

Cherokee roots inspire 'Broken Heart Land'

By Carter Smith

"Broken Heart Land," a play by longtime Dobbs Ferry resident Vicki Lynn Mooney about a teenager who recognizes her potential and self-worth through the discovery and celebration of her Cherokee roots, will have its debut run next month at the WorkShop Theater Company in Manhattan.

The coming-of-age story mirrors Mooney's real-life experience as a mixed-blood Cherokee. She was born 65 years ago in Tulsa and raised in "Oklahoma and Kansas at large" — by which she means that her father worked in the oil fields, which led to her attending "at least one different school each year" as the family moved around. After high school, Mooney wanted to attend Northeastern State University, a female seminary in Tahlequah, Okla., the capital of the Cherokee Nation, but at her parents' behest she earned an executive secretarial certificate at Tulsa Business College instead.

Mooney notes that despite the certificate, she was not secretarial material. Instead, she met her future husband, Gerry Mooney, in a Tulsa cowboy bar called Mickey's Country Darlin', where he was performing Bruce Springsteen and Bob Dylan songs. "I thought he was one of the bravest people I'd ever seen," she said. The two found each other after the show and eventually moved east to New York.

Mooney and her husband, now 63 and a graphic artist, arrived in Dobbs Ferry in 1986, and with the exception of 22 months in Charlotte, N.C., have lived



Vicki Lynn Mooney

TIM LAMORTE/RIVERTOWNS ENTERPRISE

School notes

Bucknell dean's list

Hayley Bingham was named to the dean's list at Bucknell University for the spring 2014 semester.

Wake Forest dean's list

Jillian Grant was named to the dean's list at Wake Forest University for the spring 2014 semester.

Skidmore honors

Chloe Larson earned term honors for the spring 2014 semester at Skidmore College.

UDelaware dean's list

Dylan Glickstern, a 2011 graduate of Dobbs Ferry High School, was named to the dean's list at the University of Delaware for the spring 2014 semester.

Wake Forest graduate

Jillian Grant graduated from Wake Forest University in May 2014.

Siena president's list

Scott DeBiase and Molly Maguire were named to the president's list at Siena College for the spring 2014 semester.

Wash U. dean's list

Bronwyn Cruz Bingham was named to the dean's list at Washington University in St. Louis for the spring 2014 semester. She is enrolled in the university's John M. Olin School of Business.

Mooney

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in the village ever since.

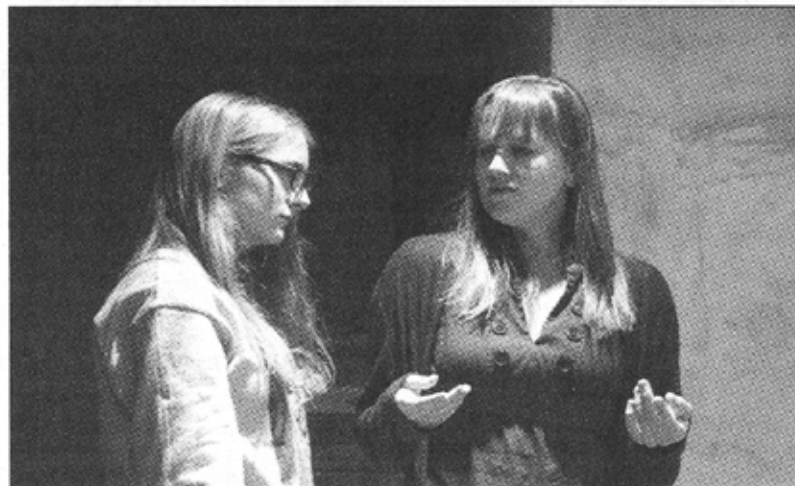
As a child, Mooney was aware of her part-Cherokee heritage, but remembers her father telling her to forget it. "But in the meantime I had my grandfather and my grandmother, and my great-grandparents — all of whom I knew. They were all born in Indian territory, and you don't have that kind of background unless you're part Indian," Mooney explained.

An avid interest in genealogy revealed her Cherokee bloodlines on her father's side, dating back to 1640. As a result of that lineage, Mooney applied for and received membership in the Cherokee Nation. To officially join the Nation, citizenship does not require a specific blood quantum but it does require that one have at least one direct Cherokee ancestor listed on the Dawes Final Rolls, a federal census of those living in the Cherokee Nation that was used to allot Cherokee land to individual citizens in preparation for Oklahoma statehood.

"The federal government had rounded up all the survivors of the different tribes in the United States, and crammed them into this American equivalent of a Soweto," said Mooney, referring to one of South Africa's largest segregated townships. "But because they had treaties, they had to recognize them as sovereign nations within this little area."

The Dawes Act of 1887 authorized a survey of American Indian tribal land for the purpose of dividing it into allotments for individual Indians. Those who accepted allotments and lived separately from the tribe were granted U.S. citizenship.

Out of this history and her family's experience came "Broken Heart Land," which explores, in Mooney's words "what it means to be a mixed-blood, with a foot in two worlds but truly being part of nei-



PHOTOS BY ASHLEY MARINACCIO

Photos of a "Broken Heart Land" rehearsal.

ther." Tony White is the director of the play, which is being produced by Ryan Victor Pierce and The Eagle Project, a theater company that, according to its website, "explores American identity through performing arts and Native American heritage."

"Broken Heart Land" is set in Tulsa, in Indian Territory, in 1903. Indian Territory would enter the Union as the State of Oklahoma in 1907, although white settlers had been moving into the territory even before the federal government extended the Homestead Act of

1862 to Oklahoma in 1889. Many of those early white settlers intermarried with tribal people in an effort to claim rights to their land.

Alma Wimsey, the play's main character, is the mixed-blood daughter of a Cherokee father and white mother. At age 13, she is manipulated into an arranged marriage so that her white grandfather can exert control over her tribal land allotment and control miles of acreage along the railroad right-of-way through Tulsa.

According to the play's production notes, "Alma is just as willful and wily as the old man. She goes through with the marriage, but she rebels against and destroys her grandfather's plans of empire. By embracing her Cherokee heritage, Alma frees herself to live the life she chooses and finds her own way to true love."

"Broken Heart Land" is the second installment of a three-part retelling of Mooney's ancestors' lives in early-20th-century Oklahoma. The trilogy began with "Hoop Jumper" and concludes with "Thicker Than Oil." Neither of the other two parts of the trilogy have been staged. However, "Hoop Jumper," which won first place in the Oklahoma City Theatre Company's 2014 Native American New Play Festival, will debut in Oklahoma City next spring.

A fundraiser for "Broken Heart Land" was held Sept. 17 at the AFA Gallery in SoHo. In addition to readings from Mooney's plays, and others, a silent auction and raffle included gifts from Endless Trail Bikeworkx, Dobbs Ferry Pottery, Audrey's, Celtic Corner, and Fiamor, all of Dobbs Ferry.

"Broken Heart Land" opens Thursday, Nov. 6, and will have 12 performances through Sunday, Nov. 16 at the Workshop Theater Company's Main Stage, 312 W. 36th St., 4th floor. For more information or to purchase tickets (\$18), please visit www.smarttix.com or call (212) 868-4444.