

HONOURING INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Hearts of Nations - Vol. 2.

Artwork: © 2012 Yolanda Teresa Philgreen

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our most sincere gratitude to the 62 women and men who answered our call for *Honouring Indigenous Women: Hearts of Nations - Vol. 2*. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and personal stories through your writing, photography and artwork. We feel very honoured and privileged to have had the opportunity to work with each of you on this project.

Initially, we only wanted to create a small booklet, just like the first volume. But thanks to your courage in sharing your voices and the unexpected number of submissions we received, we are publishing a book instead!

We would like to thank everyone else that has been supporting us through this process. In particular, we would like to send special thanks to Nancy Reid of NR Grafix for the layout of this book and Erika Shaker from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives for her advice regarding sponsorships, promotion and distribution. Thank you also to Under One Roof Properties for their generous donation to this project. Without Under One Roof Properties' financial support, we may not have been able to complete this book.

And last but not least, we would like to thank Catherine McCarty of the Nipissing First Nation for writing the Foreword for this book, which is dedicated to all Indigenous women on Turtle Island.

With Respect and Solidarity,
ling sou, tân lâm tú vân and wang pei-ju
for the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa
On unceded and unsundered Algonquin Territory, October 2012

COVER ART: FIRE

This particular piece represents the parts of a woman: her love, her embrace, her laughter, and her tears.

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As a young person, **YOLANDA TERESA PHILGREEN**, from the Cherokee Nation, grew up with images of what she was supposed to be. As she grew into an adult she realized that being Native wasn't what she was but just a part of soul. She began painting and drawing at a young age, based on what she felt and saw or what was of interest to her.

She took classes, and, at age 15, started following her art mentor who taught her about art in general, but also provided her with guidance. Yolanda became a Montessori teacher and used art in the classroom as a way of calming and communicating to the youngest of children. She felt throughout her life that being a painter was a way to let her energy flow back out to the universe. She typically creates art that comes to her in either a dream, or while in creative moments.

Of her piece, Yolanda says: "As a Native woman I feel very deeply connected to the earth and the moon. This piece came to me when I wanted so deeply to connect with others and was also at the same time very alone."

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FOREWORD

A while back I watched a documentary about what huge businesses have done to people when they move in. This is what was said: governments and corporations are big organizations who make rules and laws for the people and society. When crimes against humanity are committed by large organizations, it does not feel like a crime has been committed, because it has been done collectively by a legal organized group.

People taken by force, by an organization that benefited from the force, is a crime. For example, the Indian Act, Residential School System, Land Claims and Treaty Rights were all crimes.

When the colonizers and conquests came to Turtle Island, now known as the Americas – North, Central and South – they started their Class System of Skin Colour: Negro, black, brown, mulatto, Native, mixed-blood, Indian, Eskimo and Aboriginal.

People of colour have always been categorized and classified to keep the White people in control.

Colonizers have perpetuated a certain image of what First Nations, Métis and Inuit are today.

Our lives have been in the White oppressor's hand. Because they have the higher positions, the truth has become lost in history.

The growth of the Americas and Early Europe today has come from centuries of free labour, slavery of Africans, the dispossessing of all Indigenous peoples, and a value system based on skin colour.

The Indian Act dehumanizes us, making our own self-government seem unserious, less advanced than theirs. Making us wards of the Crown, they forced us to live on reservations to justify the Land thefts, and told us whether we are "Indian" according to who we choose to marry.

Our names and images of the "Indian" appear all over this continent of the Americas. We are in films with whites painted and dressed in our clothing, displayed on covers of novels, T.V. media and advertising, sport logos, manufacturer's toys and tourist items, names of streets, lakes, towns, and condescending phrases such as "Indian givers" and "squaws".

We now seek to rewrite history from an Indigenous perspective to stop the myths, ensure healing and celebrate the survival of survivors, despite all the obstacles.

We write about almost being destroyed, being forced to hide pain like nothing ever happened, and still being able to love. We remember our grandmother and our Sisters in Spirit for the debts they paid, because the racism they suffered never knew equality.

So, in struggle and solidarity with Indigenous women, we write about legacies, birthrights, honour, persistence, rage and rebellion.

*Catherine McCarty
Nipissing First Nation*

PART I

this, her swagger

a poem once aspired
to bear witness to the powerful ways
indigenous women posture. it walked
away frustrated, embarrassed;
returned unrelenting:

i am struck by the powerful ways
indigenous women posture, in this city. i am
struck by all of her. with all of how
she sets her Self out, in this city:

she leans forward, elbows on
knees, shoulder-width apart.
fingers entwined. head down
or up, Métis is intent
on every word said

Ongwe onweh stands akimbo
or one hip in limbo; she don't
dance in one spot, her moves
say "i'm givin' it all i got"

and the long spine bend,
stretching vibrations from
her healing song or fluttering
knife, that there's Inuk

if her squinting you all up, brings
you down, that Cree'll chuckle,
shake her head, say "cha" or
"wachay", walk away into her day

and she's got the lean back
down pat—legs out, ankles crossed,
hands in pocket—lookin' you right
in the eye, guy. that's Anishinaabe.

she all gots the way
of one knee up one knee down,
laying her kind of asemaa (tobacco) on
cement ground. she all gots her
city, and this, her swagger.

WAASEYAA'SIN CHRISTINE SY is Ojibway Anishinaabe from Bawating (Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario) and Obishkikaang (Lac Seul First Nation). She presently lives in Nogojowanong (Peterborough, Ontario) with her daughter, Nozhemenhs Aja Sy, while she completes her PhD in Indigenous Studies. Waaseyaa'sin has published in *Algoma Ink*, *Rampike*, *Matrix*, and the anthology *Other Tongues: Mixed-Race Women Speak Out*. Her first spoken word sound recording, "ishkigamizigan: the sugarbush" was recently published in *InTensions*, an online Fine Arts journal. She has read her poetry publically in Bawating, Nogojowanong, Montreal, and recently performed her first spoken word piece, "Love Med'cin" at the Indigenous Women's Symposium at Trent University in March 2012.

A Lesson in Wild berries

A woman from Red River is picking wild berries

She carries her basket on her hip, the wrinkles in
Her tanned skin show

Her story is filled with sorrow but her smile is filled
With elation; she looks towards the sky and whispers
"Thank You"

She knows no boundaries her heart knows no hate
Let's emulate her, let's listen to her story

Among all the twists and turns is her grace, among
All the shadows are her tears

Her wisdom speaks of humility and her courage has
The force of a lion and the gentleness of a lamb

A woman from Red River is picking wild berries while

The sun beats down on her, the sweat pours from her brow

Let's listen to her story, let's take her journey

© 2012 *Marcie Riel*

MARCIE RIEL is Métis/Mohawk, currently attending college. She recently completed her first year of the Social Service Worker program. She is actively involved with the Durham College/UOIT Aboriginal Student Circle, doing volunteer work with the annual drum socials in the community. She had poems published with an Indigenous art project for the Vancouver 2010 Olympics and recently with the Ode'min Giizis Festival.

Gaia's Vision

Tears from the sun trickle down to earth, the
Cry of the loon echoes through visions of rebirth

I stand amongst this land they call savage an
Unbroken spirit waiting for a challenge

A heavenly light illuminates the hunter's chance
So we can all feast on the ancestral hunt and dance

The womb of the earth has risen, her essence is
Blossoming into a fertile vision

Fiery ashes are carried with the wind, tomorrow
Is waiting to begin

© 2012 *Marcie Riel*

Sisters in Spirit

I am an Indigenous Daughter, My gift is hope
I am an Indigenous Sister, My gift is kindness
I am an Indigenous Woman, My gift is strength
I am an Indigenous Mother, My gift is to nurture and give life
I am an Indigenous Grandmother, My gift is peace

We are sacred beings,
We honor all of creation
We are the three sisters in spirit
We are the holy trinity

Together we weave,
Peace, Hope and Balance
For all of Prosperity
Our Hearts beat in synchronicity
For Infinity

Msit Noqmaq
(For all our relations, all our nations, all of creation)

© 2012 Eva Apuk Jij (Mouse Clan)
L'nuk of Wabanaki Nation

EVA APUK JIJ is a proud Wabanaki woman, mother and wife from the traditional territory of Oonamaki, the land of the mist and fog. Oonamaki is also known as the beautiful Cape Breton island of Nova Scotia. Eva was born and raised in the Community of We'koqma'q, the head of the waters located on the foothills of the Skye Mountain and shores of Bras d'or lakes, an ecological gem.

Along with her partner of 21 years and their children, Eva is dedicated to repatriating her original natural inherited ways of life, enjoying decolonizing and finding solace and happiness in original Indigenous knowledge. She especially enjoys gardening and promotes growing plants with original seeds and ancient methods, such as the sacred three sisters that represent the important roles of the grandmothers, mother and daughter. Together, these three sisters are the keepers of peace, hope and balance. Eva believes that all food has a spirit and our original foods are full of spirit.

The three sisters in spirit are Mother, Daughter and Grandmother, the weavers, nurturers and strength of our families, nation and mother earth.

Many if not all of our nations have versions of the three sisters stories/legends/spirituality. In ours, Glooscap, our protector of the oppressed, giant, shape shifter, and creator of the first L'nuk (original people of Wabanaki) was known to grant wishes to the good. He would usually grant one wish. One time, after defeating the water monster, the L'nuk were so grateful for Glooscap saving them from death and suffering that they honored him with a great feast. This feast was so meaningful to Glooscap that he granted three wishes to the L'nuk. These became the first fish, crabs and leeches, all of which would feed and be good medicine to the L'nuk.

Another legend related that when Glooscap's mother died after giving birth to him and then his evil brother Malsum, she returned to earth as the three sisters, corn, squash and beans. The meal served to Glooscap after the war against the water monster, Soccutash with honey, reminded him of his love for his mother. He granted the L'nuk three wishes in her honour.

All these foods cooperate in the same spirit as the three sisters in spirit. We are interconnected and give strengths, nurturing, and nutrients that protect and feed one another, mentally, physically and spiritually.



© 2008 Louise Vien

"Drum Circle"

The tribes of the world have one thing in common in its early history and that they all share a relationship to a type of drum. The drum was the first actual instrument ever invented by man but only second to the human voice which was the first ever instrument. In this painting—you find four cattails that symbolise drumsticks. Each drumstick is denoted by a different colour that represents the different nations found on Mother Earth—the red, white, yellow and black. In the background is the full moon that embodies the visual aspect of the drum. This strong image teaches us that we all live under the same sky and that we really are no different from one another.

© 2008 Louise Vien

LOUISE VIEN has been embracing the arts since the tender age of six. Born and raised in Timmins, Ontario, oil painting has energized her natural talents and creativity. For Louise, painting was a way to comfort the self and a chance to express freely the struggles of her inner difficulties while giving greater meaning to her existence. Possessing a sense of form, texture and colour, her outlook to any project is based on how to reach and captivate the soul of the viewer, all the while focusing on the spirit of her subject in the moment of creativity. In the end, the final product needs to stimulate and communicate a sense, a feeling, an emotion and a story to the observer.

In the year 2000, after a long search to find her ancestral truth, the acknowledgement of her identity became a catalyst in her art. Embracing her Aboriginal family tree, she took up traditional art forms naturally. From leather working, to beading, to drum making and sash weaving, she understood the strength it added to her repertoire. By blending both traditional and conventional art forms, an evolution became evident in many of her works. By August 2005 she exhibited the results of this fusion with the Métis Artist Collective at the Black Creek Pioneer village in Toronto.

Woman of this Land

When first you came, how helpless and needy you were.

It was I that saved you
I that fed you
I that healed you

Mother of this land

As mother of this land, today you
Mock me
Curse me
Try to make nothing of me

Mother of this land

When first you came, how beautiful, exciting and powerful I was
It was I that you lusted for
I that you associated as

Queen of this land

As queen of this land today how you
Ridicule me
Degrade me
Imagine me dead

Queen of this land

When first you came here, how young I was
My father of power
How often I saved you
Loved you

Princess of this land

As princess of this land today, I try to save mine
And you scold me
Harass me
Degrade me

Princess of this land

When first you settled here,
How poor I was
A whore you thought of me
And savage I became

Squaw of this land

Today I refuse your labels
You, virus on this land
I am mother
queen and princess despite all you say
today, I remain

Woman of this land

A Historical review of how First Nations women were viewed through time.

© 2012 Mariel Belanger

MARIEL BELANGER, a member of Okanagan Nation, was first published professionally at age 26 in a poetry anthology titled *Our Words, Our Revolutions* and later appeared in *Gatherings XII*. She has had a lengthy career with the Senklip Native Theatre Company, since her youth as a performer and later director/script writer.

Recently, Mariel graduated from the Enowkin Centre's National Aboriginal Professional Artists Training program, where she received the First Year Media award, the Professionalism Award and Creative Writing Award for the NAPAT program. She directed two films which won at the Cowichan International Film Festival for "Best Documentary" (2008 *Mothers Milk*), "Most Promising Film Maker" and "Best Actor" (2007 *Wayward Soul*).

Mariel continues to produce multi-media video installations promoting her people and the connection they have to the land.

Laws of Destruction

Detesting the colonizer
His repugnancy in every form
For his greed
His destruction

Justifying acts of genocide
Training
My people to facilitate your destruction
Behave in ways that destroy each other
And our Mother Earth

Sacred Treaties
Violated with your foul mouth
And your dirty laws
That lie
And entrench colonial
Domination and control

You are a beast
Raping, demonizing, isolating, destroying
The beauty of our Earth
My people
From the light

You are a plague
Festering in a cesspool
Of your disease
Disguised
Benevolence
In laws
That contribute to your
Plans of extinction

I do not forgive
Your open faced
Manipulations of peace
And kindness
Will come back on you.

My people
Traumatized in pain
From your evil and malevolence
Creator sees you
And your laws of destruction

TAMARA STARBLANKET NEYIHAW is from the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation in Treaty 6 Territory. She is a mother of two beautiful sons and two grandchildren. She is presently in her final year of writing her Masters of Law on genocide and the forced transfer of Indigenous children. She acquired a B.A. with a major in political science from Simon Fraser University in 2001, graduated from the University of British Columbia in 2004 with a law degree. Tamara now resides in Vancouver and teaches criminology at the Native Education College. She has also been recently invited to be a part of a Committee of Genocide Scholars. Her interests are in further teaching, writing, and researching in the area of genocide. Tamara has recently been acknowledged by the leadership and citizens of Treaty Six Territory for her legal work and has been recognized as a legal advocate (Legal Onapekasowiniw) for her people in the area of treaty law.

On her submissions, Tamara says: "My submissions are based on my own personal loss of my family. From 1995 to 2004 the family I grew up with passed on due to the direct long-term impacts of genocide. My mother, father, two sisters and a brother passed on into the spirit world. In that time-frame, my youngest son also passed on. In March 2011, I entered into a coma, nearly losing my life, because of the traumatic loss. Today as part of my healing I write about the collective grief of Indigenous Peoples, my own personal grief and my understanding of genocide."

Miskwiwi = s/he bleeds

methodist = a person who relied greatly or excessively on methods

Methodist = a branch of Anglican Christianity that stresses personal and social morality

when they rounded us up and herded us over to grape island to put us into their Indian Removal Methodist Assimilation Machine, the Methodists gave the women cloth to bleed into because 1) Methodists think sphagnum moss is savage and 2) Methodists didn't approve of menstrual blood showing through our clothes.

aanji giisiwed = to change something

but the Anishinaabekwewag couldn't imagine bleeding on cloth, because cloth was precious and rare and so they made baby clothes out of it instead.

aanji giisiwed = menstruation

those Methodists got real mad at those women because they were still using sphagnum moss and where was all their cloth going and those Anishinaabekwewag were still marching around the island not even one bit ashamed of menstrual blood on their clothes, and even the Anishinaabeg men didn't care, because they knew it was the blood of life.

life = a continuous battle for honour

© 2012 Leanne Simpson

LEANNE SIMPSON Leanne Simpson is a writer of Mississauga Nishnaabeg ancestry. She is the editor of *Lightning the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Protection and Resurgence of Indigenous Nations* (Arbeiter Ring) and *This is an Honour Song: Twenty Years Since the Blockades* (with Kiera Ladner, Arbeiter Ring). She is the author of *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Arbeiter Ring) and *The Gift Is in the Making*, a re-telling of traditional stories, forthcoming Spring 2013 (Debwe Series, Highwater Press). Her first collection of short stories, *Islands of Decolonial Love* is forthcoming from Arbeiter Ring Fall 2013.

Shkakaamik Kwe

She put her hands on the earth,
Listened,
There was a sound that she could hear across the land,
The ships neared the shore,

The land,
My body,
Was injured in the name of "Christ,"

I became "Christianized,"
So did the land,

People began praying for me,
As I was torn from my family,
My community,
My uterus was hurt,
Pain inside,
My children were no longer my children,
My body was no longer my body,
My hair was cut,

I began to cry tears,
But they told me not to cry,
But to pray,
As it was "God's will,"

I wanted to move my fingers through my beautiful
black hair,
I cried,
My hair was gone,

Reservation internment camp,
Reservation prison camp,
Treaty,
Treaty,
Treaty broken,

The land was bought and sold,
Divided and contained,
Same was done to my body,
As they prayed,

They prayed for my assimilation,
To forget my culture,
Forget my land,
My territory,

I could not cry anymore,
Because they would abuse me,
Tell me not to speak in my Native tongue,
I was silent now,

Rape of the land occurred,
Rape of me,
My Mother,
Sister's,
Aunt's,
Daughter's,
Forced sterilization,
Unable to birth children if I choose,
Denied my own life,

"Gods will," meant I was to be invisible,
Who is Shkakaamik Kwe?
Who is Anishinaabekwe?

I had no voice,
No land,
No home,
Reproductive rights denied,
Traditional communities destroyed by force,

The prayers kept coming,
Mixed blood,
Mixed race,
Beautiful Native women,
Two-Spirit,
Healer,
Visionary,
Alone,
Crying,
Poverty,

The prayers didn't stop,
Colonial reproductive policies,
Reproductive injustice,
They would rather have me dead than pregnant,
They prayers continue,
The hurt continues,
The injustice continues,

Shkakaamik Kwe is about reproductive justice!
Anishinaabekwe is about reproductive justice!

© 2012 Cecelia R. LaPointe

CECELIA R. LaPOINTE is an Anishinaabekwe of mixed heritage residing in Naaminitigong (Manistee, Michigan) but is a part of Kchiwiikwedong (Keweenaw Bay Indian Community). She is a published author, poet, writer and healer. Cecelia was previously published in the anthology *Voice on the Water: Great Lakes Native America Now*, *Yellow Medicine Review: A Journal of Indigenous Literature, Art and Thought* (Fall 2011), and the astrological datebooks *We’Moon 2012 – Chrysalis*, and *We’Moon 2013 – The Other Side*. She is also the author of the children’s story book *Ajjaak*, published through Four Colours Productions. Cecelia’s poetry has appeared in online publications, magazines, booklets, and chapbooks including: *DIY Life Zine*, *Honouring Indigenous Women: Hearts of Nations - Vol. 1*, *Native Literatures: Generations*, *Poets’ Night Out* and *Revista Ixchel*. You can read her poetry, writing, rants and ramblings on her website – www.anishinaabekwe.com.

The Brightness of Coming

After the Long Walk,
Trailing tears,
My people arrived in Oklahoma,
Asked "Where is the water?"
Answered by silence and the absence of rain,
Fingered dry clay and fell dead in pain.
Every brick in Indian Country is baked ash and bone.
Now,
Wet earth and rivers flood all our dreams.
Memories of mountains fill our waking hours,
Bloom in this thirsty land where no water is.
Blood is currency.
Weeping is rain.

© 2012 Dawn Karima Pettigrew

DAWN KARIMA PETTIGREW (Creek/Cherokee) is a NAMMY-nominated recording artist and the host of a Native American public affairs program that airs on Talktainment Radio. Dawn is the author of two novels, *The Way We Make Sense*, a North American Native First Book Award runner-up, as well as *The Marriage of Saints*, which is part of the University of Oklahoma's American Indian Studies Series. An award-winning writer and filmmaker, her films have been featured in the International Cherokee Film Festival, International Indigenous Film Festival, Comanche Nation Film Festival and many other film festivals throughout the world. Her first CD, *The Worship of Angels*, was nominated for a Native American Music Award. *The Desire of Nations*, her second CD, is a recent release. Her home is the Qualla Boundary Reservation.

Today I Opened the Door

Today I opened the door
Hoping to find some insight
It was raining buckets,
And so I sat on the bench with a pillow

A lesson to learn
A desire to be engaged
in conversation.
I so enjoyed our chat the last time.

