural installation created by Goldner and local students, the words of Leon Sullivan are surrounded by texts and drawings in metal expressing the young people’s concerns for their community.

Jackson’s audio work *The Sound of His Voice* focuses on stories about men in the lives of their families, friends and coworkers. The thirty minute piece combines interviews with Nicetown-Tioga residents and original writings by community youth.

When I Look Out My Window, an interactive website developed by Sindhikara and community residents, explores the neighborhood using various types windows (e.g., home, school, bus, religious or community center) as its focus. Inspired by the like-titled poetry of a neighborhood youth, the piece pays special homage to the many generations of women who have nourished and grown the community from within.

Memory Mine

a project of COSACOSA art at large, Inc.

Listen with your heart.
Listen with your heart and speak
Words and deeds etched in flesh
never are erased.

Listen with your heart.
Listen with your heart.
Remember what he said...

Time passes,
but the words remain.
They are unlimited.

Homer Jackson
The Sound of His Voice
Listen With Your Heart, song text, 2003



Rana Sindhikara

When I Look Out My Window

manipulated color photography & mixed media images from website, 2003
www.ArtistSight.org/WhenILookOutMyWindow.html



Janet Goldner

Book of Hopes and Fears

steel and ink-washed brass, 12' x 4', 2003
Gratz High School Marble Hall, Nicetown-Tioga
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Community Mine

Organizational Participants

Challenge Learning Camp
 Ferguson Manor Community Center
 Gratz High School and Gratz Youth-Driven Service Learning Center
 The Kenderton School
 Nicetown Boys and Girls Club
 Nicetown-Tioga Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia

Nicotown-Tioga Improvement Team
 North City Youth Association
 Opportunities Tower
 St. Michael's Cathedral
 Temple University Children's Medical Center
 Zion Baptist Church

Community Participants

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Deidre Adams | Daniel Davenport | David Hurd | Wykeya Miles | Keesha Smith |
| Laquanda Allen | Janell Davis | Elise M. Jackson | Andre Miller | Nia Smith |
| Shaheita Anderson | Rodney Davis | Lashonda Jackson | Malika Mitchell | Ricky Smith |
| Shenika Anderson | Donna Devore | Leshonda Jackson | Sakina Mitchell | Shaheed Smith |
| Krystal Anyair | Shirah Donovan | Tyree James | Keisha Mobley | Sholanda Smith |
| Adafih Arthur | Lakeesha Drayton | Bedelia Jarrett | Keith Mobley | Theresa Smith |
| Kenneth Austin | Hakeema Edwards | Alice Johnson | Scott Morgan | Tanika Spratley |
| Whitney Batchler | Ramel Edwards | Jeannette Johnson | Mykell Nelson | Peggy Ann Sprewell |
| Cell Baynard | Sacoer Ellerbe | Jessica Johnson | Tytianna Nelson | Melody Soloman |
| Alan Beckett | Vincent Ellis | Nichelle Johnson | Elisha B. Morris | Anthony Stewart |
| Ronnetta Benton | Michelle Evans | Roslynn Johnson | Anthony Mosley | Alton Strange |
| Tyriq Billups | Roberto Evans | Shakeena Johnson | Patrice Newton | Brahkeem Strothers |
| Dominique Blacknall-Harris | James Farrell | Sharee Johnson | Iaisha Palmer | Fannie Strothers |
| Lamar Boddie | Shakeema Felton | Teaira Johnson | Maurice Palmer | Isaiha Strothers |
| Ms. Bounce | Donte Fields | Latisha Jordan | Patrice Perriman | Marian Terry |
| Velissa Bowie | Tanalee Flowers | Lillia Jubilee | Tyaira Perry | Shetea Thomas |
| Rose Boyd | Denicia Floyd | Maurice Keel | Deanna Peterson | Jamilla Townsend |
| Amir Boyer | Lee Fogel | Marquita Kellam | Robert Peterson | Aliyyah C. Turner |
| Robert Boyer | Anastasia Foreman | D. King | Nicole Pettijohn | Derrick Valentine |
| Alfonso Branch | Brian Freeman | Ranisha Kitchen | Rasool Phillips | Steven Valentine |
| Vivian Branch | Kevin Gary | Steven Kitchen | Shandra Powell | George Van Norton |
| Christopher Brower | Gregory Gibbons | Andrea Knox | Latia Randolph | Quincy Walke |
| Leah Brown | Keicha Gilliam | Martin Lavie | Nathaniel Reesel Lee VII | Robyn Walker |
| Vivian Brown | Jereama Glass | Myisha Laws | Monshell Reyes | Karin Wallace |
| Juanita Brown-Smith | Vernon Green | Crystal Leavy | Hyson Rice | Kevin Wallace |
| Fatim Byrd | Phillip Harris | Leon Little | Phillip Riddick | Maleke Ware |
| Tevin Cameron | Reneer Harris | Leona Little | Brittany Robinson | Tatia Warren |
| Antwine Caple | William Harris | Deona Lloyd | Danielle Robinson | Wendell Watson |
| Derk Carter | Raheem Harvey | Antwine Long | Rashaan Robinson | Lavonna Vaughn |
| Art Chapman | Essence Hatchell | Rafeia Love | Taquan Ross | Joynequa West |
| Kyree Clark | Elantra Haynes | Latasha Lyles | Carla Rosser | Eudora Wiggins |
| Jasmine Clowney | George Henderson | Jennell Marks | Shamira Rosser | Myles Wiggins |
| Bernice C. Cooper | Leonard Henderson | Celestine Martin | Elijah Rowland | Christopher Wilkins |
| Joseph Council | She-Lah Henderson | April Massey | Delores P. Sarrys | Antwyne Williams |
| Christopher Cox | Karl Henneghan | Lamar McBride | Pierre Shaw | James Williams |
| Corey Crippen | Malcolm Hill | Rasheada McKay | Shamika Shaw | Pat Williams |
| Donald Curtis | Malikah Hill | Garry P. McKim | Shonte Small | Shaquitta Williams |
| Shanon Curtis | Malinda Hill | Anthony McNair | Antoine Smith | Shaniece White |
| Briana Daniel | Markell Hill | Lamar McPhail | Ashley Smith | Brandon Woodson |
| Imerah Darby | Fayette Holloway Parker | Tashay McQueen | Felicia Smith | Alexis Young |
| Norman Dash | Donte Howard | Sharon Medlock | Juanita Smith | |

