

“A Ladder and a Stop Sign”

2009. Bronze Relief Sculpture. 10”w x 9”h.

Christine Stark, Native American sexual abuse survivor and Mark Biedrzycki, sculptor, with contributions from David Feinberg and artists Ali Abdulkadir, Bonnie Brabson, Stephanie Thompson.

As a child of physical and sexual abuse, Chris’ road to recovery has been long and full of hardship. Throughout her childhood and into her teen years, Chris was forced to participate in pornographic videos and was sold as a prostitute by her father and grandfather. Chris attributes her survival to her “dodem,” or spirit animal, which she says helped her endure the horrific abuse she experienced. Chris’ dodem is an eagle. She has explained that she is not fully recovered, and has good days and bad days, but says that her dodem spoke to her early on in her life and has been an important emotional support. Chris still experiences flashbacks about her trauma, but states that they are getting better and that she can manage them. Another thing that helped Chris surmount her trauma was simply moving away physically from the people who were hurting her. Chris accomplished this by going to college at the University of Wisconsin, where she was an honor student and played Big 10 soccer. Later, Chris taught classes in creative writing at a community college.

Chris’ cultural heritage is Anishinabe/Ojibwe. The main element of the piece is an eagle’s head, which curves to a point on the right – the eagle’s beak. The three projections stretching toward the lower left of the piece represent the feathers of the eagle. The oval-shaped hole in the center of the eagle’s head is the eagle’s eye. The triangular shapes in the top left are arrowheads, which recall Chris’ Native American ancestry. The circular bird’s nest resting near the eagle’s beak is filled with eggs, and signifies new life and new beginnings. At the bottom of the piece is a ladder, which emerges from a wall and overlaps the eagle’s head – this structure represents Chris’ climb out of abuse with the help of her dodem. At the top right corner of the piece is a Stop Sign, symbolizing Chris’ desire to stop the people who victimized her. The sculpture’s red color represents the color of the earth and is a reminder that all of us come from the earth.