

February 9, 1938

Miss Cora Marsland  
26 Ann Street  
Ossining, New York

My dear Miss Marsland:

I have your letter of February 6th making inquiry about Mrs. Gertrude Simmons Bonnin who recently passed away in Washington. Mrs. Bonnin attended Earlham from 1895 to 1897. I graduated in 1896, so that her Freshman year coincided with my Senior year in college. I did not know her except to speak to her, but everyone in college knew her as a brilliant speaker.

As a Freshman, she won our College Oratoriaal Contest with an oration, entitled "Side by Side," on women's suffrage. It was a brilliant performance. I remember it as if it were yesterday. Our class had captured first and second place in the Oratorical Contest the year before, and our Earlham speaker had gone on to win the State Contest. We naturally expected that as Seniors our class would sweep everything before it in the Oratorical Contest and to have this little Indian girl in the Freshman class beat our best was quite a surprise to us although I must say that I think we all took the defeat very nicely and supported her loyally when she went on to the State Contest. She re-wrote her entire oration because she wished to talk upon the Indian question in the State Contest, and she had not expected to win in the College Contest her first year. Her oration was still called "Side by Side" but it dealt with the Indian question instead of with women's suffrage. She again did very well and received second place for her oration in the State Contest.

Mrs. Bonnin wrote the story of her life for the Atlantic Monthly, in one or more articles, I think, in a series which appeared sometime between the fall of 1896 and the summer of 1901 because I know that I read them while I was at Harvard. She wrote them under her Indian name of Zitkala-Sa (I may not have spelled this name correctly). I think you will find these articles very interesting and I am sure you will find it easy to locate them. As I recollect, I did not think that her account of her experiences at Earlham was altogether fair in that she rather gave the impression that she was being put upon and, particularly, as I recollect it,



she spoke of some of the things which happened at the State Contest as if the students of the other colleges were attempting to persecute her because she was an Indian, when I think it was all good fun and just done to her as a contestant from a rival college and not as to an Indian.

I am sorry to say that I do not know much more about Mrs. Bonnin's later career. I am turning over your letter, together with a copy of this letter, to our Registrar, who can doubtless give you further information about Mrs. Bonnin and probably supply further sources of information.

With all good wishes for the success of your work, I am

Most sincerely,

WCDennis:LRH