My name is Natalie Dana Lolar.
I am a Passamaquoddy/Penobscot drum maker. I draw my energies, passions, and love for traditional works from the blood of those who came before me. Traditional artist such as: my great (x3) grandfather - Tomah Joseph and my grandmother - Joan Dana.

When I was growing up I did not know any drum makers; even though my family consists mainly of ceremonial drummers. While attending a market, I was able to see beautiful drums that I had never seen before. This created a spark to create drums that I thought represented my people and our culture. Through mentors and small nudges from supportive friends and family I was able to learn this art by trial and error.

As a woman drum maker, I receive a lot of support in this primarily male dominated practice, which gives me strength to continue and grow.

When making a drum, I always wait until I am in a good state of mind. I’ve never made a drum while on any type of substance. By creating a drum it is important that adding good thoughts and good energy to the drum brings about absorption of these energies and every time it is played afterwards, those energies will be released.

My first step is to come up with ideas of my visions and how they will look in each step of the process because no drum is exactly the same. After this starts the physical aspect of my art. I start by soaking the hide for a few days up to a week depending on thickness to get a feeling that can only be experienced by touching and working with hides over time.

Next is cutting the drum head and lacings. The lacing are then stretched for the drum back and handle. At that point I dye my drums with clothing dye and or natural dyes, each one is unique. I decide depending on the thickness of the hide how tight to make the lacings to produce the sound I want. Each lacing pattern is more intricate than the last. My dream catcher drum is a good example of this practice.

The drum is then slowly dried. I constantly check to make sure the sides do not curl inside. This is usually for cosmetic reasons, but does have an affect on the sound of the drum in different areas of use.

I will sometimes paint on the drum an image with black or white paint. I call my art that I put on a drum, tribal tattoo art. I never paint more than a 1/4 of the surface area because it will affect the sound negatively.

When fully dried I check the sound, if needed I heat treat them. Which is a basically applying direct heat to get the rawhide to tighten. I prefer to work with the already processed hide. To me, the artistic aspect that I love in drum making is producing beautiful drums with amazing sound. I believe it is so much more than just decorating them.
I typically make my drums from deer skin. The sound of a deer skin drum allows people to have their singing voice shine through. The last part of drum making is finding the person that the drum connects to. Finding the drum’s drummer!

The hand drum is a way for people to connect to themselves and their culture. When you listen to your heartbeat; you can learn the drum beat of my people. A drum can be used to restore balance and regulate the person’s heart beat. The drum is powerful and is a medicine for your spirit and body.

Some history as to why drum making means so much to me personally. A long time ago our drums where taken from us. My people would use pots, pans, rattles, small drums that they could hide to maintain the ability of being able to drum. Only after the 1978 Native American Religious Freedom Act (NARFA) where we able to actively drum again.

My goal is to have a drum in each Wabanaki household. Whether that is through buying a drum from me at various markets, attending one of my workshops, or buying from another Wabanaki artist I have taught. I want to return our drums back to our people and their homes. This will help heal my people and their futures.

Thank you for your consideration.