**Question:** Welcome everyone. We’re recording this from the Phillips Club, Lincoln Center, Manhattan, on what was once Lenape land. Our small, live audience here is vaccinated and socially distanced. Our zoom audience will be muted throughout, but please leave us messages in chat and let us know where you’re from. And, of course, leave questions or comments on www.soniaantaki.com.

**Sonia:** Pre-covid this would have been a live book signing, so if you’d like a signed bookplate, send me an email—soniaantaki@gmail.com--and I’ll put one in the mail to you. (Hold up)

**Question:** For people who haven’t read the first book yet, can you give us an introduction to Red Dove?

**Sonia:** In the first book, it’s 1890, and Red Dove is a thirteen-year-old half-Lakota girl who faces a stark choice: leave her people to live in the white world–or stay, and watch them starve. When she breaks a sacred tradition and eats the fruit of the Dead Man’s Plum Bush, her wise old grandfather gives her a medicine pouch that allows her to enter the thoughts and feelings of others—and truly listen. With it, she confronts the cruelties of boarding school, and the horrors of Wounded Knee. With her beloved pony, she begins a journey between worlds and bring her worlds together.

In Book 2 of the Trilogy, just published, she’s fourteen and escapes boarding school to tour Europe with Annie Oakley in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show. Her grandfather’s medicine pouch has taught her empathy. Now, she must find the courage to speak her truth–and bring her worlds together.

**Question:** How do the Lakota spiritual beliefs fit into the story?

**Sonia:** Calvin Spotted Elk said something that helped me understand Lakota spirituality. Lakota people see the spirit I all things. that’s what made the pouch so important to the story. Red Dove has the ability to enter the thoughts and feelings of others because she sees the spirit in all things.

**Question:** So this isn’t just an adventure story?

**Sonia:** It’s an adventure story, sure—Red Dove overcomes great obstacles but it’s an adventure story of the spirit, something I think young people are hungry for.

**Question:** When this book starts, she’s back at boarding school again. These schools have risen in the public consciousness again, after the discovery of graves on those sites in Canada, and now here. Can you give us a little background about the schools, and how Red Dove finds herself there?

**Sonia:** in 1926, over 80% of Native children were taken from their families and forced to go to boarding schools. Can you imagine what that would be like, if your children were taken away and their culture obliterated, if they were punished if they spoke their language? If the last you heard of them was the day they were ripped from your arms and you never saw them again. They’ve discovered so many mass graves in Canada and now Deb Haaland, our Secretary of the Interior, who is Native American, is investigating boarding school graves here. The shock is that the story hasn’t been told for so very long. The boarding school system almost destroyed Native culture, but it didn’t--because Native beliefs and culture are so strong The culture is undergoing a revival. You’re seeing more and more interest among young people in relearning their language and culture. People like Mary Puthoff, educator are working hard to bring Lakota language back.

**Question:** Red Dove is searching for an old friend, and also for her place in the world. Can you talk a bit about *Iyeshka*, and how it relates to your own life?

**Sonia:** *Iyeshka* means translator, mixed blood someone who walks between worlds, like Red Dove, who is half white, half Lakota. On my website, there’s a video with Linda Six Feathers, who talks about walking between worlds and she alludes to young people today who are often mixed race—something she understands. She is full-blood Lakota, born in the Badlands, but was raised by a white (Italian) family. My own background led me to thinking bout being between worlds. I was born in Egypt to a British born Syro Lebanese Father and a Swiss Mother and came to this country when I was small. I’ still trying to bring my worlds together. I think it also refers to the state of being a young adolescent and walking between worlds, the world of childhood and that of being an adult.

**Question:** Why did you decide to take Red Dove out of the United States to Europe? And what gave you the idea of using Buffalo Bill and his Wild West show as a means to do that?

**Sonia:** Many of the survivors of the massacre at Wounded Knee actually did join Buffalo Bill’s troupe, because he managed to get them pardons for fighting against the US in the so-called Indian wars. Women, children, families, went along and were part of the spectacle that was a huge success all across the US and for several tours in Europe. And Annie Oakley was an important part of that show. She admired and respected Indigenous culture, and knew a lot about traditional herbal medicine. In the story, she becomes a Sister figure to Red Dove.

**Question:** I think you do a great job of portraying both Native Americans and white people in a balanced way – almost no one is either all bad or all good. In particular, some characters, in spite of their flaws, help Red Dove to fulfil her potential, while others stand in her way. Then you have the spirit guides that support her. Which of these was/were the most fun to write? Do you have a favorite character?

**Sonia:** I love Jerusha—I think I relate to her so well. She’s so annoying and so well intentioned. She almost gets it, all the time. In my mind, she’s sort of a representation of the white world, trying hard to understand, but not fully getting it.

**Question:** Your descriptions of America and Europe at that time really put me in the scene. The trains, the ship, the carriages, and the costumes and customs are all very vivid. Did they require a lot of research?

**Sonia:** Research is one of my favorite things, and once I have a vivid picture of the scne, I’m there. It’s like watching a oveie and I can just describe what I’m seeing.

**Question:** Do you consider Buffalo Bill as having good intentions in his real historical context? Did he genuinely try to make it up to Native Americans for the harm he’d done?

**Sonia:** In the beginning, no. He boasted about slaughtering over 4000 buffalo as part of the US government’s effort to destroy Native people’s food supply. But I do think, as he learned more about the damage he had caused, he did try to make it up to Native people for the harm he had done. He did think he was helping by showcasing Native culture, and from the perspective of 1891, that was probably true. Contrast that with what L. Frank Baum, who later wrote the Wizard of Oz said: that Native people should be eradicated from the earth.

**Question:** Can you tell us something about the title and what it means?

**Sonia:** Tell Truth to Darkness—something girls at that age struggle with—the courage to speak their truth. The first book is about listening and empathy—something her grandfather’s medicine pouch allows her to do—a necessary skill for a young person coming of age. But young girls need to learn to speak their truth, and stay true to their truth. Book three will be about using those skills—listening and speaking—to bring worlds together.

**Question:** Can someone enjoy volume two if they haven’t read the first one? According to the reviews, yes.

**Sonia:** One reviewer said: This book makes it easy to pick up even if you have not read the first book in the series.

**Question:** What age of person would enjoy this book?

**Sonia:** From about age 9—a mature age 9—on up.

**Question:** What would you like readers to take away from the novel?

**Sonia:** Learn to Listen. Learn to Speak your truth. And Bring your worlds together!

**Question:** And what’s next for Red Dove?

**Sonia:** Well, bringing her worlds together—in Book 3, Run Through the Fire

And I just learned that Red Dove, Tell Truth to Darkness won the Moonbeam Silver Medal for Pre-Teen Historical/Cultural Fiction!