Her shop with books
Sketching journeys
Over the sea and back
Colours and life uncovered

Their Ancestors,
thousands and thousands of generations,
have always known
their earth beneath our feet.

People under the sun;
Are we not all just people?
Do we know whose land
our feet walk upon?

A book, acknowledging blood tied
to this ancient land
Sacred in stone.
Returned to life in the trees.
People run out by others.

"There aren't any here"—her words tell me.
Them. Us.
Indigenous.
Aborigines.

And so it goes...

"Well, why don't they want to assimilate?"
She said, her brow furled above her glasses.
"I knew one once," she said. "No, two, really.
One was alright, you know? But the other was the type
to give them a bad name."

I held the book close to me—
stories of the land beneath our foreign feet.

History uncovered. Under the floors and sand of this
shop.

"Until the fifties they shot them like rabbits," she says,
And she smiled...
At the audacity, one could only assume.

The droplets of water weigh,
Above the bite and venom of her words,
And her sign is knocked over by the wind.
A cyclone of ignorance from out of her mouth.

"Indigenous people are different everywhere else,
aren't they?
They can't adapt;
it must be in their make," she says.
Time to go...
I make my way out of this pummeling wind of a shop,
And say a prayer;

For those that came before us.
Those that are here now.
And those of us
Who come after.

Know whose land
your feet walk upon.
Name Them.
Honour Them.

Today I opened the door.
And wished for a rainbow.

© 2012 PJ Prudat

*This poem is in honour and acknowledgement of the
Gubbi Gubbi people of the Sunshine Coast, Australia.*

PJ PRUDAT hails from northern Saskatchewan and is of French, Scandinavian, Cree, Saulteaux and Métis roots. She loves writing, yoga, photography, visiting strange and beautiful places and being fortunate enough to hear great stories along the way. PJ holds a B.A. in Drama from the University of Alberta and has performed across all corners of this land now known as Canada and the USA. For her work as an actor, PJ is the recipient of the *Yukon People's Choice Bob Couchman Award* and the National ArtsCentre of Canada's *David Leighton Arts Fellowship Award*.

of all this, I am afraid

"Merry Christmas,"
coughs the pawnshop clerk,
"Buy a candle or a knife."
A hole has been torn in his throat,
The price he paid for what once he loved.
I hand him the golden ticket, eleven months old.
I found it in the dust of a powwow,
In the line of a sidestep,
By the beads of my moccasins,
Came to find out what was lost.
What would I redeem here?
What good is a jingle dance
Against the weight of a heart?
The sign in the case states in shaky hand,
"Fingerbones—Modoc, Maybe Tohono Odham"
What a difference a century makes.
A rancher's bullet or a federal agent's
Both government issue
Gold stars or silver
"Are these fingers from now or then?" I ask.
"Couldn't tell you," rasps the clerk,
"but kinda gives new meaning to the words dead pawn."
He laughs, blows smoke through fissured tissue.
He was loved once, I think, before I know he never was.

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no torture, by cruel red indians

No torture of helpless victims by heathen savages or cruel red Indians ever exceeded the cold-blooded savagery of white devils under lynch law.

~IDA WELLS, *Crusade for Justice*, 1928~

body pieces

a finger a toe

body pieces

blackened skin

from fire being sown overtop a

deeper black kneaded

into something soft

and tender ancient doumbou skin

born beneath a bantu sun

in

among the pickle jars

lined up along the pantry walls

where warm white fingers lick this slick stacked glass memory

souvenir of a fresh killed collins¹

to numb the soul for another meal

of a middle passage

a middle passage

feel

that limnal bonny exit into hell

into hanging from a tree

burned backs and weathered bone

stacks piled fathomes deep

and stringing necks, land sharks circle

with hemped hands loose and noose

knitted fingertips razor lips

split into something like a grin

set to spin the brute savagery

dressed in a face of pink

skin

florid and blazing red

this white devil

so called so forth

summoned from a looking glass

and looking into his own dark

heart he sees himself at last

he sees himself at last

but blames this other

this burnt-meat brother

hanging from a tree

the middle passage circles 'round
and ends in lynchburg tennessee
with a corkscrew twist pliers in fist
panning for gold in the mouths
of the new trenton six

over there in jena
underneath
a white roped tree

here
in the land of the brave
and free
where contradiction *a la* fiction
live side by side with
truth and living proof that
'heathen' and 'red'
'savage' and dread
were never so cruel
indeed

© 2012 *nehi katawasisiw*

This poem is, in a sense, a memorial that attempts to bear witness to all our African American relations who have suffered under the tyranny of racism...both in the past and today. Even if our communities have more in common and in solidarity having shared a similar history of oppression, Indigenous peoples remain marginalized and stereotyped by other people of color, and vice-versa. This poem is a reminder that our similarities far outweigh our differences.

NEHI KATAWASISIW is muskego/anishinaabe on her mother's side (affiliated with the Opaskwayak Cree Nation) and nehiyawak on her father's side (member of the Pihpikis Cree Nation). She was born in Snow Lake, Manitoba. Since then she has lived in four provinces, one territory, eight states and the District of Columbia. She is currently entering the second year of an M.A. program with the Department of Native Studies at the University of Saskatchewan.

1 Addie Mae Collins, age 10, murdered Birmingham Alabama September 15, 1963 Benjamin Collins lynched Phoenix So. Carolina, November 10, 1898 Ernest Collins lynched Columbus Texas November 11, 1935 Isaac (son of Paralee) Collins lynched West Plains Missouri June 17, 1914 Paralee (a woman) Collins lynched West Plains Missouri June 17, 1914 J.C. Collins lynched Mondak Missouri April 5, 1913 Jennie (a woman) Collins lynched Shaw Mississippi June 30, 1914 Robert Collins lynched Oglethorpe Georgia February 15, 1894 Sylvester Collins lynched Collins Georgia March 5, 1894 Unknown Collins lynched Athens Georgia February 10, 1894 William Collins lynched Mayo Florida June 9, 1895.

“Aboriginal Day”

Celebration?
ONE DAY
To showcase
Remnants of the past
Or display that we are prisoners

“Aboriginal” – Homogenization of our cultures
An appearance of oneness
Swallowed into a category
That spits out their putrid
Bastardization of our ancient nationhood

European invasion
Torture
Theft
Decimation of our Mother
Genocide

A condonement of lies
Beliefs that are false
We celebrate
Their lies and
Their moral repugnancy.

© 2012 *Tamara Starblanket*

Colonialism

You took away my mother!
You took away my culture!

You wanted to pave the road with good intentions for me

But did you really?

You crumpled my identity and

You almost destroyed my destiny.

I became lost, I became ill.

Colonialism, Can't you see what you've done to me?

It's been a terrible tragedy.

I can still see and I can still feel the many lingering wounded spirits

Of my 60's Scoop sisters and brothers

I pray for peace and reconciliation for those still lost.

Colonialism I dare you to step into our moccasins for a little while

You'll soon see what I mean.

No..... Don't tell me to get over it!

No..... Don't deceive me anymore with your lies,

No.....Don't say you're sorry! Because you're not!

Someday I may forgive you but I will never forget you.

© 2012 Angela Ashawasegai

ANGELA ASHAWASEGAI is an Ojibway from Henvey Inlet First Nations and resides in Ottawa. Angela is a true unsung hero of the 60's Scoop and is currently writing her Memoirs about her adoption experience.

She has contributed to the 2004 anthology of *Book of Voices: Voices of Aboriginal Adoptees and Foster Children*. Angela has also contributed her voice to the 2011 *Earth my Body, Water my Blood*. She has recently published "Identity Conflict", an excerpt chapter of her memoirs in the magazine *Rizing Medicine*, Volume 50/Issue 9 – 2012. Angela is an emerging Inspirational-Motivational speaker. She delivers her life story from tragedy to triumph with an inspiring message of hope for others; to develop their creativity and personal strengths to become successful in life.

What is Your Reality?

In my reality scarcity doesn't exist for there is an abundance of love, light, and joy; in fact, it's never-ending.

In my reality, I can hear the Spirit World. They have been speaking this whole time, but it is now, I can finally hear.

In my reality, miracles happen with every breath that we take and the sequence of time is anything but linear.

In my reality, tiny butterflies flutter by shimmering in the golden sun and Thunderbeings ignite across the entire night sky on a midsummer's eve.

In my reality, we experience immeasurable happiness, hugs, & kisses and drink sweet water that trickles off majestic sparkling hills.

In my reality, negativity beads up on my skin only to be easily brushed away and dreams coordinate with the expressions of the awake.

This is my reality and I now believe in magic.

Once you release from fear and embrace trust, you will be free.

So let me ask you again....

What is your reality?

© 2012 Deanna Rae "Getabiikwe" StandingCloud

Survive the Genocide

Take a break from your hectic world for a moment, my Anishinaabe brothers and sisters. Separate yourself from the chaos that has at times had the power to engulf your life. Allow the power to be shifted back to your authentic self. Reflect for a moment on the following idea:

Consider our presence on a global scale and given the reality of our past as Indigenous peoples, just being alive and being able to celebrate life as Anishinaabe people is a precious state of being. Do you ever stop to realize as you go about your day that we were never meant to make it this far? We may be invisible on some levels of society and we may not be given the equal opportunities as others, but you know what? We are breathing, we are celebrating, we are speaking the language, and we are making babies. Corporate Government and Manifest Destiny says we were supposed to be exterminated a long time ago. Do you realize that there is a well-thought-out, calculated plan formulated by the Government to exterminate every Indigenous person in the Americas? With that piece of information, take a look around your immediate surroundings. Breathe in slowly and exhale slowly. Look around. What do you see?

I can tell you what it is that I see. I am in my bedroom, on my bed. To the right of me lies my 11 month old son sleeping. His beautiful brown hair sprouts out in various directions and each of his limbs drape comfortably outward to his sides. His one-piece body suit is not buttoned, so his size 4 pampers are wrinkled and visible. His delicate body is rhythmically embracing the sacred pattern of breath. For me, there is nothing more precious than what it is I am witnessing right now. He is a miracle. Why? Because there were an unbelievable number of campaigns, policies, and sanctions that did everything they could to prevent his birth. But you know what? I gave birth to my son, he was given his spirit name, we will raise him in a traditional way by any means and we will teach him how to survive the genocide. Now ask yourself this question, my brothers and sisters: What will you do in honor of our ancestors? And more importantly, what will you do in honor of your children?

© 2012 Deanna Rae "Getabiikwe" StandingCloud

DEANNA RAE "GETABIIKWE" STANDINGCLOUD-GREEN is a member of the Red Lake Nation of Anishinaabe (Ojibwe). She grew up in South Minneapolis and graduated high school at Two Eagle River School on the Salish-Kootenai Reservation in Western Montana. She had attended the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque for a short time, before graduating with her Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts from Fond du Lac Tribal & Community College's Urban Outreach Program located in the nostalgic birthplace of the American Indian Movement on Minneapolis' Franklin Avenue.

StandingCloud is also a mother, writer, daughter, educator, activist, organizer, and student of life. StandingCloud loves being an Indigenous woman and strives every day to make a better world for all tribal nations.

An Indigenous Woman's Prayer

Today I am praying for the youth they are going through so much. Please give them strength.
Lift their hearts and clear their minds. Help them to focus and move forward.
There are so many hurting. Mend these broken hearts. Soothe their souls.
I pray for my community. Give them hope and strength to withstand.
I pray for our leadership, police and health care professionals.
Give them courage, direction, and protect them. Keep them strong.
These are hard and trying times. Hear our prayers.
I pray for all mothers whose hearts are heavy.
Let their spirits be strong. Women are the backbone in our communities and families.
Give them the energy they need to guide, love and nurture our families.
I am praying for fathers to be the rock their children and families can stand on strong. Give strength to the men.
I am praying for our families to come together.
Too many times it is in sadness but please shine your light after the rain.
Give us more times to gather in happiness. More times to laugh and lift each other up.
Make our families strong. Let us guide, love and protect each other.
Now more than ever. We are looking to the dark clouds to subside.
Many of our lives have been shattered, broken and bent.. please build us up stronger.
Sometimes, I feel so weak, tired and lost. I ask for strength for myself.
As I stand as a mother, wife, sister, friend, family and community member.
I truly would want to be the perfect person, never failing.
This is impossible for anyone. Help me to acknowledge and accept this in myself and others.
Help me to find my way in this complicated world.
More than anything I am praying for my children. Send protection for them.
For all children. May they feel surrounded with love.
Keep them in good health. Keep them safe. Keep them close.
Let their pure joy and sweet innocence be a constant reminder of the goodness in our lives.
We are truly blessed. Thank you for all you have given us.
Help me to remember everything good. I pray for your love, blessings and protection.
Gitchi-Meegwetch. Thank you...for the strength in your spirit

FAITH TURNER is a Moose Cree First Nation member. Faith and her family currently reside on Moose Factory Island in Ontario. Her passion is writing and the arts with her writing published in various magazines and in an Anthology Book of Poetry and also read on stage in Poetry Readings. Combining the written word with varying topics such as FASD, Suicide Prevention, Residential Schools to bring awareness and understanding of Indigenous culture and people.

Ikwewag

Aabiding... Once my grandmother held a small baby against the sky
Cheek flattened against her palmskin, not knowing how many ikwe
will hurt against the earth, but still she prayed her forward, humming sounds
Ahki, soil drenched in voices, held together by ikwe singing each other
silent honour songs, currenting water-edges and sliding inside of our daughter's laughter.
Now, our bodies stretch over the watertops, making permanent our marks against our ahki,
starting with the sacred water we were once held under by long, thick, white hands, the veins throbbing
against our struggle. But now we are gasping, our tongues finding airways, our voices thick with the
memory of our grandmothers, of the old ones before us, our daughter's eyes watching for us.
All Ikwewag remembering the sound of the underwater voices that poured into the woman spirits.
Aabiding... Once our bodies lay in freedom against the greened earth, soil pressed against
flesh that spoke of yarrow-scented springs where our men and babies slept against bodies
comfortably fleshed inside of the sky, celebrated for the fierceness of birth and loving
splendor. Hands craving the squish of berry into our babies mouths, red ochred dreams splashing
like a long sturgeon's body against a grey rockface, pressed into dawn's smooth face, trailing
Into memory like a smooth ripple against the surface of Lake Superior's yawning mouth.
Our own lips filled with laughter and pressed into our histories as smooth as the waking
Today, we are standing, sunning our wet bodies against the sky and our tongues are speaking
singing songs that the ikwewag sang to our memories this whole time.
There is no forgetting who we are, our braided fingers finding each other beside us.
Ikwewag, we stand and the song is humming louder against the curve of sky and slow moving of water
Our tongues live, a great muskrat, sodden but stronger than before
Ikwe we are movement, our skins a rainbow birthed like a story after a storm.

© 2012 Lesley Belleau

LESLEY BELLEAU is Anishinaabekwe who works at the Indigenous Studies Department at Trent University in Peterborough, ON. Her homeland is Garden River First Nation, Ojibway Territory, outside of Baawitigong, Ontario (Sault Ste. Marie). She is married with four children, all under ten years of age. Lesley is the author of *The Colour of Dried Bones*, a novel published with Kegedonce Press. She is interested in the voice and stories of Indigenous women, and wants a full retrieval of being for Ikwewag everywhere.



© 2009 Louise Vfen

“Written in the Grain”

“Written in the grain”

Corn is an essential grain for many of the eastern woodland First Nations. Its importance in cultural events and spiritual beliefs help keep the community knit close together as it is reflected in the way the corn kernels are positioned on the cob. Basically, everyone has a place and an importance in the Nation.

Being a descendant of European Men and of Anishnawbe maidens, many of these early settlers known as “Coureurs des Bois” or “Voyageurs” depended on this staple, among others, as a means to survive – much like the women they united with. Hence the reason why the symbol of Infinity found in the kernels represents who I am as a Métis.

As for the different shades of the colored corn; it demonstrates my many mixed ancestor’s, a.k.a “All my Relations” and the descendants that are to come.

The colored husk represents the fibers of the wool sash that symbolizes the people with whom I am united to.

The title “written in the grain” is in reference to having it in the blood. It runs deep and how ever often we try to ignore it by going against it i.e. going against the grain, it somehow always finds a way to remind us of our importance as a member of a community.

Today corn is not seen in the same light, but we can recognize the anticipation individuals get when the fields start to grow and when the crop begins to show up at the markets. The spirit of this harvest still invokes are senses, whether it be from our pass or for future gatherings yet to be celebrated.

The history of corn is etched deep in oral history, stories and culture – this staple fed the people in the best of times and above all the worst of times.

Corn in the past was a staple, meaning it was an essential nutritional food. Unfortunately, today we have forgotten its significance. With many facing poor nutrition, poor health, lack of education and training, it is amazing that much of these issues could be solved by a little grain of corn.

Traditional knowledge taught the people how to work the land, educate the people how to understand the weather patterns, how to plant the precious seed. It also taught when and how to cultivate the plant and how to prepare this precious food.

Unfortunately its future has been violated with disrespect by many industries with the invention of genetically engineered corn and the scientific belief that man can improved on something already created perfectly by Creator.

But as for me, the biggest indifference associated to corn and its importance to the people is identified in the form of bio fuel, which is, as the United Nations would voice “a crime against humanity”. Basically instead of feeding the people, it is instead feeding vehicles all in the name of a mighty dollar.

An acre of corn gives 150 bushels; 1 bushel of dried shelled corn can feed 50 people. Same 1 bushel of corn can give 2.7 gallons of Ethanol. 15% of the world’s corn crop is converted into bio fuel.

YOU DO THE MATH, WE HAVE A PROBLEM...

© 2008 Louise Vien



© 2012 Heather Shillinglaw

"Kookums Quilt"
Cowboys and Indians Quilt Double Nine patch Quilt; Fishy Story

“Kookums Quilt”

Cowboys and Indians Quilt Double Nine patch Quilt; Fishy Story

This painting is based on a theme of children playing a set of cowboys and Indians. I became fascinated with the use of the ‘Indian image’ in children’s toys. Perhaps this is a clichéd version of what idealized Indians should look like, buried within the context of questioning how culture can be saved and how culture can revitalize what is under our feet. We must respect our surroundings and look out for the little guys; they can save and nurture us.

Through this painting, I wonder if our earth can recover from the harmful effects to the environment. Primrose Lake, a source of trapping and fishing for my grandfather since before WWII, now sits on the Primrose Lake Air Weapons Bombing Range. How can this traditional land be repaired? I am told of tumours growing inside fish in particular following the contamination, through radiation, of the lake by the bombing range. Cattails, with which roots we cooked as potatoes, with which flower we cooked and ate as corn on the cob and with which leaves were weaved as baskets also feel those harmful effects.

© 2012 Heather Shillinglaw

HEATHER’ SHILLINGLAW’s art celebrates her Cree/Dene ancestry as medicine people – she applies aesthetic layers of many mediums about the healing powers of plants. Her art series; ‘Kookums Quilt’ celebrates and draws and the theory of quilting to provide comfort and inspiration through aesthetic explorations of the layers of knowledge shaped by plants and the natural world. She blends the traditional beadwork to communicate how the plant has provided comfort to her family and her community. ‘I hope that my painting will bring a higher purpose of ancestral memory of my culture that is not to be forgotten.’ Heather is an artist, an activist and an arts educator. She also is a guest curator at the Art Gallery of Alberta, and her artwork can be found at the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, in Canadian embassies, as well as internationally. More of her art can be found at www.shillinglaw.ca

PART II



© 2012 Lana Whiskeyjack

Real Home and Land Security: Defending children and families since the beginning of time

I saw an image with Geronimo and three other warriors carrying guns, called, "Homeland Security: fighting terrorism since 1492". I began reflecting on how the original people of this land survived a history of colonization, assimilation, and genocide. I am a child of an Indian Residential School survivor and learned that those schools were meant to kill the spirits of our children, not save them. I am proud that, in spite of this, you can still hear the Cree language being spoken, traditional songs being sung, and find a seat amongst our grandparents in ceremonies. As a nehiyawiskwew (Cree woman), I know we are still here because of the powerful roles and responsibilities of nehiyawiskwewak (Cree women), and their constant and unwavering acts of resistance against colonization and assimilation. Women have the only true power. The power to give life; and to nurture that life by passing on stories and strengths based on language, culture, tradition, and kinship. I am exploring how nehiyawiskwewak in the 21st century are surviving and thriving by deconstructing and reconstructing our womanhood, our families, our nations and how we fight for the next seven generations.