images (left to right, top to bottom): Simon Gratz Choir records at Kenderton School; produce vendors off Broad Street; Ferguson Manor Community Center at *Memory Mine* event hosted by Zion Baptist Church; *Memory Mine* artists at the Kenderton School; intercommunity dialogue at *Memory Mine* public event; guest storyteller and catalogue essayist Elizabeth Ann Terry at the Nicetown-Tioga Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia; guest storyteller Bruce Robinson at Zion Baptist Church; Goldner draws with a student at Kenderton School; class recording session with Jackson at Kenderton; young writers group at Kenderton; Nicetown-Tioga Town Watch (photo courtesy of Marian Terry); Sindhikara improvises with students at Gratz High School; Kenderton School performers; neighborhood children at Nicetown-Tioga playground; Gratz students assist in family history workshop at *Memory Mine* public event; Goldner working on *Book of Hopes and Fears* (photo courtesy of Lisa Kahane); Jackson discusses storytelling with Gratz students; Sindhikara reviews *Memory Mine* community photos with Kenderton students.

**"When I look at my community, I see help and love and kindness."
 -neighborhood youth**

**"We share a common history and an abiding concern for one another."
 -neighborhood elder**

Memory Mine Resident Artists

“The Book of Hopes and Fears grew out of my work with students at Kenderton School and Gratz High School. During the time I spent in Nicetown-Tioga, I came to appreciate the determination and courage of a community which continues to strive and grow in the face of formidable barriers. This sculpture is a salute the neighborhood, its residents, its students and its teachers with all my best wishes.” -Janet Goldner

Homer Jackson is an interdisciplinary artist with a background in teaching and social service. His work is presented as installation, performance art, public art, video and audio. He uses images, sound, text, live performance, video, audience participation and found objects to tell stories. Mr. Jackson has worked with young people, adults and older adults, as well as intergenerational participants. Through his workshops, participants have produced art exhibitions, albums, books, comic books and video tapes. Mr. Jackson has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Pennsylvania Humanities Council, Pennsylvania Radio Theatre, Art Matters, Franklin Furnace Fund For Performance Art, the Funding Exchange, Pittsburgh Filmmakers, The Playwrights Center and The Pew Fellowship in the Arts. He has performed and/or exhibited works at venues ranging from the Painted Bride Arts Center, Taller Puertorriqueño and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia; to Hallwalls Arts Center in Buffalo, Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis, Art In General and Aaron Davis Hall in New York City and the Smithsonian Institute Traveling Exhibition. He has worked with participants at a range of institutions including The Anti Graffiti Network, Community Education Center, Friends Neighborhood Guild, Graterford State Correctional Facility, Howard High School of Technology, The Philadelphia Prison Society, Southwest Center for Cultural Enrichment, Taller Puertorriqueño, William Penn High School, and others. Mr. Jackson is a B.F.A. Graduate of the Philadelphia College of Art, and he holds an M.F.A. From Temple University's Tyler School of Art.

