

2021 MICHAEL JOHN KENNEDY SCHOLARSHIP

AWARD-WINNING ESSAY

The inaugural Michael John Kennedy Scholarship award winner, Jozelle (Jozie) Arenz, is a 2021 Potawatomi Leadership Program graduate and junior at the University of Wisconsin - La Crosse pursuing a bachelor's degree in biology. She plans to become a physician assistant. To learn more about Jozie, check out [this article](#) from the January 2022 edition of the Hownikan.

The Battle of Monongahela, as described in the Citizen Potawatomi Nation (CPN) Encyclopedia, was one of the first major conflicts for the Native-French Alliance during the French and Indian War in 1755. It is believed that a brave Potawatomi warrior had a dream of the future battle. The French and Indian forces used the dream as a battle plan, and were able to defeat the British, including the young George Washington. By following the powerful mnedok (spirits), the Potawatomi warriors were victorious. For centuries, Potawatomi warriors have been able to apply their Native spirituality and combat training to battle. With the mnedok to guide them, and their brothers and sisters to support them, Potawatomi warriors have fought fearlessly to protect their people and their culture. Warfare among CPN has evolved over the last several centuries, but one thing has remained - the honor that comes with risking your life for the safety and freedom of your people.

My mother, Tondra Arenz, enlisted in the United States Navy in 1985 at the age of 17. The military offered a small-town Potawatomi girl a way out of her trailer park in Montana. She attended Navy Corps School at Great Lakes Naval Base and served as a Hospital Corpsman. Her dedication led her to complete over 20 years of service and retire with the ranking of Senior Chief Petty Officer in 2005. While my mother did not initially set out to impact CPN, her choice led her to overcome the narrative for Native American women that was placed before her. Following the Removal Acts and Reservations, many Native American women were plagued with addiction, teen pregnancy, and abusive relationships. Despite dealing with discrimination and sexism, my mother always represented CPN with pride through her years of service. Her fortitude led her to become an unstoppable, powerful and proud Potawatomi woman warrior, paving the way for future warriors.

Today, Potawatomi warriors may face an internal conflict with serving in the United States military, as there is a significant history of war and injustice that stripped away much of Potawatomi culture and freedom. Perhaps experiencing personal or ancestral oppression inspires current Potawatomi warriors to fight even more fearlessly for freedom, so that the United States can become the place of equality and equal opportunity our ancestors deserved. With the service and representation of Potawatomi warriors in the U.S. military, CPN is provided the opportunity to rebuild what was once lost and become a strong, independent nation. From the early beginnings of CPN to the present day, Potawatomi warriors have upheld Native spirituality, comradery, leadership, and skill. This stretches from Potawatomi warriors in the French and Indian War, who fought to protect our land and traditional way of life, to present day Potawatomi warriors, like my mother, who serve the United States to defend the new identity CPN is building. Their impact cannot be appropriately quantified, because Potawatomi warriors have given Citizen Potawatomi Nation the greatest gift of all - the opportunity to grow and persist.