© 2012 Lana Whiskeyjack

LANA WHISKEYJACK is an art actionist and multidisciplinary artist from Saddle Lake Cree Nation. Working at decolonization one Cree word and brush stroke at a time; Lana's art themes reflect her personal experiences and reflections on the paradoxes of being a Cree woman, mother and grandmother, educated by a non-Cree-speaking system.

The Healing of the Women of Our Nations

The healing of the women of our nations,
Removing the chains of oppression,
Removing the chains of marginalization,
Removing the chains of racism,
Removing the chains of sexism,

Grounded firmly into the Earth,
Grounded into the wisdom of the ancestors,

The healing of the women of our nations,
Traditions,
Language,
Culture,
Visibility,
Voice,
Rising up,

The healing of the women of our nations,
Is the healing of us all.

© 2012 Cecelia R. LaPointe

The Imagination of Hearts

For all the survivors of Indian Schools

The count begins with a column of winters,
Manifests in a chill, a damp after rain.
A contagious pain is a stained glass quarantine.
You cannot come any closer because we cannot come.
So, we run.
Roll our regrets into sage and smudge them,
Braid shame into sweetgrass until we can pray,
Know more now than what we were given.
Wisdom forces us to enter
A confessional made of scars.
Where , the way of the priests leaves lye in our mouths
And we rebuke the taste of coriander.

© 2012 Dawn Karima Pettigrew

We are

We are listening with
open hearts
trespasses forgiven
we are well fed plentiful nations
remembering messages of
grateful for warm shelter
and shared abundance
with the lesser blessed

listen to rhythm speaking through
our connection to Creation
happy fire lives inside
as New Year resolutions
we are delivered
from familiar dark places
rise up keep climbing
we are born
without limits
we know how
the other world
waits for our work to
be done

we walk
together towards it
lessons in love and struggle
packed inside
I am you and you are
everything born
to be kings and queens upon
an earth's kingdom

We are wind
breath, not Dragon fire
but the same immortal
mythical magic flows
swiftly as ocean waves
of change and strange messages
bringing sparks of thought

take care to travel with
family fires of heart
flames leading you back home
every time as beacons reach
into dark universes
looking for Creation

© Janet Marie Rogers

JANET MARIE ROGERS is a Mohawk/Tuscarora writer from the Six Nations band in southern Ontario. She was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, and has been living on the traditional lands of the Coast Salish people (Victoria, British Columbia) since 1994. Janet works in the genres of poetry, short fiction, spoken word performance poetry, video poetry and recorded poems with music and script writing.

Janet has three published poetry collections to date and has gained nominations for best spoken word recording at the both the Canadian Aboriginal Music Awards and the Native American Music Awards. You can hear Janet on the radio, as she hosts Native Waves Radio on CFUV FM and Tribal Clefs on CBC FM in Victoria, British Columbia.

Janet started a collective called "ikkwenyes" or "Dare to Do" with Alex Jacobs in 2011. They collaborate with artists to create projects that promote the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) culture.

To read more about Janet's work, please visit her web site: www.janetmarierogers.com or to listen to her spoken word recording, you can go to <http://soundcloud.com/janet-marie-rogers>.

Resistance is Medicine

I did not go to residential school, although my Grandmothers did.
I did not suffer abuse at the colonizers' hands, although my Grandmothers did.

My abuse is hidden in off handed remarks,
"Don't take offense but, are you an Indian?"
"Funny, you don't look like one!"
And in the comment section of every on-line news article about all things Indigenous.
"I'm sick of these people getting everything for free!"
As if, treaties are a figment
of
our
imaginings
and my education isn't prepaid in them.

Yet, I am a survivor. We are ALL survivors.

Through violence, rape, shame, forced cultural abandonment, community rejection and
because of blood memory,
we are here: a constant reminder of failure...
theirs
NOT ours.

"Missing and murdered" is an institutionalized colonial legacy, but nothing new
we shouldn't talk like it is.

My Grandmother, murdered, by colonial minded Indians.
Her crime: marrying "out".

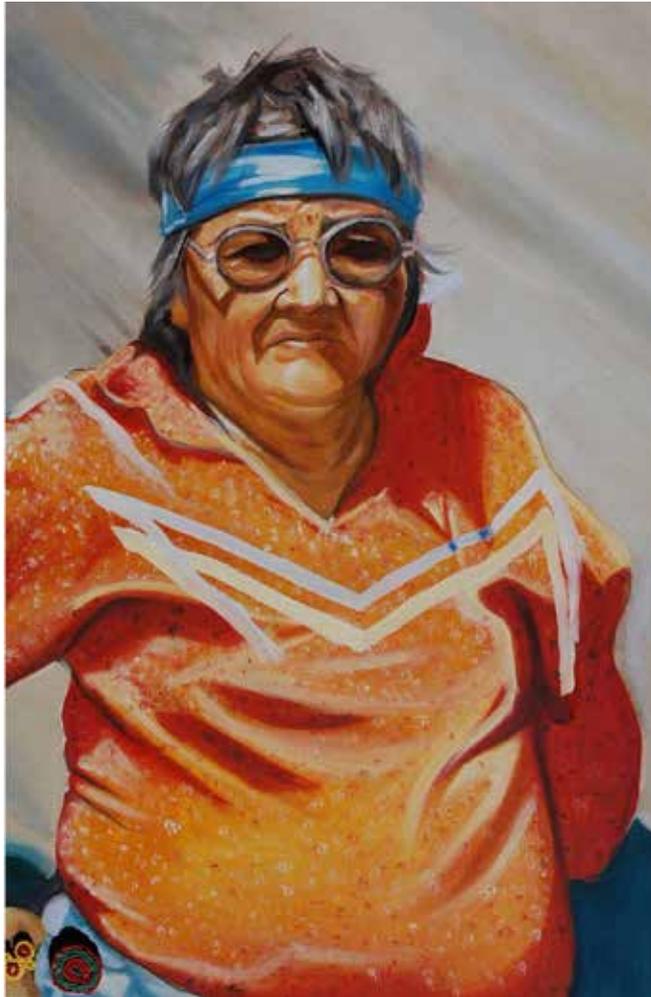
Lateral violence is nothing new
we shouldn't talk like it is.

We should talk like sisters and exchange stories of resistance to heal from the past and
protect us in the future.

I am here, although my Grandmothers are not
because resistance is medicine.

© 2012 Janine Manning

JANINE MANNING, whose spirit name is Osh Kwe Ah Nung (New Star Woman), is a mixed ancestry Anishnawbe who was born and raised (mostly) in Toronto. Her maternal family is from Neyaashiinigmiing, Ontario, and her paternal family is from Aazhoodena, Ontario, with the exception of her grandfathers, who are Irish descendants. Janine is the President of the Aboriginal Students' Association at York University and an executive member on the Native Women's Resource Centre board of directors. More importantly, Janine is the proud mother to three year old Tarquinius.



My big Mama

This is an oil painting portrait of my greatest rock and most precious relation – nohkom (my grandmother) Caroline Whiskeyjack (1923-2006), whom I called “my big mama”. She helped raised me, giving some of the greatest teachings that form and sustain who I am today. She devoted gentle love, loyal support, and the loudest cheers that one could ever ask for. Her hands were strong and creative, her eyes wise and knowing, her heart fierce and protective. She knew many traditional songs, stories, and medicines. She was a midwife from the time she was sixteen years old and helped bring hundreds of children into the world, as well as giving birth to fifteen children herself. She is one of the greatest warriors I’ve been blessed to know, love, and cherish. She continues to live through me and the thousands of friends, relatives, children, and great grandchildren whom she loved and breathed life into.

© 2008 Lana Whiskeyjack

Scarred

I'm clinging onto wasted worries of peering gazes.
I'm hiding my shameful self-inflicted scars.
I'm taking a stand against my neurotic suspicions,
of any misjudgements, rejections or even misinterpretations.

I'm scarred.
I'm scared.

Please, may I have permission to get over the shame?
I've had these big scars since age 17.
I'm longing for my untouched, unbeaten, unscarred body.
I'm longing for my safety, my human dignity.
I want reconciliation, I want peace of mind.
I'm hiding the beatings, the cuts and the bruises of family violence.
I'm ashamed of my 60's scoop PTSD scars.

I'm scarred.
I'm scared.

Please, may I have permission to get over the shame?
I've had these little scars since age 3.
Head to Toe, countless scars Twinkle Twinkle just like stars
I'm wishing upon a star for them to magically disappear.
The pain maybe gone but the memories remain.
Every single mark, every single scratch
bears a disturbing tale of courage.
Shame! Shame! Shame! on the scars of violence.
Shame! Shame! Shame! on the scars of self-inflicted wounds.
Only when I die, I will be free of this scarred body.
Oh Assimilation scars of shame!
You do not belong to me anymore but rather
Shame on Canada!

© 2012 Angela Ashawasegai

Stella Bella

From the creative depths of the primordial soup
I arose...
surrounded, engulfed, nurtured and protected by Spirit
Guides and Ancestors...
through a childhood of hell: physical, verbal,
psychological, emotional, sexual and spiritual abuse
shame, blame...
abject futility.
awkward puberty...
sexually-provocative drunken escapades
maligned, raped and further shamed.

Trudging on bleeding soles (soul?)
through which life-essence oozed...
silent; hopeless, gawky, moody, easily-triggered,
constantly experiencing unidentified flashbacks,
never realizing the magnitude of the damage -
post-traumatic stress disorder...
unbelievably ever-resilient,
constantly seeking refuge and healing

suicide attempts!!!

hopelessness assuaged:
ever-present Spirit Guides and Ancestors...

Working stiff...
functionally-alcoholic.
consumed by rage and terror...
slim hope of finding her purpose...
wandering...bereft of hope...
faith LONG gone

searching high and low,
never looking inside...
yet...knowing the empty shell covers the Truth of Who
She REALLY is:
a beloved Child of the Universe

Ever-present Spirit Guides and Ancestors egging her
on...
hinting at a Higher Purpose...
hinting at a Life Mission.

Decades of non-judgmental, caring, concerned,
empathetic, understanding:
Our Elders
with their calm encouragement:
channeling Divine Wisdom.

Finding just an hint of a whisper of a voice...
opening Pandora's box,
the lid of which would NEVER be shut again.

Answered prayers in the form of unconditional loving-
kindness - Angels: in the guise of Offspring -
unflinching devotion.

Maturing into her Soul Essence...
sharing the seeds of wisdom sown by Our Elders,
Keepers of the Traditions, for the Next 7 Generations...
those Sacred Seeds fall upon fertile ground...
magically overseen by Mother Earth and Grandmother
Moon...
constant reminders of the Resilience of Her Women!

Living Proof of the glorious resurrection of the Phoenix:
reciprocated, creative community involvement - the
pathway from egocentricity to philanthropy...

mirrored Inner Beauty...
Blueprint of her Soul.

© 2012 Donna Roberta Della-Picca

DONNA ROBERTA DELLA-PICCA, whose name means "of bright and shining fame", (a.k.a. Bright Star) has spent a lifetime using expressive arts to shine her inner light on inequities, injustices and blatant political, social, cultural, and "religious" crimes against humanity. This Bonnechere Algonquin/Métis woman is the epitome of "being the change she wishes to see in the world" – rather than talking about it; she goes out and does it – everywhere she goes.

Her devotion and dedication to the values of respect, acceptance, openness, caring, understanding, compassion, equality, inclusivity, fairness and tolerance are intrinsic to her fundamental nature as an individual living in the rainbow community of people.

Her name is Dolores.

It doesn't sound Indian, does it?
She has gray hair
She's from that generation, you know.
She doesn't know who she is.
She was taken from her home.
Get over it, some say
It was long ago.
Not that long, for her.
She's still alive...
Her biggest heartache,
She didn't know how to parent.
Didn't know where her home was.
They gave her a house on the reserve.
Look, here comes her granddaughter
Long black shiny hair
The buggy is faded
The wheel bent
She has sparkling eyes.

Come here my beloved
The dog barks.
Dolores looks around
Is this my home?
Better than the cold streets.
Sometimes she wants to run
Her door is always open
She remembers what it feels
Like to have no place to rest
Drinking got the better of her
She stopped 10 years 3 months and 2 days ago
She's a fighter
Fought that demon and won
The Ancient of Days
Gave her strength
If only all this mess was gone?
We could see the land and
Animals dance once again.
You can't get that kind of
Strength
The strength it takes to fight and fight again
Caught up in a whirlwind.
These new technologies
New Ideologies
Consumerism is here to save the day
That's what they said
After World War II
That's what they said
After 911
She doesn't think so.
Look, her granddaughter is
Chasing a butterfly.

Dolores' heart skips a beat
She closes her eyes.
Fly little bird
Take flight
How about we go inside?
OK, Grama
Dolores takes hold of her hand

It's warm and soft.
How can it be?
In this life of cruelty
Dolores pauses.
Maybe she's wrong about that.
Maybe there's more to life. Some days she knows so.
If only she could see the land again
Without the footprint of globalism;
The eagle flying
The Great I Am
Every life is precious.
This she knows, for the Bible tells her so
Those people in the residential schools
Got it all wrong.
Every life is precious
Yes, every single one.
In the still, and the quiet
In your heart of hearts
You know there's no denying it.
Yes you are, my dear one
Dolores pats Zoey's head.
That's her granddaughter's name.
I love you Grama
Where's your mom? Dolores
Finally asks.
She went to the store to get some liquor.
Dolores wants to scream
But she doesn't know how.
They beat her if she screamed
In the middle of the night...
When she lost her innocence
Dolores turns her head
To hide her tears.
Something bubbles up deep inside her.
You get back she screams
The chain is broken
You can't have my daughter
You can't have her, you hear.
We are children of the Creator
Dolores' fight is still not over.
Yet when the sun sets
She sees hope on the horizon
The robins will sing

Find a plump juicy worm
And take flight...
Her niece's daughter
Two doors down
Just had a baby.
They grow so fast.
Come over for some fish and bannock.
Let, me see the hope of the future,
Dolores laughs.
Truer words have never been said.
The baby's name is Hope.
Dolores says the name again.
What a fine baby.

Did you hear the news?
Her niece asks.
Dolores doesn't know what she's talking about
She doesn't answer.
Jimmy's in jail
Hope is deep asleep.
Newborn sleep.
Is he okay?
Dolores asks.
He's beat up pretty bad.
Zoey runs into the kitchen
It's warm and safe.
Grandma is always boiling
Water
It's moist and the air is thick.
I'm hungry
Dolores doesn't hear her.
What do they say he's done?
Mistrust runs deep.
So does the poison of alcohol.

Got in another fight
Jimmy's a fighter
Dolores used to fight like him
Too.
If only Jimmy would stop
Fighting with his fists
And start fighting
With his heart.
It's harder to do.
The wounds are much
More deadly.
The pain much More sharp.
But what about Hope?
And the future generations
What does it look like to
Wake this nation?

Bright shining stars
That's what we are.
We need the healing balm of Gilead

But it's a dry and thirsty land.
The elders have all been sabotaged.
Not allowed to enter in
Dolores stands up
Her hands clenched, white knuckled.
She looks up
The ceiling stares back
This ceiling can't stop me.
Her spirit takes flight
She talks with the Creator

Jimmy
Jimmy
What's happened to Jimmy?
Her answer comes in a whisper
He was made to fight the giants
But they lied to him.
Told him they were too big.
Dolores knows it's the truth.
Where's her drum?
Hanging on the wall
Above the couch.
She walks slowly over to it
Zoey takes her eyes off the TV.
Dolores pounds her drum
Dolores sings
She'll take on the giants, if she has too.
She'll cut all those poisonous strings
She has the strength of the
Creator
She has His strength deep within.
Her voice reaches to the sky
It echoes across the mountains and plains
Jimmy sits up
He's got to quit drinking
Is that Grandma he hears?
This dead end cycle.
This ugly gray wall
Never, never again
He vows.
They try to rehabilitate him
Computer class
Law and order
They're okay, he guesses
But he was born a fighter
Where do I fit in?
Not overseas.
Not in Afghanistan.
I want to fight for the truth
But where do I begin?
I need to go home.

Where's that?
I'll go see Grandma.
Have some fish and bannock
I'm ashamed to go back.
I've done wrong
24 hours on the Greyhound.
It's like I never left.
Why did I leave?
To find something better?

The giants in the land were big.
Too big for me.
That's a lie Jimmy
Grandma tells him
If you trust the Creator
Who? Tell me who, can be against you?
What can man do to
You?

Jimmy walks down to the river
In the still and in the quiet
He knows she's right.
Every life is precious
Every single one.
Even his?

Even His.

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DVORAH COUGHLIN has been writing poetry and illustrating for most of her life. She recently finished her English Degree at the University of the Fraser Valley. Although born and raised in Vancouver, she has lived all over British Columbia and in neighboring Alberta, which she feels has deeply impacted her perspective on life and people. Her personal interests include social justice, women, Indigenous issues and community restoration. She presently resides in Chilliwack with her husband Douglas and four lively boys.

Coming to Know

Walking down that long sterile hallway, it seemed that it took us forever to reach Room 310. Images from the night before were imprinted in my memory; bloodcurdling screams and pleas to stop hitting echoed in my mind. Being witness to the violence was not a rare occasion, and we were accustomed to scurrying to the corners of the closet on a weekly basis. This time was different though; we knew that it was serious. I was called to the front room as I had been many times before, only to find my mother's listless body on the floor, covered in blood, and a baseball bat lying close to her body.

As I approached my mother, an odor that I thought odd masked the aroma of stale smoke and liquor breath. Her face was as white as a ghost, and I noticed the pool of blood getting larger by the second. I grabbed some sheets from her bed and masking tape from the counter. I noticed that her chest was not rising, and, very faintly, I could hear her struggling to breathe. I wiped her face, and her eyes rolled back in her head; I furiously taped the sheets to her head as tightly as I could. As my mother lay there, dying in my arms, I kept her close to my body to give her my energy. I sat in silence, looking into her face, watching as her lips turned blue and aware of the almost silent air exchange between her and the world. I had never been so scared, and I was not sure whether I was more afraid that Bob would wake up or that she would die.

As we entered her room, all five of us under the age of 11, we were afraid of what we would encounter. Nohkum did not tell us anything other than that we had to go to see our mom. Once the initial shock of seeing our mother was over, we remained quiet. I remember seeing a small space of her face between the white bandages wrapped around her head, and I saw the spot where I had noticed the blood the night before. Was she still bleeding? Was she going to be okay? Would she wake up? I listened to her breathing, and it seemed easier. As I touched her hand, I felt her warmth. My body trembled in fear, and my nohkum was silent as she gazed deeply into my mother's face and ran her hand across her body as though she was feeling for something; at the same time, she took a bundle from the palms of her hands and pinned it to the inside of my mother's gown, locating it close to her heart. I never asked any questions about the pouch, but I wondered about the significance and the mystery of it.

For three days, we sat at my mom's bedside, waiting for some kind of response, even though the doctors had told us that she would not live past this week and it was in our best interest to say our goodbyes; still, my grandmother refused. Instead, I watched nohkum begin a regime of rubbing my mother's body with cream three or four times a day. She would use long, slow strokes and cradle each joint in the palms of her hands. She would then gently raise my mother's head and bring the edge of a cup close to her lips so that the medicine would flow into her body. Each time, a different nurse would come into the room and warn nohkum to stop applying the cream. The doctors told us that it was bad medicine and could harm her. When the nurses changed the gown, they unpinned nikawyi's pouch and threw it in the trashcan next to her bed. The look on my grandmother's face was one of horror. She snapped at them in Cree: "kayawia awas!" She picked up the pouch from the trashcan and, with a sharp tongue, told them that they had no business touching the pouch and that she would remove it when necessary. One of the nurses was silent for a moment and then replied, "I'm sorry. Mrs. Bearskin, but I cannot ask you every time we want to change her gown" You could sense the sarcasm in the nurse's voice, and she abruptly turned and left the room.

Finally, when a nurse caught nohkum putting eye drops in my mother's eyes, it threw the nurse into frenzy. With a firm, loud voice, she demanded that nohkum stop, or she would have to ask her to leave the ward. In the hallway outside the room you could hear the nurses chatter: "We should just call security." "I do not have time for this! I am not going to ask her every time we need to change Ms. Bourque Bearskin's gown!" "Why do they come in here thinking that they can just do what they want?" "Can you smell that in there? Are they playing with matches? Don't they know they can kill her with that?" "Why don't they just say goodbye and make arrangements with family?"