“When I Look Out My Window explores the connections binding members of the Nicetown-Tioga neighborhood. Imagery and text are integrated as a means to link the physical aspects of the community with the deep emotions, insights, and experiences of the lives that fill it. “This project is a tribute to all of those I've encountered, especially those women who continually have shown their dedication in building and nurturing the community from within. They exude beauty, strength, and sustenance, serving as the backbone for Nicetown-Tioga. I pay homage to you all.” -Rana Sindhikara

“Stop giving up! Stop looking for the easy way out! Everything in life doesn't just come to you. You have to work for it.” -community matriarch

Janet Goldner brings together art and poetry by cutting text and images into steel to examine contemporary social issues. Her metal works -- gigantic vessels, books, and free-standing sculptures -- meld text into steel, inviting meditation on the meanings of words and concepts. From over thirty years of travel and dialogues with West African artists and artisans, her work juxtaposes images and ideas from Africa and the West as a response to Ms. Goldner's own layered American cultural identity.

Ms. Goldner is recipient of a Fulbright Senior Research Fellowship to Mali, West Africa and grants from United Nations Committee Against Apartheid. She has been an artist-in-residence at a variety of organizations including the United Nations Women's Conference in Nairobi; the Mali Dye Project in Bamako; Europos Parkas Museum in Lithuania; and Beth Israel Hospital, the Millay Colony for the Arts, the New Museum, the Queens Museum, and Yaddo in New York. Her vast experience as an artist-educator includes teaching at the national Women's Caucus for Art, the University of the Arts, Franklin and Marshall College, and the Neighborhood School (New York City). Her work has been exhibited at New York venues including Art in General, the Bronx Museum of the Arts, Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Lincoln Center, and PS122. Goldner holds a B.A. from Antioch College and an M.A. in Sculpture from New York University

“The boys, the young men, the elders, all of the men in our lives leave a lasting impression. Sometimes it is their inspiring words. Other times it was an unkept promise. Sometimes it is a thoughtful gesture. Other times it is a painful insult.

“There are many who have impacted on us for the good and even the not so good: our fathers, our brothers, our sons, our grandfathers, our uncles, our nephews, our preachers, our teachers, our friends, our neighbors, and even our enemies.

“The Sound of His Voice is dedicated to all of them.” -Homer Jackson

Rana Sindhikara focuses on the visual interpretation of cultural histories and stories through digitally manipulated media. Through photography and electronic design, she explores relationships among individuals, communities, and environments. Her work collates visual information with non-linear text, spoken word and other performative/interactive aspects to investigate how group knowledge is reproduced and communicated in populations with varying languages and literacy levels.

An emerging artist in the field of new media, Ms. Sindhikara has been artist in residence at the Asian Arts Initiative, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Martha Madigan Studio (Philadelphia), and previously with COSACOSA as part of our *Healing Art Project*. Her work has been featured in venues including ARTforms Gallery, the Painted Bride Art Center, Presidents Hall, and Tyler Galleries in Philadelphia; and in the annual Labor Day March in Portland, Maine. She has worked as an art educator at numerous regional schools and community centers, including ARTWorks in Different Places, the Ford Community Center, the Huey School, the Kenderton School, and Temple University. Ms. Sindhikara studied photography and visual anthropology at Temple University, from which she holds a B.F.A., and Thames Valley University (London).

“In an age where people ‘make it’ and move away, there's a commitment to stay in this community and make it better.” -urban professional

COSACOSA

art at
large

Art creates cultural change.

Founded in 1990, COSACOSA art at large, Inc. creates new art specific to Philadelphia neighborhoods and public spaces. Through collaborative art workshops, artist residencies, and media projects, we enable dialogues among our city's disparate cultures and communities. COSACOSA projects assure a sense of equality among people of diverse backgrounds and differing abilities, while building their participation in local communities as well as in society-at-large.

interaction COSACOSA art workshops engage people of differing backgrounds to create a common project. Each workshop identifies a community theme to explore through one of many possible artistic disciplines, from painting to theater, from quilt-making to ceramics. COSACOSA has brought together thousands of citizens from over thirty Philadelphia neighborhoods to learn about art, about each other, and about how to work together. As our participants grow in understanding and cooperative skills, their community -- our city -- grows with them.

interpretation COSACOSA artist commissions and media projects expand upon ideas evolved in our public workshops. Again, our approach is multi-disciplinary -- from tile mosaics for a school to interactive sculpture for a hospital, from audio work examining changing city neighborhoods to theatrical journeys through Philadelphia's public monuments filmed for the Smithsonian Institution. COSACOSA interpretive projects provoke accessible, insightful dialogues, while building collaborative forums in which to address the common and uncommon challenges of living together.

COSACOSA continues to design and apply new models to deliver innovative and interactive "dialogues through art" directly into Philadelphia neighborhoods. For more information about COSACOSA, and to learn how to participate in our programs, please visit our website at www.cosacosa.org.

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