

Finding the Class of 2008

By **GLENN COOK**

WHEN CARLY BAD HEART BULL and her twin sister, Kate, were in their mid 20s, they were considered statistics. Both had dropped out of school before they turned 16, a common problem that plagues Native American students, and faced a life with limited career options.

“Growing up all over, we had a difficult time in school,” said Bad Heart Bull. “I read all the time and got good grades, but as Native students, we felt pretty invisible in the school system. We were usually the only Native students in our classes, and our people weren’t talked about. We didn’t feel like we mattered because our heritage was not discussed.”

That heritage, steeped in Dakota traditions, proved to be a powerful calling card, one that led both sisters from the Southwest to their native homeland. Both went back to school, earning advanced degrees, and now are working to change the fortunes of Native Americans in Minnesota and North and South Dakota.

Carly, who worked full time while earning her associate’s and bachelor’s degrees, went to law school at the University of Minnesota in large part due to the Minority Corporate Counsel Association’s LMJ Scholarship. She was one of 18 recipients in the 2008 class, the fourth such group to receive the honor.

“I decided that I really wanted to serve my people, and I knew the only way to do that in the best way possible was to go to school and get an education,” said Bad Heart Bull, now the Native Nations Activities Manager for the St. Paul-based Bush Foundation, a philanthropic organization. “I definitely went the non-traditional route to get here, but I feel very fortunate that I get to do this work.”

A Non-Linear Path to Law School

Given their family’s background and history, the fact that Carly and Kate Beane decided to drop out of high school before their 16th birthday must have come as a shock to their parents. But it also points to the complicated path that many Native Americans have faced for more than 150 years.

The girls spent their childhood in Arizona and Nebraska, where their father Syd ran citywide Indian Centers in Phoenix and Lincoln and their mother taught school. Their ancestors were exiled from Minnesota to South Dakota after the bloody Dakota War of 1862; Syd’s great-uncle, Charles Eastman, later helped found the Boy Scouts of America and worked to improve the lives of Native American youth through his writing and speeches.

“I always knew I was Native, but we grew up in urban Native, pan-Indian communities,” said Carly, who took her husband’s last name (Bad Heart Bull) after they married. “We would spend our summers on the reservation, and go to ceremonies now and then, but we didn’t grow up speaking the Dakota language. Something was always missing.”

After dropping out, Bad Heart Bull worked in numerous low to mid-paying jobs in the San Francisco area. She enrolled in a community college program designed for working adults, then decided to return to Minnesota so she could learn more about her heritage.

“I wanted to study the language, to learn the songs and stories, and somehow find a way to become re-connected to my roots,” she said. “When I started to do that, I found a better understanding of who I am as a Dakota woman and as a human being. As I became more connected, I started volunteering in my community and realized I needed to go back to school.”

SCHOLARSHIP

Bad Heart Bull started studying the Dakota language at University of Minnesota, where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in history and American Indian studies. She taught the language to preschoolers and kindergarten students in an immersion program in South Minneapolis and started advocating for families at the Indian Child Welfare Act Law Center.

"I loved my work, but at a certain point in time I didn't want to be a teacher any longer," she said. "I felt that I was meant to something else to serve my people in a different way. I started talking to people who I respected who worked in the community, and they told me to go to law school. To truly help make a difference, I needed to learn the language of the law."

LMJ Scholarship Helps Pave the Way

The LMJ Scholarship, which started handing out law school monies in 2005, is designed to help law students who are highly qualified but face steep financial hardships. Recipients receive \$10,000 for their first year of law school, and can qualify to receive the same amount in their second and third years.

Most of the recipients are in their early to mid 20s when they earn the scholarships. Bad Heart Bull had just turned 30, which she said only increased her gratitude.

"I felt so honored to receive it because it was from an organization that was looking at people of color and people from communities that haven't always had the most opportunities in the legal world," she said. "Law schools in general need more people who come from communities who know the obstacles to opportunities that I know, and MCCA knows the type of people we need. I was really proud that they chose me."

Bad Heart Bull graduated from law school in 2011, then worked as a law clerk for a district judge and in the child protection division of the Hennepin County Attorney's Office. She soon realized that advocacy for Native Americans would be a better use of her skills than working in courtrooms.

"I wanted to be in a place where I could utilize my skills and my connections as a bridge between the different worlds I walked in. If I could sit at those tables and be an advocate, I could give access to some of my relatives and members of my community that they haven't had."

In 2014, Bad Heart Bull joined the Bush Foundation as a Ron McKinley Philanthropy Fellow in the organi-



Carly Bad Heart Bull

zation's education division. Established by 3M executive Archibald Bush and his wife, Edyth, in 1953, the foundation works in communities in Minnesota, the Dakotas, and the 23 Native nations that share the same geographic area.