I recall hearing these words and watching the nurses' reactions to both nohkum and my mother. I sensed the nurses' discomfort when they walked into the room; it was as though we were invisible. They seemed afraid to touch my mother. I sensed a distance, and I could feel their piercing looks and see their lack of compassion and concern for us in their faces. They used big words such as noncompliant; I wondered what it meant. I watched them treat my mother's physical body, and they refrained from speaking to her directly or acknowledging that she was alive and breathing on her own. I heard their whispers about how ill cared for we seemed to be. I saw their body language: they kept their backs to us and avoided eye contact. I will never forget my feelings of shame, guilt, fear, distrust, and anger. I vowed to myself that I would become a nurse who would believe in everybody's worth regardless of who they were or where they came from, and that I would support their own healing practices.

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MONA LISA BOURQUE-BEARSKIN grew up in Lac La Biche, Alberta, and is a member of the Beaver Lake Cree Nation. She has been a practicing nurse for over 25 years and is passionate about completing her research in Aboriginal Health Nursing framed within the concept of cultural safety and guided by Indigenous Research Methodologies. She believes in an inter-disciplinary approach to health care, especially in our First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, where issues are complex and diverse.

Mona Lisa has worked for First Nations and Inuit Health as a community health nurse and Alberta Health services as a clinical nurse with the Aboriginal Diabetes Wellness Program. Before returning to graduate studies, she taught nursing in Hobbema First Nation community, the Arctic Nursing program in Nunavut, and then the Baccalaureate Nursing Program at the University of Alberta where she continues to learn, promote, share, and advance Indigenous knowledge in nursing. She is grateful that she has learnt many lessons from her mother and gained much insight into providing holistic nursing care to our First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples.

Mona Lisa would also like to give thanks to Alberta NEAHR for bringing her to the Women of Sinew Group where her learning and healing became part of her research.

Law, Justice & Anishnaabe

I look down upon my sense of self and sanity
Their eyes drive me towards the downward spiral of inhumanity
All the while they talk with crooked tongues at me...

I turn my eyes towards the skies where Kitchi-Manitou gazes down
Surely he can relinquish the choke hold I have volunteered myself into
But not today, today his lesson is that of silence...

I question all that surrounds me, especially brown faces
I ask how it is they can perpetuate that what continues to decimate us
My bewilderment at their arrogance and indifference is misperceived...

My head and heart are spinning, I witness another relation gutted at the hands of 'law'
and 'justice'
I convince myself I can help to ease the gashing wounds inflicted by society
Only to find myself hemorrhaging despair from the violence of it all...

I focus my rage and return to humility and humbleness
The only knowledge that comforts me is that I cannot become them or 'it'
I remember why I am here and who I am here for even when others cannot see

I hold the cold hands that seek warmth behind the bars of injustice and inhumanity...
In the end, even if this is all it will ever be, it is enough to keep me moving
Miigwetch Anishnaabe for you remind me of the truth they cannot extinguish.....ever

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MIRANDA MOORE, LL.B. is Anishnabe:Kwe, Treaty 4 territory, Cote First Nation. She is a proud mother, partner, sister and Anishinaabe helper. Her work and focus has been to challenge and expose colonialism continuously in her own life, and to engage across Indigenous and non-Indigenous arenas and spaces. She has worked and lived within a Treaty 4 Nation where she experienced and witnessed directly how colonialism is being perpetuated by Indian Act leadership, impacting Treaty peoples in a manner detrimental to future generations if not exposed, confronted and eliminated. She is currently completing the lawyer licensing process in Ontario and offers workshops to Indigenous communities that are ready to challenge and eliminate colonialism firstly through acknowledgement, people directed action and true commitment to original laws and values.

Colonialism Inside

My Anishnabe:kwe journey in this life thus far has had many twists, turns, tragedies, disappointments yet also joy, awe and an ongoing deep sense of wonderment at what it all means. This Great Mystery is often referred to by those that have had the gift of lifelong teachings and grounding in Anishnaabe law, values and worldview, encompassed within the land, our language and ceremony.

For those of us that have had to, and many that continue to, flounder about with bits and pieces of our language, history and worldview, it is much harder at times to feel at peace with all of the suffering we witness and experience, not only in our own lives but in the lives of the people that make up our Nations. This seemingly senseless trajectory that we are on can facilitate destruction of so many sorts when we become overwhelmed.

Too often we are told that we don't have a place, a contribution because our languages, names, Nations and teachings have been stolen from us, even by those that claim to be holders and teachers of Anishnaabe knowledge. I have personally come to understand that this is only an expression of insecurity, and it is to be found at all societal levels, within 'leadership' and in our own sacred spaces we often don't share with others. This rejection, judgement and false superiority perpetuation is colonialism and we must remain personally responsible when it creeps into our own thinking, actions and shaping of the world around us. I understand this challenge to be not only a collective one but also a personal one and one that will be life long as Anishnaabe living in a dominant colonized world.

The true tragedy within lies in that many times we push away our sisters and brothers who most certainly do have something to contribute and offer towards the crushing reality of colonialism we are all engulfed within, whether we like to acknowledge it or not. This silencing and exclusion will only reap sorrow, disconnectedness and delusions of 'progress' at the expense of our lands, lives, peoples' and future.

Until we can reconcile with ourselves, Mother Earth, our clans, and the colonial hypocrisy we witness daily in our communities to the detriment of the Next Seven Generations, we will remain passive victims of Colonial Genocide that is fueled by our own inner shortcomings and willful blindness.

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Too Mush Ego

I see you hiding beneath
rough-cut diamond edges
I am calm in knowing that you would kill for me
but shaken by the thought that
you would kill me too

How many times must I accept
your accusations
your unsafe feelings
your will to control me

Your presupposition of guilt
crushes me...
like an in-season blueberry between your toes

I know not what you must overcome to be you
I know not the trials of your life
but I pay all the same, for your spirit
and I pray to be centered & balanced

How many times must I accept
your apprehension of my beauty
because you question your own?

I know not the hurt in your heart
I know not the nero-pathways etched
in your brain
...the dead synapses
limp and withered

How many times must I say I love you
with no return
too mush ego
to speak the truth of the heart
it will not deteriorate your manhood
I promise

I know what I deserve
I know who I am
I will not be lost in you
but I love you all the same

FRANCINE BURNING belongs to the Kenieke'haka (Mohawk: People of the Flint) Nation of the Rotinoshonni (Iroquois Confederacy) people of the Turtle Clan. Her home community is the Six Nations of the Grand River Indian Reserve in Southern Ontario. She is currently in her second year of her Master of Arts degree in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies Program at the University of British Columbia. Francine is also a single mother of three Kenieke'haka girls. She has lived in Vancouver for 17 years and stays connected to her homeland and family by returning for ceremonies and teachings every summer with her kids.

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Speaking Up: Self-Advocacy for a Safe Place to Work

As a Cree woman with a PhD in Higher Education Administration I wanted to provide educational leadership in a First Nations (FN) setting. I understood that FN women are attending university in higher numbers than men. Like other FN women, I wanted to give back to my community, and wanted greater opportunities for FN children and youth. I chose to work in a FN institution assuming that it would provide a measure of “home.” Like many FN women I find that like home, sometimes our First Nations institutions can become sites of oppression.

I applied, and was short-listed for an interview for a senior administrative position with a FN post- secondary institution. I was honored to accept the position. Over the next 18 months of a three year contract I experienced numerous oppressive behaviours on the part of the administrative team. The other two members of the team (both male) were politically appointed to their roles. The following outlines some of my experiences with the patriarchy of the three member team.

When I noticed financial irregularities on the part of a colleague, I addressed the issue directly with him and our employer at our team meeting. Instead of addressing the issues he claimed that I was anti-(insert name of local FN political body here). He continued to deflect the allegations. I turned to our boss, who implored us to “get along”. The matter was not addressed. Over the next few months, I charted the financial irregularities and shared my concerns with our Chief Financial Officer. Upon my dismissal (without cause) I brought attention to these matters with media.

My colleague brought males into our office that made sexualized comments and advances towards me while I worked. I addressed those males directly and dropped the matter. When our team investigated an allegation of harassment between a staff member and a student, my colleague declared that the supervisor in charge should have known better, that he should be fired for his lack of initiative in dealing with the harassment. I responded, “If so, then I expect your resignation for bringing the following individuals into our offices...and them harassing me”. Again, the matter was not addressed by the team. He began to exclude me from meetings.

When my employer said to me, “you make me look like I can’t control you”, I responded, “why is controlling me the issue?” I was fired four months later. Both of these colleagues were later suspended, and then fired.

Our FN institutions are not devoid of oppressive behaviours. While we women may desire to create greater opportunities for our people, we can’t be naïve in our assumptions about our safety. We must engage actively in working to correct harmful behaviours. Individuals must recognize that institutions are made through human decisions, and those decisions are value laden, and belief driven. I believe in safety, honesty, fairness, equity, and accountability. As women in leadership roles we have an obligation to speak up, maintain our integrity in order to be a role model for others, and maintain the traditional values of our people. Greed, dishonesty, secrecy and bullying must not be tolerated if we are to give our children something better.

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SHAUNEEN PETE is from Little Pine First Nation (Saskatchewan, Canada). She is a tenure-track faculty member at the University of Regina, Faculty of Education. She has also served as a Vice-President (Academics) and Interim President at an Indigenous higher education institution. She was the Inaugural Tribal Scholar in Residence at New Mexico State University in March 2012.

Circle of Healing

The women, they bring their spirit
The circle is strong
The voices express the experiences
The heart holds closely these memories
Each with their own understanding
How their spirit was dampened
I sit, I listen, and I heal.
They say other will learn by accident
But there is a reason that we are all brought together
Our faces are all mirrored in each other.
The women, some Cree, Seauteaux, Dene and Métis
In the circle the spirit is united
I hear the prayers and the songs
Our hearts are nourished and begin to heal
Harmony of body, mind and spirit grow strong
Let us learn to wear our pain
For the essence of who we are and where we come from
Is forever imprinted into our mind and hearts
An through the research is where our re-searching begins
It's where the sacredness of our journey is honored
And were we begin pitos isihiwewin

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Nursing is to community as Indigeneity is to spirituality

Nursing
What it means to me
Being helpful, compassionate
Caring, knowledgeable and open to other ways of knowing
To advocate for social justice, to model health and wellness
To walk with an open heart, and talk with a strong mind
To be present in the most unrepresentable situations
To feed the hunger and nourish the heart
To see the souls of the human race
To hold a hand of those in need
To love the human face
And Mother Earth for
All its blessings
Peace

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Reflections on 'Law' and Life as an Anishnabe:Kwe

I resisted the path of 'higher' education for many years after dropping out of high school in my chaotic teen years. I was a single mother of two by 19, which I credit to actually be the driving force into the hallowed halls of the 'academy', whereby I would struggle to make sense of myself, the reality and tragedies I experienced and witnessed in my own life and family, and to reconnect at some level to contribute in a good way.

I started in criminal justice, inspired by my relatives that had met their demise either through encounters with police or within jails, but it quickly became apparent to me that a higher level of engagement would be necessary to make more sense of what I perceived to be the root of Indigenous oppression and colonialism.

A wise Lifegiver and personal role model once wrote:

*When I enrolled in law school, I honestly believed that Canadian law would assist Aboriginal people in securing just and fair treatment. This is why I agreed to study law. Since then, I have learned that the Aboriginal experience of Canadian law can never be about justice and fairness for Aboriginal people. Every oppression that Aboriginal people have survived has been delivered up to us through Canadian law...
(Patricia Monture-Angus, 1995)*

My choice to pursue law school was founded in a belief that law was the source of our oppression, and that necessarily, to effectively struggle against it, knowledge of it was necessary. My belief today has not changed to any great extent, however with added insight of 'law' within the context of Anishnaabe worldview and values, legal training has taken on additional responsibilities and challenges. I was never part of the 'aboriginal lawyer' crowd that became shaped and poisoned by the arrogance of colonial law and the 'survival of the fittest' mentality and materialism embodied within this. But while the colonizers continue to take our children, lock our People away in jails, and impose their values and goals onto us, front line helpers will continue to be needed, period.

The main lesson for me that has become glaring after completing legal training is that we need to acknowledge the loss of our own laws and values as Indigenous Nations, or colonial law will continue to oppress and poison us towards its own motivations. The longer we 'talk' Treaty and 'self-determination' (there is no 'I' in 'We') and don't act to confront colonial oppression in our organization as Nations, the longer we remain colonized puppets. The longer we allow 'leaders' to oppress and dictate to our People under colonial law, the longer we only have ourselves to look to.

The sad reality is that the people in our communities that are currently experiencing silencing, abuse, violence and disintegration of identity, self, family and future will remain alone until we choose to engage with colonial law 'at home'. While national struggles for funding, representation and Nation-to-Nation governance are important, they will prove meaningless until we choose to clean up the mess in our own backyards. There is no funding for fighting colonialism, nor will there ever be.

As per my minimal understanding of Anishnaabe law, we are obligated to struggle against colonial law and those that perpetuate it to our detriment. We must be the change we wish to see and create the forums once again for our peoples to peacefully resolve our conflicts and to engage in respectful decision making that empowers every member of our Nations.

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Overcoming Barriers!

While attending university many of my courses enabled me to write papers involving First Nation topics. This was inspiring for me in two ways. First, I would learn more about our culture through the researching needed to complete my papers. Many times the teachings came from listening to the Elders' oral stories as opposed to reading something that was published. Second, sharing my findings with other students brought great pride to me as they would show such enthusiasm in learning about our culture. I felt that I was helping to rid stereotypical views and prejudices plaguing our people.

Although I was successful in graduating from university, it was not without challenges. The challenge that stands out the most involved a course where the professor asked the students to pick out a topic from a list she had selected for us to write a paper. I, of course, chose one that involved the First Nation People. When I spoke to the professor about my choice, I also explained that I was Mi'kmaq. She immediately responded that this paper would be too easy for me to write, considering I was Mi'kmaq making this to be unfair to the other students. I explained that this would not be the case, as I was unfamiliar with the topic and would have to conduct extensive researching. After explaining my position, the professor agreed to let me go ahead and write in this topic.

Having a month to prepare this paper, I started at the library selecting books that would help me find the appropriate information. I also wanted to include actual stories and opinions from the Elders. I conducted a few phone call interviews and even visited a few Elders making sure to write clear notes as to not misquote anyone. All quotes used from the Elders were clearly identified in the bibliography of my paper.

The day I received my paper back, I was very disappointed in my mark, only receiving a "C". After class, I went to the Professor to find out why my mark was so low. Her response was that I used quotes from verbal conversations and because the quotes did not come from a published article or writing, I could not use that information as fact or truth. I was stunned by her response and I tried to explain that our culture had an oral tradition and many teachings are passed down to generations using oral communication. She agreed that this may be true for our culture but not acceptable in writing a formal university paper. So, without further questioning, I took my paper and left

her the classroom. From that day forward I shared this story with many people as an example of the injustices and prejudices we face on a daily basis.

I carried this experience with me for many years and always wondering what I could do to prevent a similar thing from happening to my children or grandchildren. Then in 2003, I was able to have my first children's story book published. It had seven stories in the book and each topic teaches about different aspects of our Native spirituality. For me, this book has brought closure to my university experience and could potentially prevent hardships for future generations. Although oral traditions remain vitally important to our culture, having published written work has also proven beneficial to us as well.

Msit No'kmaq (All my Relations) - Santelas (Theresa)

© 2012 Theresa Meuse

Born and raised in the Bear River First Nation community, **THERESA MEUSE** attended Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia as a mature student, graduating in 1990 with a Bachelor Degree. She was then employed with two major Mi'kmaq organizations before becoming self-employed as a First Nation Educator and Advisor in 1997. Theresa enjoys creating crafts and is a published author. Her most recent works include a children's story book entitled *The Sharing Circle and the Mi'kmaq Anthology Volume 2*, of which she was a co-author. Please check out her web site at www.sharingculture.ca.

My Decolonizing Journey: An Urban Aboriginal Woman's Thought

As a young girl, I knew that I did not look, act or know the same things as my peers and friends, but I had no understanding of why. Through my elementary and secondary school journey, I learned more about who I was as an urban Aboriginal woman, but it wasn't until I was a young adult that I began to reclaim my culture and traditions. To reclaim my culture, I attended events, ceremonies, and spoke to as many Elders and healers as I could. I had always had a sense that I 'just knew' about ceremonies or plants, but as I spoke to Elders, I discovered that I did 'just know' because Creator was assisting me with reclaiming my culture.

Growing up, my Aboriginal family members taught me about berry picking, living on the land, and told me some of the stories from my community, but as none of them lived in our home community, I felt that I learned about my culture without truly experiencing it. I began to meet more Aboriginal people from across Canada and I began to realize that I had learned more about my heritage, culture and worldview than I had originally believed. I knew about Mother Earth, the interconnectedness of all things, and the horrors of past government policies thrust upon Aboriginal people. I felt an awakening of my Indigenous self and yearned to learn more about it; education would be the key to further understanding and reclaiming my culture even if it were through a western perspective.

Through my education and throughout my life, I learned that Aboriginal knowledge is secularized and not held in the same regard as non-Aboriginal knowledge. I struggle to make sense of my world from two distinct perspectives; this bicultural worldview incorporates both Algonquin teachings and western paradigms. I am often in a position that requires me to make decisions based on the setting, not on my worldview. This bicultural decision making is stressful, worrisome and can ultimately lead me away from my Aboriginality. I often ask myself 'why must I decide between a western way of doing something and how I know this task should be completed?' Nonetheless, I feel pressured into making some life decisions based on the western norms and values, but I do infuse my Aboriginality into the decisions.

During my education journey, I have faced racism, oppressive policies, and misunderstandings and misgivings about Aboriginal methodologies and research. I have continued to focus on my balance and tried to maintain the 'good way' during my journey, but I know that I have had to compromise my beliefs in order to move further through the western system. Part of reclaiming the culture is to ensure that my culture, knowledge and traditions are written about for other scholars so that they know now and in the future, that Aboriginal people practice their traditions, ceremonies and struggle with identity and know the culture continues. My academic articles help me to explore ideas and provide a way to pass knowledge on. One Elder once told me that no one can 'keep' knowledge and Creator intended for Aboriginal people to learn and pass on the knowledge. To follow this teaching, I have continued my personal learning and have begun to share my knowledge through teaching, researching and writing about Aboriginal issues.

I hope that future generations of Aboriginal women who hold the culture, language and worldview will not have to meet such oppressive and colonialistic forces. I hold the hope that through my defiance in some situations, I have helped to decolonize the western system; even if only just a little. My ancestors managed to retain the culture, language and worldview through very oppressive and often dehumanizing conditions. This knowledge spurs me to attempt to work with non-Aboriginal Canadians to provide them with knowledge of Aboriginal history and current situations. But how do we, as Aboriginal women, fight such a large ominous battle of reclaiming and revitalizing our cultures, languages

and worldview in a dominant western way? I believe that Aboriginal people are passing on our cultures, languages and worldview to the future generations while we educate non-Aboriginal people about us and our teachings.

Children are gifts from Creator and we must continue to provide our traditional knowledge to future gifts in order to reclaim and revitalize our cultures, languages and worldview. With every Aboriginal child that learns who they truly are, we are one step closer to decolonization. Aboriginal women have done this for centuries, and we shall continue until we have self-determination over our cultures, languages, knowledge and worldviews without imposition.

© 2012 Angela Mashford-Pringle

ANGELA MASHFORD-PRINGLE is from Timiskaming First Nation, Quebec, and is a PhD Candidate at Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto. Angela was the inaugural Aboriginal Programs Manager at Centennial College in Toronto. As an urban Algonquin woman, Angela has focused her research and work experiences around Aboriginal people and issues. Angela is a CIHR Doctoral Fellow in Public Health Policy and Dr. John Hastings Student Award winner.

Inner Strength

Growing up, I was a happy child, at least I thought I was. Back in the seventies, domestic violence and alcoholism were the norm in my family. My mother was beaten by my father and my aunt was beaten by my uncle, etc...So it should have come to no surprise that I would eventually follow in their footsteps.

When I was in my late teens, I met a man who was five years older than myself. He was so cool, he didn't go to school anymore, he had a job and his own place. We dated for a little while and then decided to live together. It was going pretty good. I got a job where he worked and for the next five years we would work and live together.

He didn't really like my family and although he would swear up and down that he did, I could see it in his face. My family wasn't too crazy about him either, that little (shoganosh) white guy.

In our fifth and last year together, he started changing, doing drugs and drinking more than usual, which brought out a side of him that I'd never seen before. It all started with a shove here and a shove there, no big deal, I thought. Then the shoves escalated into full blown punches. How did I get here? I swore up and down that I would never end up like my mom or auntie, yet here I was.

Shortly after the abuse started, my mom passed away suddenly from a massive heart attack. The shock of that left me in a coma like state for two weeks straight. Before her death, I was afraid to leave my abuser because I didn't think that I could make it on my own. I had no self-esteem at all and I'm certain that's exactly the way that he wanted it.

After my mom's death, she came to me in dreams and it was like a wake-up call. I woke up one morning like a totally different person. That same day, I made arrangements to leave that abusive situation and stay with family. It was very difficult, don't get me wrong. I left with no money, no job and just a duffle bag full of belongings, but I had the love of my family to keep me going.

Now in the year 2012, I have been blessed with a wonderful family of my own, including a wonderful husband, who would never lay his hands upon a woman and two beautiful boys. I know that my boys will grow up to never strike a woman and that makes me happy. I've also regained my self-esteem. I now know that any dream is possible and after a lot of work, mine is finally coming true.

Ever since I was a little girl, my dream was to write. I am now the published author of six aboriginal children's books. I have also written for *The Anishinabek News*, *Windspeaker Magazine* and *Canadian Living Magazine*. My favourite animal is the porcupine, so with the help of my cousin, we wrote and illustrated the Porcupine series together. My mom still comes to visit every once in a while, in dreams, and I'll always remember the strength she gives me when times get tough. I believe in my heart, that as aboriginal women, we are strong, proud and we can do anything we put our minds to.

© 2012 Emilie Corbiere

EMILIE CORBIERE is a descendant from Walpole Island First Nation. At the age of five, Emilie began to learn the art of beadwork from her mother, for which she has won awards. At age eight, Emily wrote her first play and continues to write poetry and short stories for fun.

In 2006, Emilie wrote *Porcupine's Bad Day* (Red Road Publishing), an Aboriginal children's storybook, based on the everyday activities of a grumpy porcupine. These stories are all written in part Ojibwe and part English. The first book has been followed by *Porcupine Goes to the City*, *Porc and Beans*, and, the fourth in the series, *Porcupine and the Powwow*. Besides the ever popular Porcupine series, Emilie has written for the *Anishinabek News* in Ontario, and *The Voice of the Indigenous* in the US.

Raising a family with her husband in central Ontario has proved to be the biggest joy in her life.

My resistance to negative definitions of being

Indigenous women are the most marginalized population in the world – period. We experience the highest rates of poverty, ill-health, unemployment, violence, death and violent death. There has been an assault on our “being” since colonization began. Colonizers knew that they needed to target the life givers in the communities. The assault continues. And yet we remain. Not only do we remain we resist. We are taking back our communities.

Like many of my friends and family members, I resist by reclaiming my traditions. In doing this I deconstruct the negative definitions and reconstruct and decolonize those definitions. My name is Morning Star Bear. I am Bear Clan. I am a proud Anishnabe Métis woman. I belong to the Regina Riel Métis Council because I choose to belong to the community who nurtured me and my family not because I have to according to the definition of an external government.

For me, ceremony is important. I attend sweats with my Kookum, Elder Betty McKenna, and other ceremonies that nurture my soul such as Full Moon Ceremonies. I am part of a Women’s Healing Drum Group. I was called to the drum many years ago when I was pregnant with my eldest daughter, Victoria. I was at a conference and I was pulled to the drum, my daughter kicking in utero to the beat of the drum. Now, she is 13 and we both find healing at the drum. My husband also takes part in ceremony, and we support my eldest daughter as she has entered into ceremony beginning with her year-long Berry Fast which she just completed.

Ceremony is an important part of identity. Although I am an urban dweller, when I attend ceremony or even when we carry out aspects of ceremony in the city, it reminds me of where I come from. When I am on the land I can feel my ancestors. I know my roots are here and I must honour those who have gone before me. My Kookum once said to me: “We are like trees. Our roots are put down very deep. And we take things from the four directions and we take them into our lives. And if you pull us up by the roots, we are lost. We have to go back and find those roots, find those beginnings that are strong so that we can live a good life”.

I am resisting negative definitions by creating space for myself, my family and my community to practice our traditions. I have gone back to find my roots, my beginnings, so I can live a good life. Our traditions hold sacred knowledge about us. If we are to resist negative definitions then we must do so by creating the space to reclaim, reconstruct, and deconstruct those definitions.

© 2012 Carrie Bourassa

CARRIE BOURASSA is an Associate Professor of Indigenous Health Studies at First Nations University of Canada and the Special Advisor to the President of Research. She completed her Ph.D. (Social Studies) in 2008. Carrie is Anishnabe/Métis, belonging to the Regina Riel Métis Council. She resides in Regina with her husband, Chad, and her daughters, Victoria and Lillie.

Round Dancing With Myself

I heal with every drum beat. Every song brings me closer to the person I was meant to be. As I close my eyes, my hands are being grasped by familiar fingers. When I open them again, I am surprised to see myself leading a round dance. I am present at various ages holding hands with myself at all phases of my life.

The little girl on my left is me at age 5 wearing a floral print dress with the matching hair pieces that my mother made. She is smiling, happy and innocent. I want to take her in my arms and hug her tightly, reassuring her that she will make it through the things to come and tell her the abuse she will endure is not her fault. As I squeeze her hand, my 15 year old self steps into line, moving to the beat of the drum. She's smiling like I've never seen her smile before. That was the year I went to a treatment centre for the second time and I hated anything to do with being Indigenous. I could only associate my bloodline with my weaknesses and knew none of the beauty and strength of my culture which would soon make me strong. A girl with coke bottle glasses and a frizzy perm bounces in and is full of laughter. I recognize her to be the 12 year old me and a straight "A" student, bursting with possibility.

We keep moving in a circle dancing, laughing, smiling and soon I see my faces all around me. I see myself with a swollen belly and I am in awe of the beauty I radiate. I didn't remember feeling that way. I was 19 and uneducated, battling addiction and terrified of the life I held inside me. All I could see now was love and the sacred gift of giving life.

I see myself dressed in clothes I recognize to be the ones I wore on days that I was raped, those three Indian girls are holding hands and they look proud today as they dance to the drum. No longer are their heads hung low but they are held skyward as if to say "they are still here, they have survived".

One of me even showed up in a cap and gown, age 23, graduating from a Social Service Worker Diploma. The girl next to her has a dark tan and is wearing falling-apart shoes and a bandana around her neck, she's 21, and just helped build a school in Nicaragua and is starting to learn her Dane Zaa language. She is at the beginning point of discovering our heritage, which has been instrumental in our healing.

A few faces down is a young girl with a red and black Mohawk and for once I look into her eyes and I don't see her as an enemy anymore. She survived the height of my self-destruction and as we gaze at each other we slightly bow our heads, recognizing that it is a time for peace now. I even see myself a few days ago, just after I sat with my little cousin and explained to her the importance of our moon times and Grandmother Moons role in helping us cleanse ourselves of our negative energy.

In unison we dance, recognizing each other's spirit and with each step we become increasingly harmonized. Finally, I see these girls and women the way they always needed to be, free. The last drum beat sounds and we are one again. Tradition has helped me become whole again.

© 2012 Helen Knott

HELEN KNOTT is a 24 year old Dane Zaa and Cree woman from Prophet River First Nation living in Northern British Columbia.. She grew up disconnected from her culture and encountered many adversities throughout her life. This day, she is thankful to the Creator for giving her life and strength. By becoming reacquainted with her culture, her traditions and who she is as an Indigenous woman, she is able to heal and move forward in a positive way. Now, she is a mother to a four year old boy and is in her third year of the Bachelor of Social Work program. Hakatah Wuujo Asonalah (Creator, You have done good to me).

Hope to Forgive the Unforgivable

Native Americans have struggled regarding the education they experienced in the United States. Elder Native women are now speaking of the long-term consequences of these educational practices. The use of forgiveness addresses the grievances of forced colonialism through the educational curriculum that emphasized cultural genocide through the use of boarding schools. The stories of oppression by Native women who attended boarding schools can create a narrative to address colonialism and educational policy in the U.S.

While interviewing an elder group of Native women for research, one of my questions dealt with being taught craftwork by their families. This was the catalyst for heart-wrenching discussions. One of the women spoke of how her mother was forced to take her to the Indian boarding school at a young age. This young child was compelled to make beadwork for the Christian missionaries to sell. Her mother never visited and they had only reconciled a few years before telling this story. Another woman talked about how half the time she cleaned and did menial tasks. These older women shared being alienated from their parents. Later, they disengaged from their children as they strived towards occupational achievement. They saw little that might be currently done to rectify past injustices.

Many do not understand the involvement of others in the forgiveness process when the experience of boarding schools was uniquely their own. However, the process involves many steps and many people. The 1879-2009 Wellbreity Journey for Forgiveness, (<http://www.whitebison.org/>), brought attention to the impact of the boarding school experience for many Native Americans. This historic event held gatherings at each of the 23 original boarding school sites in the U.S. While petitioning for a formal apology from the U.S. government, they used this constructive outlet to promote forgiveness—to move beyond this unresolved grief that still permeates their communities.

Elder Native women have been engaging in forgiveness and its ability to aid not only the forgiven, but to heal themselves. They continue to be engaged in traditional craftwork in order to reconcile the two ongoing processes. However, real meaningful dialogue and policies need to be promoted to establish constructive means to heal some of the resulting consequences of past oppression.

© 2012 R. Saya Bobick

SAYA BOBICK is a non-traditional doctoral student at West Virginia University. As someone from a multi-ethnic background, she is interested in the effects of cultural practices on the lives of elder indigenous women & conducted this research for her women's studies directed Master of Arts in Liberal Studies. As a direct result of this research, her interdisciplinary doctoral studies (in curriculum and instruction) have been in the Indigenous origin of western feminism; aboriginal perspectives on science, environmental racism and ecofeminism; and cultural healing from the legacy and historical trauma of the U.S. Indian Boarding School era.

Native Women

For years, many Native American Women have carried baggage weighing heavily on their souls. Some were other peoples' baggage; some was their own, collected along the way of their journey through life. Sometimes we recognize that it's not ours to carry, but too often we take on other peoples' pain, even if it is a result of someone else's prejudices. We carry each other's baggage because for the last two hundred years Native women have been told we are not good enough, not smart enough, or just of the wrong class, culture, color, age.

What an injustice we Native women have endured. I wonder if we even realize the beautiful gifts we are, given by our creator. Yes gifts! We are not someone else's projection of who and what we are. Brokenness, hurting souls, have brought us all to this place in our life. We can choose to give up, move forward or just act as if nothing has happened to us along the way.

Some of us busy ourselves and fill in the blanks. We take care of our families, making sure they're fed and clothed. I wonder how well we take care of our souls? Whenever there's a difficult emotional task to deal with we can overeat, drink, or maybe even find some man to take care of. But who are we as Native women? Are we what people say we are? We are mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, friends and sometimes strangers to ourselves.

We can all assist each other and help each other to discover who we truly are, not as society sees us, but as we journey through this life as we know it. We can begin to heal and unpack all the baggage. It's amazing how much Native woman can put into a single piece of baggage.

On the outside, our baggage looked sort of pretty, non-flexible and sturdy, but on the inside, everything was damaged with our raw emotions, anger and pain. Each baggage has its own bundle of energy surrounding it.

As a life coach, and as another Native American Indian woman, I know just how much Native women can be burdened with emotional baggage. Because I have walked out my own healing journey myself, I know how it is to be a free woman.

I had always known of these spiritual gifts as a young child. I was just not sure what this knowing was, how it worked, and what I was supposed to do with it.

As a Native woman and as a life coach I know my calling is to help spiritually guide Native women on a journey of compassion, forgiveness, and self-worth.

© 2012 Linda Lucero

LINDA LUCERO is a counselor, life coach, trained circle keeper, and Educator. Linda is a member of the White Earth Tribe in Minnesota. Linda has worked for the Minneapolis Public Schools for many years and is currently an Associate Educator for Anishinabe Academy School, a Native magnet School in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Linda's true passions are teaching children about the old ways and traditions. She has a respect for children and elders. She is a life time learner who is very spiritual. Linda's native name is Wazushkooz (Muskrat) and she is the mother of four grown children and has several grandchildren.

She is also the granddaughter of a medicine woman. Looking back at her childhood as a little girl, Linda pays honor to her mother and grandmother for their strength, wisdom and knowledge. Linda was taken into the woods as a child by her grandmother and she was taught about the wild plants and what they were used for by her grandmother.

It Stopped

The knot un-dun
Foot-prints Finger-tips
Lips-limbs-lost
The calls stopped
Tough-skinned responses
Healing minute-by-minute
Recapturing Nurturing Honesty
Humming-bird returns
Reminds us
Smile
Broken-hearted warriors
Walk-forward Keep walking towards
To-morrow
Embracing recovery
Lighting Forest fires
Reciting prayers
Taking their place
And when ready
Walk
alone
Ravens visit Deceased relations
Befriends new creatures
Reminds us
Remember
Wounds closing Words consoling
Wondering if emptiness is obvious
Blemishes on records forever
It stopped

© 2012 Janet Marie Rogers

PART III

The Genealogy of Genocide

Enka.

Yes.

This is a song about blood.

Monks.

No.

This a song about blood quantum.

A stomp dance in which mistakes are made.

Loose

Lines

of crimson graphic designs

circling rivers and sewers

until confined

in valves and tubes

transfused by soldiers

magnanimous donors earning their halos

mercenary sellers forestalling foreclosures

wanderers trading plasma for gas money and change

and a range

of drummers and dancers

crossing blood

as I step,

Este Cate

from mixed,

to diluted,

to saved.

Language:

*Enka...*Creek Word for "yes"

*Monks...*Creek Word for "no"

*Este Cate...*Creek Word for Native American

Blood quantum...A means of determining membership in Native American Nations through genealogy.

Stomp Dance...A traditional Muscogee Creek religious dance.

© 2012 Dawn Karima Pettigrew

My Sash is my Tree

Conceived from a ball of wool and love
The teacher disentangles its precious bundle

As He slowly lays out each strand
And gives it an origin and an end

One by one the framework is created
And the foundation of the story begins

Spirited with meticulous precision
The Teacher intricately places together each filament

Scrutinizing each inch of strength and weakness in the fiber
He masterfully weaves in confidence and trust

As the threads comes together a unique design is born
A textile of quality and beauty is formed

Entwined by the master weaver
It makes sure no strand is left on its own

Though the creation may look fragile as it is strained out of shape
Its distance from end to end can be deceitful to the unfamiliar eye

It is with length and not width do you measure its true merit
For a long trail of tradition and wisdom binds it

The Maker knew that many would only see a strained cloth
But I was told and I believe there are no design flaws

So as the threads of time will soon be completed
Colored by many events in a lifetime with no doubt I am sure

I share with you Creator's gift
A life of struggles and successes

So that you may understand
That we are all works of art in progress

And much like a family Tree
My Sash is ME

© 2012 Louise Vien

Dream, Travel, & Remember

I am a dreamer
and a dream keeper
Visions, Memories and Dreams
keep me alive and nourish my purpose
they give me surrender resilience and wonder

I day-dream and imagine
how life would be in my perfect world
interactions of humor, fright, and bliss

I drink Perrier at night
and grind coffee in the morning
I sing songs in my heart
all the day long
Lord help me,
I gotten silly again
and my potential has expanded
to fit my traditional dress

I envision a different future
for my people...
one that would see...
babies healthy,
sisters laughing
parents with no struggle for food
women with no fear - keepers of the land

I remember...
experiences as a brown female
...a child with big eyes of tears

wondering...
what was wrong with the world?
wondering...
what was wrong with being me?
It made no good sense
to my young child-self
who was to amount to nothing
who was expected to fit
the large frame of a cigar store Indian
a Hollywood squaw
an incompetent worthless bastard
with worn shoes and hole in her sock

How could I fit these shoes and still be me?
it makes no good sense
because I am beautiful
I am marvelous
I am the dream keeper-woman who sees

I am a traveler
I fly where I want
I put on different hats
and clean my robe in ceremony
to remember...

I am the woman who can do anything
I am a traveler
the sky is the limit
my name is Francine

© 2012 Francine Burning

“Ostracism”

The greatest indignity of all, I think, was my father sitting, moodily, on my couch and asking me, “Do you hate me because I’m an Indian?” Think, first, how absurd it is for any nineteen-year-old daughter to find her father that way. Think, then, of how words have the power to define and divide—the father is the Indian, the child is not. It would be a comedy were it not for the tragic fact that he would be dead, by his own hand, not five years later.

But this is not about my father, not really. This is about the elusiveness of identity. What would it take for me to be Native enough to be Native? And does it even matter? My family history is varied, but at the core of it is cultural exchange: the Red River Métis of Manitoba, where I was born. I did not grow up in Winnipeg, though, a city my father would vehemently decry as “the most racist place on Earth.” Instead, I grew up in Quebec City, where the neighbourhood children would throw stones at us from slingshots for speaking English and our classmates would insist to me and my sisters that our father was Japanese. The word “Métis” received blank stares. When asked what it “really meant” on a day-to-day level, I would tell people that we ate a lot of bannock at home. I can think of no other culture where it is required over and over again from everyone and their dog that you must demonstrate, tangibly, that you belong. We would travel up north with my father sometimes, where he sold music by Native artists, but that was no good, either. The kids on the reserves would tell us outright that they were embarrassed to be seen with us whites and would shout “snowman!” from a distance—but that is nothing, merely a child’s misunderstanding. The real problems came later: friends saying, “But you’re not really Native, right? You’re culturally white,” or the bureaucratic hoops necessary to jump through in order to get a Métis card. I still don’t have one. Manitoba bases membership on residency, but Quebec, on birth, making me eligible for neither. I remember my father slamming the car door shut, angry that he’d been turned away by the blond-haired, blue-eyed young man at the membership office. “Can’t they just look at me?” he’d said. I don’t even have that.

So what do I have, other than family photos and genealogical charts? What will I be able to pass down to my future children, who will be “watered-down” to just one-eighth Native and will never know their grandfather? I have only two things to give: the family bannock recipe, and these scattered reflections.

© 2012 Adelle Farrelly

ADELLE FARRELLY, née Ranville, was born in Winnipeg to a large extended family with a very strong Manitoba Métis identity. Her family moved to Quebec City when she was four, and as a result, she grew up without a strong Aboriginal identity or community. She has degrees from McGill University and the University of Toronto and currently lives in Ottawa.

Indigenous Settler

Way hey ya hey ya hey yo
Tell us stories we want to hear
But we won't listen
Our minds together
I consent

But who am I to speak?

Can't speak for the rez Indian
Can barely speak of
The pain of genocide
The responsibility of survival

Indigenous settler
Way hey ya hey ya hey yo

Where ya from?
What do I answer?
Where's your community?
New York, where I was born?
Phillie, where I grew up?
Toronto, where I live?
Staunton, where my Tsalagi
grandmothers lived?
And died?

Urban Indian
Mixed blood Indian
Clanless Indian
Black Indian
Educated Indian
Assimilated Indian
Who am I to speak?

No land knows my name
Stolen woman on stolen land
Got no home but still here
Still here
Walking on someone else's ancestors

Indigenous settler
Way hey ya hey ya hey yo

They hear me
But not her
They hear him
But not me
Our minds together
I consent

Who am I to speak???
Who do I need to be?

© 2012 Zainab Amadahy

Of African American and Cherokee heritage, **ZAINAB AMADAHY** is a singer-songwriter, author and activist. Her achievements include co-authoring (with Bonita Lawrence) "Indigenous Peoples and Black Peoples in Canada: Settlers or Allies" for Breaching the Colonial Contract: Anti-Colonialism in the U.S. and Canada. Zainab also contributed to the anthology *Strong Women's Stories: Native Vision & Community Activism* and authored the feminist sci-fi novel *Moons of Palmares*.

Highlights of her musical achievements include composing for and performing in the documentary film *One Simple Shot*. She also wrote and performed for *Breathing the Wind*, Spirit Wind's debut CD. Zainab has sung with the Wahahi:io Haundenosaunee water drum group and guest sang on Kanenhi:io's debut CD. Her recent publications can be found on *rabble.ca* and *Muskrat Magazine* <http://www.muskratmagazine.com/issue2/>.

Indian eyes

I was 20 years old and had just travelled across the border on a motorized canoe from Palenque (Mexico) to Guatemala. I had wanted to come here because I had been told that it was still very “Indian”. We were now in Antigua and living it up - soaking up the vibes of the local culture, dancing till the sun broke through the morning mist, hanging out with strange and fascinating people (at least considered so at that time) from the world over. Life was glorious! Life was bursting! I was exuberant, and so was everyone and everything that surrounded me. The poverty that I had heard about Guatemala was certainly not a part of my reality. I was surrounded by coffee shops offering up delicious treats - buzz on sugar high!