"For people in fields who don't have an understanding of how a Native country works, it can get pretty complicated. You've got federal, state, and tribal entities. You've got jurisdiction issues. You've got different school systems," said Bad Heart Bull, who was hired as a full-time staff member at the foundation in April. "There are a lot of complicated pieces of information that come from the Native community."

"Having the legal background to explain to my colleagues the landscape of the communities we are working and partnering with, as well as understanding some of the hurdles and opportunities, is proving invaluable."

You Can Go Home Again

Today, Bad Heart Bull and her husband, Jay, live in South Minneapolis. Her sister, Kate, followed her to Minnesota, enrolled in college and received her doctorate in American Indian Studies. Kate now works as a tribal liaison with the Minnesota Historical Society and is a Dakota history scholar.

"We've come a long way," Carly said. "You could say we're proof that you can go home again."

Earlier this year, the sisters were appointed to a community advisory committee that is looking at possible renovations for Lake Calhoun and Lake Harriet, two of the largest regional attractions in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. Their family's ancestral village, Heyata

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Otunwe, was located at Lake Calhoun until they were exiled in the Dakota War of 1862.

“We were appointed by different park board members who didn’t even know we were sisters,” Carly said. “We wanted to be on the committee because we wanted to bring different voices to the table than those you regularly see at these types of things.”

The sisters are lobbying for the restoration of Lake Calhoun’s original name—Bde Maka Ska—to recognize their ancestors. The process has proven to be an uphill battle, all the more reason Bad Heart Bull plans to continue her advocacy work, especially in the foundation arena.

“There’s a lack of Native representation on foundation staff and board rosters, and I want to continue to help them better serve the communities that benefit the most from their resources and help,” she said. “I think a lot of foundations would like to do a better job of serving these communities; they just don’t know how. They don’t have relationships with native communities or know how to even approach these communities. I see myself as a connector in that sense because I straddle both worlds. I can help and make a difference for my community.” ■

GLENN COOK (glenncook117@gmail.com) is a freelance writer and photographer who lives in Northern Virginia.

The 2008 recipients of the Minority Corporate Counsel Association’s LMJ Scholarship have gone on to varied careers in the corporate, government and nonprofit worlds.

Here is an update on the class and what they are doing now:

- **Ryan Chapoteau** is an associate with the Sedgwick Law Firm in New York City, where he works in the litigation, labor and employment, and insurance practices.
 - **Nakeena Covington Taylor** is corporate counsel for Pandora in Oakland, Calif., where she supports the product and advertising teams.
 - **Bryant Hall** is an associate with Williams & Connolly LLP in Washington, D.C.
 - **David Hao** is dean of academic success and an assistant professor at Houston Baptist University.
 - **Uchenna J. Ibekwe** is vice president of fixed income, currencies and commodities at Citi in New York City.
 - **Sakisha Jackson** works in the legal and compliance divisions for The Carlyle Group in Washington, D.C.
 - **Joshua Johnson** is a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, where he practices litigating eviction cases on behalf of no-to-low income clients in the Eviction Defense Center.
 - **Cesar Juarez** is an attorney at the Goosmann Law Firm in Sioux Falls, S.D.
 - **Tam Mai Ma** is policy counsel at Health Access California in Sacramento, where she represents health care consumers in the legislature and before administrative and regulatory entities.
 - **Jeffrey Peterson** is an associate in the litigation group at AterWynne LLP in Portland, where he focuses on director and officer liability, shareholder actions, employment litigation, environmental law and business disputes.
 - **Carmen Jo Rejda-Ponce** is an associate at Germer PLLC in Houston, where she focuses on labor and employment litigation.
 - **Annerly Pulgar Alfonso** is an assistant county attorney in the Miami-Dade County Federal Litigation section, where she defends the county and its employees in civil rights cases dealing with municipal liability, qualified immunity, and First Amendment issues.
 - **Brenda Robles** works as a foreign service officer at USAID, where she currently is assigned to Mozambique International Affairs.
 - **Alexander Simpson** is legal counsel at HIS in Southfield, Mich.
 - **Lori Taylor** is an associate and business litigation lawyer with Foley & Lardner LLP. She is a member of the firm’s Business Litigation & Dispute Resolution Practice.
 - **Fatihah Touray** is assistant dean for International and Diversity Advising and director of the Academic Achievement Program at New York University.
 - **Feather Moy-Welsh** is an associate at Stroock & Stroock & Lavan LLP in Los Angeles.
- Details about the **LMJ Scholarship Program** can be found at www.mcca.com/scholarships.