Prancing about cockily in carefree fashion as only young ones can, we decide to go dancing to an all night disco. Before that however, we needed our supper. We decide to go to a restaurant that had come highly recommended. Whilst sitting out in the patio waiting for our food and downing our drinks, at a lull in conversation, I turn around. I see that we are in an enclosed area, surrounded by a high fence. That didn’t dampen my spirit, though it did make me feel like I had done something bad and was now caged in as punishment. OR, wait a minute, was the fence to keep out those kids? Those Indian ones! Kids with no shoes, rags for clothes, mottled hair, their faces stuck through the holes of the fence, staring at us, dripping saliva at our cornucopia of drinks and unfinished snacks on the table. “Senorita” a little girl calls out. “Me puede dar algo de comer? (Can you give me something to eat?)”. Immediately, her voice - so sad, forlorn, desperate - pulled me out of my happy place. “Tienes hambre? (are you hungry?)” I ask. “Si, muchisima hambre (yes, very very hungry)”.

I don’t know what happened to me then, I started crying, the tears yanked out of me, much more than inexplicably, shockingly quick – a deluge. I picked up the plate of peanuts and chips on our table and walked to the fence. The 4 or 5 kids that had their faces stuck on the fence quickly came to the plate, drawn to it instinctively as fish when fed. I poured the peanuts and chips into their eager hands and watched them swallow the food. Yum yum. “Esta bueno? (Is it good?)” “Como que no?! Gracias! (How can it not be?! Thanks)” they said. I sat back down and took a big chug of my beer. I thought of the fullness in my stomach, the happiness in my heart but all this overpowered by the hot cloud of my brain.

I am a damn lucky girl!

Since that first time, I have returned again and again to live/travel/work with indigenous communities, trying to do the “right” thing. What am I looking for? What am I giving? These are questions that haunt and look to be answered each and every time...when I look inside me, I see those Indian eyes.

© 2012 Cristina Afán Lai

CRISTINA AFÁN LAI has worked as a consultant, researcher and educator with various Aboriginal communities, both in Canada (Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board, Indigenous Education Coalition, Attawapiskat FN Education Authority) and overseas (Guatemala, Peru and Bolivia). Other work experiences include UNICEF Malawi as Regional Education Officer, mathematics teacher at the Sheikh Zayed Academy in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates), and science/special education teacher for the Toronto District School Board. She self-identifies as an AMI First Nation of Taiwan.

The Flats

Way down there in the flats
near the village of Val Marie
in summertime alfalfa hay
with skies forever blue
we grew up fast and fair
we shared a history too.

When we drove by prairie dog town
those who shared their lands
turned heads
stood guard
flashed black tails back.
It seems to me that way down there
they recognized their kind.

Way down there in the flats
our aging sagey
summer home
was cooling pink and musty blue
and as a child I recall
the scent of roses too.

Way down there in the flats
by the Frenchman river bank
my mama she would take us there
we'd swim and laugh and think
it seems to me that in those days
when time was young and life was free
we had no real worries or sad recurring dreams.

The land was hot down in the flats
my dad he loved it there
and on the days he cooked for us
the food it was so good
brown beans fried eggs and baked bread too
for him it was no fuss.

And when it's hot I reminisce
a summer time of bliss
a porch we had, a sun porch wide
it was our night porch too
where we read Life danced days away
collecting butterflies and sage
and clouds of prairie blue.

And today when I think back,
I wonder was this all?
Way down there in the flats
a mile from Val Marie
and a hundred million miles away
from knowing we're Métis.

© 2012 Margaret Kress-White

Shape Shifter

You don't look like an Indian
she said
admiring her high cheekbones
Briere nose, old passport photos.
You really don't
not like me.

One time, up the river
she saw Windigo
in the willows
near the Cree burial grounds
perched up on the bank
of the south weir on Amisk.

She watched him
and he watched her back.

You don't look like an Indian
she said
and maybe she is right
'cause I don't shape shift
like her
and I've never seen the Rugaru.

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MARGARET KRESS-WHITE is a mother, daughter, aunt and friend who strives to situate her own history as she works to enhance the liberation of students, family and friends. She acknowledges her family and her Métis, German, French and English ancestors as well as her children, Andrew, Robin and Mackenzie. She gives gratitude to Elder Stella Blackbird as she has helped her uncover her own history and the importance of this journey. Her current research strives to support Aboriginal women as they dismantle environmental racism through Indigenous ways of knowing. Environmental justice and the outcomes of kinship wellness and peace is her academic and personal journey.

Effects of Participation in Cultural Practices on Elder Indigenous Women

A small group of elder females working together at a Native senior center have become reacquainted with craft and handiwork from their past. Since these types of traditions have not had great positive economic impact, they are often devalued in contemporary mainstream society, relegating these activities to second-class importance. Anecdotal evidence, however, shows a positive correlation between active engagement in these types of behaviors and longevity. Often the participants enjoy a quality of life that leads to greater self-esteem. Active engagement in cultural practices has an affirmative effect on older Indigenous women.

Older women from an Eastern Woodland Indigenous tribal nation shared their experiences with me as they reacquainted themselves with past cultural practices. Many had come from disadvantaged backgrounds where cultural traditions were exploited. One had learned beading while being forced to attend an Indian boarding school. Those in charge would then sell those items, marketing them as made by Indians. Another woman had to use beadwork to buy staples for her family. They were trying to claim these practices again as their own, and for their own purposes. Pride in ancestral material culture was evident as they either honed past skills or learned new ones by exploring beading, quilting, sewing, and basket weaving.

These elder Indigenous women now do beadwork for pleasure, and in a productive social atmosphere. Gathering to partake in these productive activities is something they look forward to, as they reclaim their heritage. Active involvement in their heritage's cultural traditions has formed supportive relationships in their lives. Although most do not have good memories from the past, they have worked hard to reclaim these cultural practices as their own.

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Am I Anishinaabe Enough?

As I sat at my desk contemplating and reflecting on my doctoral final project along with the research process, I began to realize what a precious gift I have, an education. The research process was a long journey for me filled with laughter, countless tears, and immeasurable healings. Throughout my life, nothing has been as difficult and as rewarding all in the same breath. This long road was not without its bumps, as well as important people to lift me up, brush me off, and send me on my way. To me, the interconnectedness of indigenous people is and always will be a beloved way of being and leading.

My doctoral dissertation titled, *Leadership Experiences in Indigenous Language Immersion Contexts*, catapulted me into an area of research and study that I had not considered for myself. My study sought to examine indigenous language immersion leaders' lived experiences making program decisions during the development and implementation of their immersion program. Professionally, I was trained as a Special Education teacher; but, more importantly, personally, I was not ready for what the journey would entail. It was a journey of self-discovery, acceptance, and revitalization not only with the Anishinaabe language, but, with a reconnection to my past and who I was, am, and will be. Nonetheless, despite the positive healing direction of this journey, it was neither easy nor without countless emotions. Many times, the research process confounded and disturbed me because of the deep sentiments it invoked.

Indigenous language revitalization efforts today stem from an enduring history of policies and laws that suppressed their use in the United States; thereby, largely promoting their assimilation into the dominant English-speaking culture. As a result, many indigenous communities in the United States do not have fluent speakers. A strong commitment to developing effective leadership within indigenous settings could prove to be an additional strategy in our efforts to save endangered languages.

Indigenous language revitalization efforts are concerned with self-determination, healing and survival of indigenous cultures. As an Anishinaabe woman and educator, I am humbled and reminded how limited my own language abilities are when hearing fluent Anishinaabe speakers. As a result, I embarked on my own language learning path with reverence and trepidation during my research. Throughout this process, I began to wonder: what are we here for or what is our purpose on earth? I came to believe, with clarity, that we are here to live a good life and to make life better for future generations.

Each of us determines how to fulfill this ideal. Effective indigenous leadership might simply rest in being responsible for ourselves while recognizing and appreciating the many paths to truth (Bergstrom, Miller-Cleary, & Peacock, 2003). It is about self-determination both individually and collectively as human beings.

Through my doctoral journey, I found little evidence in the literature regarding indigenous leadership. More research is needed to evaluate the impact of leadership instruction as seen through the lens of indigenous people. What is the definition of leadership in an indigenous culture? Do indigenous leaders emerge or do they have talents that prepare them for leadership? Do leaders, whether indigenous or not, improve their leadership skills when taught from an indigenous perspective? If so, what is the impact on our children? Is there a difference between dominant models of leadership instruction and indigenous leadership?

In conclusion, identity issues permeated my experiences throughout this research project and transported me back to my adolescent years. I often questioned my Nativeness or indigeness—was I, indigenous/Native enough to be asking or entering into this research especially using the language of the colonizer? When I consider myself and visualize indigenous, I envision someone else. This is an instantaneous and natural response for me; consequently, I frequently remind myself of my value and trust I am a real indigenous person who has many dimensions...I am Anishinaabe, a human being, a woman, a mother, a wife and a leader.

© 2012 Catherine M. Pulkinen

CATHERINE M. PULKINEN has been in the field of Special Education for over 17 years. She is a member of the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Ojibwe. She began her teaching career at a tribal reservation school working with middle school students who had learning difficulties. Catherine also has taught students with severe physical and cognitive delays. Her recent experience has been with students with autism and emotional/behavioral disorders. She earned her doctorate in Educational Policy and Administration from the University of MN – Twin Cities in 2008.

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Becoming Métis: A Journey of Learning and Healing

My identity as a Métis woman is ever evolving and changing. While I have always been connected to my European (Hungarian and Ukrainian) ancestry, my roots with Métis culture and history have only started to grow and strengthen within the past five years. My narrative is one that includes many voices and many stories that have been shared with me by my family. Telling this story is part of my healing process and journey, and represents some of the experiences and teachings that I have gathered thus far along the path that I am walking.

I am Métis on my father's side. My grandfather was born in St. Laurent, Manitoba, a large Métis community that takes great pride in its history and the preservation of Métis culture. My great-grandparents were Métis from Manitoba and Saskatchewan. My grandfather passed away when I was a very young child, and because of the effects of colonization and my family's own experienced intergenerational trauma (e.g., alcohol abuse, internalized shame, physical abuse), I became disconnected from Métis culture. To this day, certain family members refuse to discuss our ancestral ties, as I believe it brings up too much pain and grief. As a result of these experiences, I was not raised in the Métis culture, nor did I learn of my identity as a Métis woman until later in life.

When I think back to my childhood, I can recall the strong intrinsic resonance that I experienced in connection to Aboriginal culture. For instance, the first time I attended a Pow Wow with my mother, as she has always enjoyed participating and exposing my sister and I to different cultures, I remember how struck I was by the sight of an eagle feather and hearing the drum. While I can recall as a young child hearing my aunts and uncles refer to themselves as "Indian" and once hearing my father tell me that I was good at weaving threads because "it was in my blood," I never truly understood what these comments meant or that they referred to an aspect of our family, and my personal, identity. Close to five years ago, my family was brought together again as a result of an uncle's passing. Part of our healing process was to tell stories about our family members, while laughing and crying and reminiscing. It was during this gathering that my aunts and uncles began to discuss our Aboriginal ancestry in depth and that I learned of my connection with Métis culture and community. This event spurred an undertaking that has lasted for the past three years in which I researched,

investigated, and reconnected with my Métis roots and culture.

Identifying and connecting with a Métis community has been both challenging and rewarding. For a while I felt very isolated and disconnected from Métis peoples living in Toronto, as I did not perceive there to be a strong and active community that practiced the culture and traditions. One of the most rewarding experiences of my life was to travel to St. Laurent and spend time in my grandfather's ancestral community, listening to the Elders, learning the history of the community, and laying tobacco at the site of my ancestors' burial grounds. I felt an incredible and powerful connection to this land and to the community as a whole. Upon returning to Toronto from this trip, I was even more motivated to find a community of Métis peoples that I could exchange stories and celebrate our culture with. Within the past year, the Métis Nation of Ontario started a program entitled the Infinite Reach Métis Student Solidarity Network, which is comprised of incoming and upper year postsecondary students who work to establish a network of Métis students within educational institutions. As the facilitator of this program at the University of Toronto, I organized a number of Métis specific cultural events and activities over the course of the year, strengthening a Métis community within the University, and also within the larger community of Toronto. I have been able to form many wonderful relationships with other Métis individuals in the city, which has helped me in my own healing and development as a strong and proud Métis woman. I look forward to returning these gifts back to my community and the future generations of Métis to come.

© 2012 *Teresa Rose Beaulieu*

TERESA ROSE BEAULIEU is of Hungarian, Ukrainian and Métis ancestry and resides in Toronto, Ontario. She is currently completing her Doctor of Philosophy in the Counseling Psychology Program at the University of Toronto and is a recipient of a 2011 Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship. Her clinical practice and program of research is Aboriginal mental health and healing.

How I construct a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context

Like many Indigenous women, I have experienced inter-generational trauma. My identity was stripped and an external government wants to tell me who I am. I grew up getting called dirty names and being ashamed of who I was and also being confused. I watched violence and abuse in my family, experienced it – intimately ... still relive it in my dreams. But that is not the story I want to share. We all know that story. We all have experienced a version of that of story. The story I want to share is one of resilience, one of hope and, most of all, one of healing. It is in great thanks to my adopted Kookum ... a very wise, patient and gifted woman named Elder Betty McKenna. I thank God/Creator for her every day. Because of her and my adopted Mushum, the late Clifford LaRocque, I have been able to reclaim my identity and pass it on to my children. I want to share with you how I have reclaimed my identity in an urban setting and am able to translate traditions in contemporary contexts.

My spiritual name is Morning Star Bear. I am proud to have been gifted this name. It is a healing name. My eldest daughter, Victoria had her first naming ceremony at age six and her name was Frog Woman. Last year, she had her Berry Fast and when she finished her year of Berry Fasting she had her sweat where she received her name Head Frog Woman. It is very appropriate for she is a leader. She is a proud young Anishnabe Cree Métis woman. She has never doubted who she is. She has never been ashamed of who she is. She texted me from school last week and said she wants to learn Anishnabe and Cree to honour both aspects of her Métis lineage. She is wise beyond her years. When she fasted for a year the whole family was part of the tradition. The Berry Fast celebrated her coming into womanhood ... the beginning of her moon time. She received sacred teachings from Kookum Betty and her Aunties. While we went out on the land and took part in ceremonies we also committed to carrying out the protocols and traditions throughout the year as a family and community.

Traditionally, during her moon time she would have been in a moon lodge where the Aunties and Kookums in the community would impart teachings to the young women. That is not feasible in today's society so instead, we make sure that she has her own dishes and cutlery on her time, washes her clothes separately from everyone else's and this is to show respect for her power during that time. During her Berry Fast she could not eat any berries for an entire year even if the family was, and this teaching demonstrated that she could abstain from other things as she entered the "rapids" or "teenage" years where she will be tempted by many things around her (i.e. drugs, alcohol). But since she was able to abstain from berries for an entire year (and she did!) she has the willpower and self-respect to abstain from anything. She also has the support of her kin, family and community as she navigates the "rapids".

The Berry Fast is one example of how we have constructed positive identity in a contemporary setting. It involves not only our youth, who as we know are particularly vulnerable, but family, kin and community. Our youth need "good stones" or teachings to cling to during the years they are in the rapids. Those teachings include: growth, order, adequacy, love, social approval, security and self-esteem.

We all have a role to play in providing those teachings particularly since many of us did not get them growing up. This is the time of reclamation and healing. We must be innovative and we must support one another. Megweetch!

The Paths We Walk

I was raised to be white and it didn't work. I am Nehiyawiskwew and my name is Otiskewapiwskew. It was a wicked and twisted mindset that thought residential schools and transracial adoption to "take the Indian out of the child" might be a positive thing. For many adoptees, it had an inverse effect because our isolation forced us to repatriate to families, community, and culture. Some, with a vengeance! I smile when I think of the radical, smart, and savvy First Nation, Inuit, and Métis transracial adoptees I know and the great good mischief they are creating in Indian country. They are artists, filmmakers, politicians, academics, researchers, lawyers, students. I conducted a study awhile back where I asked some of these folks what they would change if they could. Almost to a person, they said "nothing". These resilient beings recognized that out of the painful experiences, out of the trauma and abuse, and out of the isolation, they emerged as strong people and those experiences were part and parcel of who they are. Me, I almost didn't survive because I thought that the problem with Canada was a problem with me. It wasn't. I found my culture. I found some teachers. I attended some ceremonies and I fasted and prayed. I learned about colonialism and critical race theory. I came to understand a lot of things. Most importantly, I learned about accountability as an approach to life and as a path to happiness and personal agency.

Accountability is an approach where we hypothesize, "What if I am 100% responsible for everything that I think, I feel, and I do?" The path to actualizing the question is to understand that the information (data) in our lives is filtered through our minds where our experiences and understandings frame and inform our interpretations (stories). The stories that we make up then lead to our emotional responses, which subsequently inform our actions and conduct. Many of us have been socialized to jump directly from the data to the emotional response without interrogating the filter, or the stories that we made up. In those situations we set ourselves up as victims of our emotions rather than as creators of our emotions through the power of the ability we have to perceive, understand, filter, and create stories. As an example, if I see a scowl on someone's face (data), how I perceive and understand that look forms my interpretation. If I interpret it as racism directed towards me, my emotional response will likely be very different than if I interpret the look as being characteristic of a grouchy person. The stories we make up, and we can make up a thousand stories in a split second because our minds are so powerful and creative, dictate our emotional and psychological

state from moment to moment. By slowing down and interrogating our stories, we discover the incredible power we have to find desirable emotional states and to be self-determining. As a Cree woman in a neo-colonial context, strategies that help me to wade through the sociological junk that litters our realities are vital! If I am not in touch with my own sense of agency and efficacy, I risk being part of the post-colonial problem; the problem of lateral violence and ongoing trauma. Accountability as a model for living is one strategy, one tool. It is very hard but rewarding work and when you do this work, the veils of blame, victimization, resentment, gossip, and lateral violence fall away. We gradually begin to see, like seeing a beautiful sunrise on a glorious day, that we are not alone. We are surrounded by warriors doing this very work, and they are waiting for us. The strategies and tools may look differently, but the results are the same – peace and well-being.

Being a Nehiyaw woman to me means this path of well-being is now a cultural imperative; a contemporary tradition. My sacred task is being a good role model and leader. It means walking in integrity and congruence and being fiercely strong and independent on a rock solid foundation of complete compassion and love. This is hard, challenging work but accountability is a path our ancestors walked for millennia and it is one they prepared for us and prayed about. Join us! Kahkiyāw niwahkomākānāk!

© 2012 Raven Sinclair

RAVEN SINCLAIR is from Gordon's First Nation of Treaty 4 in southern Saskatchewan. Her education includes a degree in Psychology, a certificate and degree in Indian Social Work, a Masters in Social Work, and a PhD in Social Work from the University of Calgary. Raven's dissertation research articulates the experiences of Aboriginal children in Canada who were adopted into non-Indigenous families during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s; the era known as the "Sixties Scoop". Raven is an Associate Professor of Social Work with the University of Regina, Saskatoon campus. Raven is the lead editor of the first book on Aboriginal social work in Canada which was released in the Fall of 2009. Raven is a partner in a First Nation/Métis owned and operated private practice counseling and consulting company. She is married and has a seven year old daughter.

Half of Something

Staring out of my window, not knowing where I belong.
Three full-bloods were my only sisters—that I knew back
then. I felt a connection to them and other bloods I knew
then too! We could all relate to each other's afflictions and pain.
Whether it be by the hand of another or the
constant sorrow that raged on in our elders and ones before
us. Not understanding where all the pain came from, not really
wanting to know either. Seeing other people block their pain
through addictions, suicide or by blaming others for not being
there when they were supposed to be. But who was there for
them throughout their ordeals? Parents were there in body but not to
protect or feed and nurture the children. Our behaviour was self-taught.
It was the best way for our parents to show love, but
these are the words that were sometimes said: 'Take
care of yourself!' 'You're old enough, quit being such a baby!'

Going through the ceremonies, the old fears and triumphs of
wanting to be good, not bad. Looking for love in all the wrong
places and finding heartache instead of a long love to grow
old with. Raising your children to understand you, instead they
blame you and carry on the same cycles you long
to break. So much sadness through some happy tears that
don't last unless you choose to leave all of what you knew or
know behind. Is it for the better or for the worst, sometimes
in that moment it hurts to be the self. Just yearning
to be accepted by the creator and truly loved for being half of one's self

Half of one's self through culture and then the other half
wanting to fit in and still belong. To be nurtured
and led into all these strange lessons and boredom,
To grow into self through all of these lessons,
practicing to love one's self. First through the creator, then
through the self, with forgiveness and appreciation for the
path we are on. To improve and keep the positive. To
say thank you to all the generations who walked before us,
through all their pain too. We shall always honor them as we
will be honored. To thank the creator for bestowing these
journeys upon us as spirit through time. We would not be
who we are, if we didn't walk this long red road.

© 2012 Rosie Trakostanec
White Elk Medicine Woman

What is Left?

If we didn't have to struggle for resources, who would we be?

If we were liberated from repelling genocide, what is left?

Can anyone tell me what would remain?

I look around and have realized that our identity as Indigenous people today is so dependent on the reality of our misery.

Every day we must consistently remind the world we exist and our way of life is beautiful.

We encounter each new day armed with a constant lingering birthright that allows us to resist the colonial system in which we are engrossed.

Who would we be if we didn't have to fight every day for the very oxygen in our lungs?

© 2012 Deanna Rae "Getabiikwe" StandingCloud

PART IV



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Kissing Kokom

© 2012 Lana Whiskeyjack

The model is the photographer's aunt Alsena White from Saddle Lake Cree Nation, an Indian Residential School survivor. "Kissing Kokom" represents Cree grandmothers, especially those who survived the lack of love, affection and kindness in IRS, who can now give their grandchildren all the love and kisses that warms their little hearts, builds their sense of security, and blesses a future that no one can take away.

Etsi—My Mother

Beautiful, Strong, *Tsalagi*, Independent, Activist, and Motherly are the words I would use to describe my mother (*etsi*).

Confused, Depressed, Angry, Weak, *Unega*, Needy, Scared, and Abused are the words I would use to describe my mother (*etsi*).

She loved her children because they made her whole as a woman (*ageyv*); she disliked her children (*diniyotli*) because they stole her independence while at the same time we made her more dependent on men (*anisgaya*).

With my father (*edoda*) she found love (*gvgeyui*), but she pushed him away because the idea of settling down and having stability scared her too much... These were things she never knew as a child (*ayotli*).

With my stepfathers (*utihnaudoda*) she found love (*gvgeyui*) that hurt. They would abuse her verbally, mentally, and physically, but after the second (*taline*) stepfather (*utihnaudoda*) she learned how to hit back... These were the things she remembered growing up with.

By the time her nine (*sonela*) children were all grown she learned not to need a man (*anisgaya*). As a grandmother (*unilisi*) she found grace (*adadolisdi*). She was the most comfortable in her skin (*ganega*) that she had ever been. She became a storyteller and teacher (*dideyohvsgi*) to her grandchildren. She finally accepted being *tsalagi*.

The past; however, is not easily resolved. Her hard life (*vlenidohv*) caught up to her like it does with everyone (*nigadv*). At 41 she passed away, but she wasn't alone. Those lives (*alenidoa*) that she touched along the way carried (*awidvda*) her to the Creator. Her children (*diniyotli*) mourned for her, but her grandchildren mourned even more. *Etsi* was bold (*niganayesgvna*), resistant, defiant, a survivor, a teacher (*dideyohvsgi*), and (*ale*) *tsalagi*.

Donadagohvi (Let us see each other again)

© 2012 Mikhelle Lynn Ross-Mulkey

MIKHELLE LYNN ROSS-MULKEY (Tsalagi/Cherokee) is a devoted mother of eight children (Damon, Donovan, Drake, Diego, Decotah, Dylinn, Dylou, and Dylray) and has enjoyed married life for the past nine and a half years. She is also a PhD candidate at the University of Arizona in Tucson. She is completing her degree in American Indian Studies with a minor in Public Administration. Her dissertation research focuses on Cherokee leadership styles between women and men. She is an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation and plans to find work in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, after graduation. She received her B.S. in Ethnic Studies at Oregon State University and her M.A. in American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona. Her M.A. thesis focused on the Cherokee Phoenix (1828-1835).

“Acknowledgement to our PARENTS”

Sweet loving parents we are truly blessed. *Rose* us far away from what was once thought, a dreadful place. The place they identify as home, being the stl’atlimx nation.

Shield their five from being swept away by the government agent, to an appalling place so unspeakable and low.

Government believing to make our people civilized.

The harsh engrave teachings our parents were installed, had a slight unconscious generation affect.

Mom & dad, sharing their stories and making our hearts bleed with anguish. In their disclosure to us five has given, more of an understanding, “why.”

We are proud individuals that choose not to dwell, as in time we were uprooted to return to our land of First Nations that is truly a blissful place to grow, learn of our culture, language and beliefs.

Learning the value of the heritage preserved to teach and pass on the gift brought forth by our forefathers.

How we honor our mom and dad for this gesture of protection.

Our dad’s refinement for us with his prestige presents, we acknowledge and hold on to each moment with the magnitude of our heart.

The spirit of the most beautiful lady ascended to the graceful place known as heaven “*our sweet mom.*” *Who, we will forever cherish.*

We are blessed with the beautiful memories to reminisce.

Mom so sweet has shared and taught us from her experience and riches of knowledge.

Pains that must be released for we didn’t speak when we had our sweet mom within our arms reach.

With enormous love to mom and dad!

© 2012 L. Machell

L. MACHELL is an Aboriginal from the Stl’atlimx Nation. Her parents bore and raised her and her siblings in the United States to safeguard them from being taken away by the government agent to be placed into residential school. She and her family moved back to Canada, where they were introduced into their own culture and beliefs.

Machell is now a proud mother of two and a grandmother of one.

Machell is also a hand drummer and singer. Machell was inspired to write the story/poem “Acknowledgement to our Parents” from her heart, in the manner of speaking for herself and her four siblings, after they lost their mother, “*Rose*”.

Honouring where we come from: the importance of strong, proud parenting

I am Anishinabe (Ojibway) and Lenni Lenape (Delaware). My traditional name is Giim-Mah-Myengun-Kwe which means Head Chief Wolf Woman. I am a member of the wolf clan.

I was born and raised on the Munsee-Delaware Nation, a small rural First Nation in southwestern Ontario. My community is very small with just over 500 members total. My parents, 3 brothers and most of my extended family still live and work there. Despite my living and working in different cities, it will always be my home.

Growing up, my parents always had a strong commitment to their children. They raised my brothers and I to be proud of our identity and culture, to possess a strong work ethic, to pursue our education and to defy the stereotypes facing First Nations peoples, especially those on reserve. The pride and values they instilled in me fuelled me to succeed by becoming a lawyer at the age of 26 years old. I have never consumed any alcohol or drugs out of respect for my traditional teachings. I have worked and served my community as an elected leader and I have been named a National Aboriginal role model.

My parents were the largest contributors to my success. They gave me my identity by sharing our culture, our teachings and traditions. I first realized I wanted to become a lawyer when I was ten years old. I did not know any lawyers growing up. It is still a big accomplishment for the young people in my community to graduate high school and go on to obtain a post-secondary education. It was my parents who helped me realize our people not only survived years of struggle and oppression, but that we accomplished great things as well. They taught me that I came from a long, strong, proud legacy of great leaders and that the same fighting spirit is in me to carry on their legacy.

I know that many more of our children can and will achieve great success, if they have similar support and encouragement at home, in their community and from our Nations. My biggest hope for young Aboriginal people across Canada is that they know and believe that they can succeed. As parents, we are the first teachers our children have and we need to make sure they are born knowing that: they are strong, that they can succeed and that we are there to help and support them. An important part of this is that they succeed

while being proud of who they are, where they came from and while practicing their culture and traditions.

I feel strongly about two things: setting a positive example for First Nation youth and helping these youth realize their own potential and dreams. Speaking from experience, there are many obstacles they will have to confront including negativity, ignorance, racism, sexism, and many more. They can defy these and persevere. There are many successful Aboriginal people who have accomplished great things and with their help, our collective help, there will be many more in our future generations.

© 2012 Jodie-Lynn Waddilove

JODIE-LYNN WADDILOVE is an Anishnabe (Ojibway) and Lenni Lenape (Delaware) lawyer from the Munsee-Delaware Nation. In 1997, Jodie-Lynn was named as London's first "Young Woman of Distinction". In 1999, she received her Bachelor of Arts degree (B.A.) from the University of Western Ontario, and, in 2000, she obtained her Masters of Arts degree (M.A.) in International Criminology and Law from the University of Sheffield in England. During her studies in England, Jodie-Lynn was admitted to the Lincoln's Inn. In 2000, *Maclean's Magazine* named Jodie-Lynn as "One of Canada's Top 100 Under 30 to watch in the new millennium". In 2003, she obtained her Bachelors of Laws degree (LL.B.) from the University of Ottawa. She was called to the Ontario bar in 2004 and to the Alberta bar in 2006.

In 2004, Jodie-Lynn was elected as the youngest Councillor for her First Nation community – the Munsee-Delaware Nation. That same year, she served as Assistant Commission Counsel for the Ipperwash Inquiry.

In her spare time, Jodie-Lynn enjoys spending time with her husband, Joshua A. Corbiere (from Wikwemikong Unceded Nation), their son Bode, and extended family and friends.

I grew up wondering who gave me this face?

When you walked away, you left without a trace...
Someone came around, comforted me and gave me my place.
I was raised with love and laughter and full of grace...
At times I wondered what I had done? why did you let go of me?
You dropped my hand and just let me be...
My leaf had dropped from your family tree...
So much you missed, so much you could never see...
I now have a family of my own, I wanted you to know...
I nurtured them, and love them and watched them all grow...
I show them my heart and my soul that I bestow...
At times they can sense that I am hurting and that my spirits are low...
I have always wondered, on our last day, did you shed a tear...
And were you ashamed when people pointed and began to sneer...
In my teenage years, was I thought of? Did you sense that I was ever near?
Did you ever have dreams of where I was? and did you ever have any fears?
I thank you for giving me life, there could have been other choices to make...
I never once thought that I was a mistake...
I looked for you, while you were on your break...
My adoptive family never thought I was a fake...
You would be proud of the woman I've grown into...
I was loved so much, but somehow I think you always knew...
I bet you missed me at times you were blue...
I will always love you for making my dreams become true...

© 2012 Susan Smith Fedorko

SUSAN SMITH FEDORKO is a of the Minnesota Native/Grand Portage Chippewa tribe, an adoptee who was found by her biological family at the age of 40, grand-niece of MN Artist George Morrison, and daughter of the first Native American Supermodel Cathee Dahmen.

She is also an artist, advocate for adoptees' rights, and worked in the Federal Government. Susan currently lives in a northern suburb of Minneapolis, MN, as a wife of 30 years (married to Tim), and a mother to two beautiful girls. Susan recently published a book entitled *Cricket: Secret Child of a Sixties Supermodel*. More information on the book can be found at <http://outskirtspress.com/cricket>.

I dream of you...

Mom

I dream of you every day...

You are within my heart...

I smile and I feel I smile like you...

I stand and know that these are your legs

I turn my head, just as you did..

My hands hold the same way you held...

My nails are the same shape as yours...

My posture is your shadow on a sunny day...

I will never have the opportunity to meet you...

I will forever feel you though...

Your family has found me at last...

And they have told me you're in Heaven...

They told me you looked for me...

They told me you loved me

They told me I am just as you were...

I am your shadow on earth...

And you are my Sun

I will never get to touch you with these hands

Never get to walk next to you...

Never put my head on your shoulder

Never get to stand next to you...

But I am here, with your family now...

I am another version of you...

Your family loves me, as they did you...

I am so sorry we did not get to meet again...

We will be together again someday...

for now...

I am here with them, for you, for me...

I love you Mom

Love,

Cricket

© 2012 Susan Smith Fedorko

Mother's Love from Beyond

It was during a healing spiritual time,
I recall a few mystical moments of sublime.
Waiting outside the shaking tent
With eyes opened wide, gazing up towards heaven
I searched for my birth mother's spirit
amid the galaxy of glittering stars.
Shaking tent medicine man yells out to me.
Hurry, Hurry, Look down at your hand!
My mother's love swept through my entire being,
Pervading me, overwhelming me.
All the love I should have had
She gave to me from beyond
A lifetime of a mother's love.

© 2012 *Angela Ashawasegai*

Ogitchita Kwe

The beat of her heart
echoed and flowed
around me, a watery
blanket kept me secure
and safe
I wasn't alone, lost, cold
or hurt, and those things
were not yet a part of
my experience
There was only my need
to grow, strong, healthy
and complete
Nothing else was required
of asked of me. There were
no burdens or expectations
Just an echo that was
consistent, reliable
and reassuring
As I readied myself
for the long journey from
the start of this path of mine
I knew only one certainty
she would always love me
she would never be ashamed of me
she would never let me down
Ogitchita Kwe
My Mother
My Heart
My mother
was a Warrior
and her love
was her gift to me
Unending and
Unchanging
Is my mother's love

*Dedicated to Alanna Blackbird
1962-2012*

© 2012 *Samantha Elijah*

SAMANTHA ELIJAH is Aniishnabe Kwe from Kettle and Stony Point First Nations. Samantha comes from a long line of strong Aniishnabe women who were great mothers, healers and teachers. These roles as women, daughter & mother, give us the greatest teachings on love and living.



©2001 Tamara Pokrupa-Nahanni

Lost Connection

“Lost Connection” represents the artist’s relationship to her indigenous heritage and her mother. Tamara grew up far away from her indigenous community and relied on her mother to transfer the knowledge of her ancestors and keep her involved in the local native community. In the days prior to her mother’s death, Tamara had her mother record a speech in Slavey so that she could listen to it in years to come. This was a pinnacle because of its symbolic representation of strengthening the oral tradition, but also because her mother had not taught her the language (like many other parents who had endured strict rules at Residential School). The tape jammed during the recording stage, and unbeknownst to them, recorded nothing of the speech. The piece shows Tamara’s feelings following the realization that the tape was blank. *Lost Connections* includes a tape cassette with a sentimental label and its contents exposed. It also includes a snapshot of a mother tenderly caring for her child. It is meant to be closure; saddening but also an acceptance of the situation and thus empowering.

© 2001 Tamara Pokrupa-Nahanni

Dying By Her Past

She's often up in the night, afraid to be alone, unsettled in her sleep.

On bright sunny afternoons, with curtains closed, she'll sleep in the day,
with the T.V. playing on.

She is remembering a father who drank and believed she was not his, due to the fairness of her skin. She remembers a little girl whose fear was falling asleep, only to be awakened in the night, by a father who felt he could have his way with her.

She is an elder now, had children, married twice, ending in divorce and separation. Her memories are haunting her. Her children have felt the toxins. They have been mothers to her all their teen and adult lives.

She talks in bits and pieces, but the whole story is never told. The pain has gone so deep, trusting no one to ever to heal her. Her parents have long since gone, when alive, spoken of with disappointment. When they died, spoken of as saints.

She has not been able to be the best of whatever she could be. Self-esteem and self-worth were disintegrated as a child. And, I have met many such as her, dying by their past.

© 2012 Catherine McCarty

CATHERINE McCARTY is an Ojibway of mixed blood, from Nipissing First Nation in North Bay, Ontario. She has been working as a nurse since 1987. Her poems have been published by the former *Native Beat* newspaper, *Native Women in the Arts*, and the Poetry Institute of Canada, where she received an Award of Excellence in 2000-2001 for her poem *Our Grandmothers*.

Fire

for Catherine Kennedy, great-grandmother

Mé tis country wife
a hundred years away, ablaze

on a riverboat off Warren Landing,
you bore demands

of Catholic clerics, a French prospector,
and eleven of his children.

Only six survived

you. Incinerated
on a northern lake,

worth an inch in The Free Press,
not a word in my home.

At twelve, I knew, looking
at those brown girls hiding

at the back of history
class in The Pas,

bones aflame
cast light through

time: your eyes, this photograph,
my mirror.

© 2012 Lorri Neilsen Glenn

LORRI NEILSEN GLENN is the author of four collections of poetry, a memoir, and three collections of scholarly work. She has edited several anthologies, including the forthcoming *Untying the Apron: Daughters Remember Mothers of the 50s*, due out in 2013 with Guernica Editions. Former Halifax Poet Laureate, she lives and works in Nova Scotia.

The Journey into Death

You left
Taking me with you
I didn't know where I was
Wandering this world
Like the walking dead
Heart empty, spirit gone
Where was I?
Who was I?
Why?
Abandoned, heartbroken
Turned inside out
Creator was nowhere.
In an abyss of darkness,
I was never free.
The light was deceased.
Destitute and alone
Darkness closing in around me
Hell became my only friend
Death was my existence
One by one, you left
Until there was just me and the beast
I cried for you
My heart ached for you
To hold you again
See your beautiful eyes
And behold your radiance
I wake up
In a blink of a second
My life went numb
No hope, no love
Heart shattered
I was alone
The expansiveness of darkness
Filled up my spirit
Like tears, like rain
It poured out of me
Nothing
Where were you?

Why?
My love for you, your love for me
The expansiveness of light
Forgiveness
Compassion
Unconditional love
You saved my soul
I was hurtled
From the walking dead abyss
I went through it, not around it
Healing from the agony of losing you
I entered into the light
Embraced by your love
I love you sonny boy
I love you mom
I love you dad
I love you my sisters
I love you my brother.

© 2012 Tamara Starblanket

Comfort

I have been looking for comfort
From the loss of you
From the loss of myself
No understanding
Surrounded with no understanding
With no comprehension
What it feels like
To lose your connection
No understanding
About what it feels like
To be the only one standing
No mother, father, sisters, brother
Most fear the loss
Of their very own
Losing you my son
Turned me inside out
One by one
You left
Leaving me here
Amongst strangers
Finding comfort in the comfortless
Expecting understanding
When there is none
Perhaps this is my fate
To experience this loss
With others that are traumatized
Expecting love
When there is none to give
Loneliness and sorrow
Fills up my spirit from time to time
Will I ever heal?
I cannot be sure
Looking for comfort
From the loss of you
Somewhere I lost myself
only to find comfort in you.

© 2012 Tamara Starblanket

A Son's Love – A Mother's Love

One day you entered into my life
Beauty, Glory and Love
You chose me to be your mom
A being of light so pure
A child of creation
Creator called you home
You could not exist in this brimstone of hell
When you left, I left
Alive, but spiritless I remained
Taught not to grieve
Instead be a pillar of might
Like nothing could touch me
Or reach my light
A tree firmly rooted in the earth
Brought down to the far reaches of silt
Sinking into a deep well of darkness and sorrow
Brimstone of life, fading into cinders
Left to suffer and smolder in pain....
Born into this world alone
For it was not just one but six
I found myself before God
Just creation and myself
In a black pit of despair
I decided life was hollow
Taken through an eternity
I came back around
And chose life
You never left my side
Thank you for loving me like no other

© 2012 Tamara Starblanket

Unconditional Love and Forgiveness

A dedication to my late son, Kihiw Starblanket

You left suddenly
Leaving me in despair
Devastation
Took the place of love

Believing I deserved
Sorrow, trauma and grief
I entered into the dark
Lost without you

Guilt
Inability to forgive
Resentment
Bitterness became my hell

My Son Kihiw
With a purpose
You left me here
To face myself

I see now
As the light of the spirit world
Shines down on me
With your rays of love

You passed on
so that I could live
You left this world
So that I could see the truth

The truth of unconditional love
The reality of forgiveness
Not just toward humankind
But for myself
I can forgive myself

I can love myself
Unconditionally
Because you guided me

Toward Creator's love
Today as I bask in God's love
And feel the warmth of forgiveness
I realize you never left me, You never stopped loving
me.

TAMARA STARBLANKET NEYIHAW is from the Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation in Treaty 6 Territory. She is a mother of two beautiful sons and two grandchildren. She is presently in her final year of writing her Masters of Law on genocide and the forced transfer of Indigenous children. She acquired a B.A. with a major in political science from Simon Fraser University in 2001, graduated from the University of British Columbia in 2004 with a law degree. Tamara now resides in Vancouver and teaches criminology at the Native Education College. She has also been recently invited to be a part of a Committee of Genocide Scholars. Her interests are in further teaching, writing, and researching in the area of genocide.

On her submissions, Tamara says: "My submissions are based on my own personal loss of my family. From 1995 to 2004 the family I grew up with passed on due to the direct long-term impacts of genocide. My mother, father, two sisters and a brother passed on into the spirit world. In that time-frame, my youngest son also passed on. In March 2011, I entered into a coma, nearly losing my life, because of the traumatic loss. Today as part of my healing I write about the collective grief of Indigenous Peoples, my own personal grief and my understanding of genocide."

In A South Land Ach-Sah Koakotsalgi Comes to the Light

My brother, Menawa, comes to the light first. He presses past blood and water, vapor and warmth into the portal between living and life. While everybody in the Koakotsalgi and Selocta families turns 'bout crazy, hollering around out in the front porch, I take my time. I am careful about things even now and that must have been the start of it. My brother and I curve my mama's belly away from the lean line of her slender frame. Mama is only 16 years old at the time, which means my brother and I spend life hugged up kindly tight, in a small, dark space. I find my place behind him and stay. He breathes for us both as the doctor's stethoscope circles chilly rings around my mother's back and belly. His heartbeat masks mine. When we finally come to the light, his shadow alternately embraces and engulfs me.

So my daddy, a teenaged preacher who married early to avoid throwing dice with temptation, fornication and malnutrition, in no particular order, is shouting on account of my brother being his firstborn son. I get to miss my brother, especially since this womb becomes kindly airish without him. So, I decide to join all the fuss in the outside world and see what Creek Nation and this family is like.

I stretch my legs forward and get to marching, left-right-left. My legs and arms tear into tissues and bruise blood vessels. Finally, my right foot finds the kind of cold made out of air and fear. Every female relation I have gasps-all together, at the same time- like an unearthly, tribal choir.

"Scared every one of us 'bout to death," Great-Granny Selocta likes to tell. She never minds telling about how I entered the earth on account of how it all turns out.

"Here we was cleaning up after your brother and out came your lil' foot. Nobody even knew you was in there, Sister," Great-Granny shakes her head.

Well, I am in here and now I cannot get out. My other foot fails to find the first one, so I pull my right foot back in.

"Scared us right into acting," is how Great-Granny Selocta says it. "Pouring Clorox and gathering rags. Your poor mama was just a-hollerin'. Cryin' for Jesus, which ran right into the congratulation' out in front of the house and got lost underneath all the celebration' carryin' on out there."

Meanwhile, I am preparing to swim. I can either tear my way from this tunnel of blood or drown in the rising water surrounding me. Either follow my brother into the light or make this cavern of flesh into my casket. Disappear, then return as a ghost that fills gossip and inspires little children not to sleep without the lights. Only my brother would ever know for sure that I had ever been.

I draw my legs into the rest of my body. My arms flail up and down as my lungs fill. Again and again, I thrust my legs before me as I lift one arm against all the water and force it from me. As I bring down one arm, the other rises. Water swirls around my head.

I cartwheel.

Mama screams. My head and my arms find air. All that brightness makes me holler right along with her.

This, my daddy hears. He abandons his gleeful romping with his in-laws and his kinfolk to burst through the screen door and stomp into his bedroom.

"What in the Name of....?" Daddy starts to ask. As soon as he sets his eyes on my head and shoulders, he reaches out. My daddy made me in God's will and now, he delivers me into it. Great-Granny Secota cusses. Auntie Marina throws a sheet over my Mama. Nana falls out.

Mama dies.

Daddy holds me in both of his big hands.. Great-Granny takes up a spoon, holds it up to Mama's once-rosy mouth, now gone all slack and pale. She waits for a mist that does not come.

"I'm so sorry," she weeps.

Later on, folks will try to make this a miracle and give all the credit to Daddy, on account of him being a preacher and all. And maybe they should because Mama really was dead and gone and now she's not. But to hear Great-Granny Secota tell it, the miracle maker is me.

"Your daddy set you down on the bed beside your mama and laid his face down in the floor. None of us ladies could think of anything better to do so we got on down there too. Couldn't nobody pray. Too scared and sad all at the same time but we handed God our hearts and just laid there bawlin'"

Until I sing.

A Gift of Springs

Death rubs long legs together,
A symphony signaling famine,
A violin created with chitin and lard,
Promising lack in minor keys,
Preaching hunger while gnawing plenty.
A thick, black cloud, every insect for himself,
A wise man sees trouble and hides himself
In damp cellars of sorrow and pantries of grief.
The simple goes on and is destroyed
By loss and reservations in sharp succession
Until every man does what is right in his own eyes,
Which is almost, always, achingly wrong.
While the locusts laugh,
We fold our hands and eat our own flesh.
Opponents of death
Long for singers who know redemption's song.

"You just started cryin'," recalled Great-Granny Secota,
"and next thing we all knew, your Mama was cryin' too.
Water streamin' over her cheeks and over her hair and ears. And there you were, showin' off how you had lungs."

We never do know if Mama came back for Daddy or for me or for all of us, so we split the difference and give God the credit. Mama came back sad though, like she had been somewhere wondrous and I had interrupted her magnificent travels. But whenever my brother's shadow blocks my portion of the sun or my Daddy forgets that he has both a daughter and a son or folks at church tremble when I look their way for too long, I remember. Death turned tail and ran because of me.

Then, I start to sing.

© 2012 Dawn Karima Pettigrew

PART V



©2012 Nicole McGrath

Delegate to the Climate Change Conference

There were up to 10,000 people lined up that day. These three women sat down to eat, as many did throughout the day, while they waited to register. They each had a concerned look upon their face even as they ate, and seemed to be deep in thought about what they may encounter at this conference.

They were dressed in a very similar way. These three women had been given the role of delegate team by their community, to speak on its behalf at the conference.

This was the People's Conference on Climate Change, and the involvement of the Indigenous people of Bolivia throughout the conference tells us that communities came together to discuss what should be done there long before they attended. There is a folded newspaper sticking out of one of the women's baskets, suggesting they are keeping up to date on the events and sharing information with the others.

The women's knowledge, wisdom, efficacy and dedication in finding solutions for their communities and their descendants were a humbling lesson. I hope I have shown in the painting at least the concern, the quiet, self-empowered strength and the determination of these wise women.

© 2012 *Nicole McGrath*

NICOLE McGRATH lives in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve with her husband Robert Lovelace and their children Skye and River. They also have a nice old dog, two cats, and chickens. The other creatures who live there have adopted the family, who appreciates their company very much.

On her art, Nicole says: "I always thought I would paint forests, my favorite place. But it was remarkable people that inspired me to attend a portrait class, using oil for the first time. I wanted to "talk" about them through art. My favorite medium is oil on canvas, portraying those who have survived much, or built much, or fought much to protect what they believe in. I admire the people I paint, using colour to express their spirit, their generosity and determination."

giizhikaatig nibi

when i come home
after a long day
picking berries & plants—
odeminan
wiigwaas
namewaashk

strawberries
birchbark
mint

am filled, exhausted
from the heat & bright
sun of zhaawin & the
dragon, butter, & black flies
of odemin giizis. mosquitoes.

spirit in the south
strawberry, moon, june

i peel off the day, wash it
away with showering nibi,
ready to sink into the
evening, twilight, night

water

when i hear the back
door open & close

open & close

hear running nibi
in the kitchen, your
banging & clacking,
hear boiling, smell cedar

when you find me, take
me by the hand, undress me,
soothe my burnt face
with giizhikaatig nibi

cedar water

when your brown hands
quench my sunned skin
aching muscles, damp
hair with giizhikaatig nibi

when you satisfy your
thirst & heat with the
mashkiki on my skin,
when i taste your lips

medicine

© 2012 waaseyaa'sin christine sy

Cherish Her: A Message to my First Nation Brothers

Spoken-word poet Mark Gonzales once said that he understands how so many women "have a story that's been told to a maximum of one soul -- maybe less."

I agree with his sentiment entirely.

We are at a time of irony in the legacy of our People, in our history linking to our future, and within our First Nation communities.

In this time of irony (and what I can only describe as an era where too many of our indigenous men have become walking contradictions to the very cultural affinities that we claim to respect, protect, and place pride within), a step backward with open eyes would suggest to the very contrary as one examines the experiences and realities that too many of our Indigenous and First Nation women wake to on a daily basis.

Our Daughters, Granddaughters, Mothers, Sisters, and Friends.

Our women, whose legacies were traditionally respected as our life givers and strength in our communities for generations, are now (in great and significant numbers across Turtle Island) being pulled beneath a contrary and contradictory legacy at the hands of a number of our men. These all-too-common currents in our river of time are those of reprehensible domestic abuse (from physical, to verbal, and emotional and beyond), to assaults, rape, to our men stepping into the deplorable wake of 'The Deadbeat Dad.'

Spousal abuse and victimization in the family darken the picture, driving many of our women's pride downward.

I see too many of our women looking downward as they walk while their opinions, strength, concerns, and perspectives existent in our communities are hushed.

One thing is not "becoming crystal clear", it has become clear: too many of our indigenous men are not respecting our women.

Avoiding the assumption that there are not numerous indigenous men of character and conviction who adhere to our cultural foundations and who respect our women in our communities (as well as taking into account that there are countless of our women are fortunate not to experience such conduct or experiences in their lifetime) -- the reality exists that too many of our men have become walking contradictions while claiming to respect and protect our teachings.

Statistics demonstrate, in areas ranging from domestic violence to assault to the alarming rates of single mothers left in the wake of Deadbeat Dads, that we (First Nations) have many cycles to break, a dynamic legacy to maintain, examples to demonstrate, and many, many of our sisters, daughters, wives, and mothers to empower in alignment with the respect and reverence granted to them as our life-givers and the centre of our communities in our sacred and timeless teachings.

Until then, a sobering contradiction remains to be seen by our sisters who may feel the cold fists of abuse stemming from a body adorned with a shirt that reads 'Native Pride', a community meeting where the true strength in our community is hushed by adopted patriarchy and rigid colonial gender 'norms', and those who strip respect and dignity from our women within the home or community while rehashing spoken rhetoric about placing personal focus on "Seven Generations forward" at a faraway podium.

True, one cannot deny that our communities have inherited histories of multigenerational trauma through colonization, pluming forth many of the realities we see. This, nor the trickle down cause and influence across generations, should never be downplayed, minimized, or forgotten.

However, our personal responsibilities, individual choices, and collective conduct should (and must) overcome the afterglow while many seek to heal the breaks from past to present and carry our strengths into the future.

I believe that addressing these contradictions and empowering our teachings to address this lack of respect towards too many of our women, our life-givers, will equate to the healing of our communities.

To break the legacy of trauma and victimization in communities must begin with the "too-many" of our men breaking cycles in our own conduct.

Increasing the well-being and pride of our women will increase the messages of resiliency and strength adorned in the words they give to their children.

Strong women make strong families.

Strong families make strong communities.

Strong communities will re-create strong Nations.

Men, the longer our conduct and contradictions go unexamined, the longer we place the fundamentals of our culture onto the historical rungs of endangered vulnerability, creating a tragic disconnect between a sound history and a strong future.

I believe now is the time for our men to reflect, to examine, and to question our current attitudes, our current actions, our current way we speak to, and our conduct towards our women.

Do these things adhere and align with the fundamental and foundational teachings at the core of who we are, in the character of those that came before, and at the cultural heart of that which we claim such "Native Pride"?

I believe now is the time to come to terms with the well-being of the relationship we are building between our People and generations to come. This begins with the respect and the value we place on our women, aligned with our traditional teachings. As our women are our children's first teacher and leader; the message, the pride, and the character that our women give to the child is that which will be brought into, and spoken into, the world.

This message is one which will speak to all of us, in the future, as well.

And finally, I believe that;

Humbly but directly put, now is the time to come to the realization, to solidify this awareness, and to separate the rhetoric from true integrity of what is clearly and logically self-evident.

And that is...

One cannot respect the future, our future, or Seven Generations forward without truly respecting those that make the future, our future, and Seven Generations forward possible; our women.

Men...all indigenous women should feel respected, appreciated, beautiful, and valued.

And real men know how to treat women with value and respect; no question and no excuses.

In a very real way, our happiness and collective futures are greatly tied in with theirs.

Step it up, Fellas.

© 2012 Robert Animikii Horton

ROBERT ANIMIKII HORTON (“BEBAAWWEYAAZH”) is an Anishinaabe member of Rainy River First Nations (Manitou Rapids/Manidoo Baawitigong) from the Treaty 3 region of Ontario. Horton is a sociologist, social and political activist, contrarian writer, internationally-recognized orator, university instructor, advocate, and spoken-word poet.

An open letter of apology to my First Nation and Indigenous sisters (Excerpts)

This is a sincere and long-overdue apology to the Anishinaabekwe and to all indigenous and First Nation women.

[...]

But most importantly, I apologize for each of us who do not walk alongside our ancestors by living up to our cultural responsibilities as men -- by standing beside our women with nothing short of support, kindness, and love -- every day.

All in all -- for when we refuse to listen to our teachings and walk this road beside each of you in a good and respectful way, I am truly sorry.

*

So why am I taking the time to write this to you today? It is not only written out of respect and adoration of our women, but to acknowledge the voices that fall too silent when matters are as clear as crystal.

I can say that I have never, ever raised my voice to a woman, nor a hand, nor ever put down a partner in a relationship, nor have I ever stepped into the shoes of such a vile Abuser -- but I do know there have been times in the past were I could have shown our Ikwes and women more respect so very deserved, in different ways and at different times, often due to ego, pride, a lack of humility, not taking the time to step back and ask myself "is this respectful?" or due to an absolute disconnect from so much... and for that I apologize from the very bottom of my heart.

Fundamentally, I know now that it is not enough for one to simply apologize, nor is it enough to choose not to do these things.

Respect, kindness and fulfilling personal responsibilities to our Ikwes are only legitimate when we challenge those who continue the abuse.

And my Sisters, from this day forward, my commitments are to you and to challenging such matters that need to be challenged. I'm in it for the long-haul, wherever it may lead, and come what(ever) may.

I know I can do more. We all can.

And that is the very point at the heart of this apology and acknowledgement, but in no way does my acknowledgement and apology absolve men of their responsibilities and choices.

It is not written, by any means, in a way that perceives you (or any of our life-givers) as victims, but rather acknowledging you as dynamic and resilient survivors. Survivors who, far too often, experience realities that should not have to be experienced, at all, at the hands of far too many of our men who absolutely know better.

I also acknowledge countless of Ikwes who are fortunate enough not to face many of the things I've written. But even one is too many.

It is also written to find its way to our Men's eyes, as well.

It is inarguable that we have a lot to answer for.

Acknowledging that there are also countless of our men who are solid -- men of integrity and character who are kind and respectful to all of our women (Miigwech to each of these countless Brothers) -- there is still a cautioned, too-common, and often-overlooked third-option between the Abuser and the Respectful. That is the Complicit, those who may not raise their fists or voices, but who give those who do a safe harbour and an enabled disposition by our silence and approval by our non-involvement.

This is meant to be a mirror for all of us to see what and who we really are.

Are we Abusers?

Do we truly and fully respect and support our Sisters?

Or are we Complicit, who give Abusers unseen nods of approval by our language of silence with cues of non-involvement, as we claim to respect our Sisters -- claims that truly ring hollow?

It's not enough anymore for one or many to simply not do these things, as supporting our Ikwes is only legitimate when we challenge those who continue the abuse.

*

True we have inherited histories of multigenerational trauma through colonization, plumbing forth many of the realities we see. This, nor the trickle down cause-and-impact across generations, should ever be downplayed, minimized or forgotten.

However, our personal responsibilities, individual choices, and collective conduct should, can (and must) overcome the afterglow.

And I have a request for us all, men and women.

Above all, our definitions of kindness and respect must be redefined.

Men, it is no longer enough that we choose to never be abusers and to never disrespect our Sisters. Our kindness must reach further, to actively challenge those that abuse women in any way, who disrespect or devalue our Sisters and treat women as anything short of sacred.

My Sisters, is it enough at this point to simply exhale with relief when you've been fortunate not to experience these things -- or when you may have left abuse disappearing in the rear-view mirror? Or is kindness due for a redefinition through your eyes as it is ours -- a kindness when relief will only come when your Sisters are beyond the grip of abuse and devaluation?

The Abuse and Devaluation may not only come from our own men (who have a sacred responsibility to our life-givers and to each other - which is why our men are focus of this apology) and not only from our women (who, at times, also step into the role of The Abuser or the Complicit), but from any other person of any background or walk of life who seeks to abuse, devalue and harm.

Is respect itself due for a redefinition? A redefinition by both men and women so we respect and care enough about each other to challenge any abuse when we see it -- at any level, so we respect the teachings where all of these answers await us, and so we respect ourselves to not tolerate any love that hurts?

I think so.

Love is not supposed to hurt.

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Full text can be found at:

<http://rabble.ca/news/2012/07/open-letter-apology-my-first-nation-and-indigenous-sisters>

FACT SHEET: Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada's Unstated Paternity Policy/Procedure

Sometimes, honouring Indigenous mothers and the work that mothers do means doing work that is less than inspirational and creative. Regardless, although I am not a biological mother, I recognize someone has to be the voice for those who are too busy or too hurt to speak their truth. In continuing on with the cause of 'Unknown and Unstated Paternity and the Indian Act', I honour the work of Indigenous mothers of our nations.

- Between 1985 and 1999, 37,300 children of unknown and unstated paternity were born to women registered under section 6(1) of the Indian Act (Clatworthy). Section 6(1) mothers can pass on Indian status entitlement in their own right.
- Between 1985 and 1999, 13,000 children of unknown and unstated paternity were born to women registered under section 6(2) of the Indian Act (Clatworthy). Section 6(2) mothers cannot pass on Indian status entitlement in their own right.
- Since 1985, the Indian Act is silent on issue regarding children born out-of-wedlock, and therefore children born of unknown and unstated paternity.
- In 1985, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), now Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), established an unstated paternity policy/procedure whereby a non-Indian assumption is applied that all situations of unstated paternity. Mothers registered under section 6(2), thus unable to pass on Indian status entitlement in their own right, are at risk of losing status for their children.
- All situations of unknown paternity, which may include unrecognized paternity, unestablished paternity, unreported paternity, and unacknowledged paternity are subsumed under AANDC's unstated paternity policy, where again the assumption is that the paternity is non-Indian.
- Extrapolating from Clatworthy's figures, Gehl calculates that between 1985 and 2012 as many as 25,000 children have been denied Indian status registration, and thus their treaty rights that include health and education rights.
- The rates of unknown and unstated paternity are higher for younger mothers. Between 1985 and 1999, for subsection 6(1) mothers aged under 15 years, 45% of their children were of unstated paternity; mothers aged 15-19 years, 30% of their children were of unstated paternity; mothers aged 20-24 years, 19% of their children were of unstated paternity; and mothers 30-34 years, 12% of their children were of unstated paternity. It is not unreasonable to assume these figures also reflect 6(2) mothers (Mann).
- It is well known that Indigenous women, and young Indigenous women in particular, are at a higher risk of domestic abuse, and of sexualized violence such as stalking, rape, incest, sexual slavery, and sexual extortion where it is likely children are conceived and born.
- Given that women need to protect their children born through the colonial constructed reality of violence and rape; and further given that some women may not know the paternity of their child, and are thus unable to gain their signature on their child's birth registration form, the Indian Act and AANDC's policy/procedure serves to perpetuate the violence Indigenous women are exposed to, as well as contributes to the third world conditions that many of these women and children are forced to live under.

Enough is Enough!

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LYNN GEHL is an Algonquin Anishinaabe-kwe and her ancestors are from the Ottawa River Valley, Ontario. She has a doctorate in Indigenous Studies where her dissertation focus was an insider analysis of the Algonquin land claims and self-government process; she also holds a Master of Arts in Canadian and Native Studies where her thesis focused on the health and wellness implications of essentialized discourses of identity. While Lynn undertook an undergraduate degree in Social Cultural Anthropology, she became interested in the broader parameters of health and wellness. She also holds a community college diploma in Chemical Technology and has worked in the field of environmental science and protection for 12 years.

Lynn's primary focus and interest today is Anishinaabeg knowledge, their history, their traditions, and the teachings that lead to a good life for community peoples, in particular the Anishinaabeg.

“Invisible Activists”

With the words and faces of King and Goldman still stirring in the air
Have we forgotten our nearest voices in the struggle that too many share?
As the voices of Guevara, Malcolm, Parks, and Davis echo to our day
Do we strain our eyes to see the invisible activists who follow in their wake?
With the reminisce of Trudell, Stienem, Bellecourt, and Teters lighting serrated roads
Where are the vigils for those, standing strong, in the path of struggles bestowed?
Beside the legacies of Newton, Ingrid, Seale, and Anna Mae,
Of Chavez, Marcos, and Banks
There are voices in our day, so silenced
And so overdue of honor, vigil, and thanks.
Our single mothers, radical subversives to the uphill climb
Arthritic, hardworking hands embrace seven cents instead of a brother's wage-given dime
Higher learning, fatigued and yearning through the eighty hour week
Boycotting paths of least resistance and the silent household mystique
Speaking the words to build up her children to question the common road
Civil disobedience to a virile social code
A podium of irony between awaiting ears at night-time stories,
But hushed to the core at workplace noontime theme
Pressing time and breath fogging the glass ceiling above
But cleaning it away for her children to look up and dream
Have we forgotten the activists who truly make the time?
That struggle uphill and who keep the hope sublime?
Have we forgotten the leaders that lead us through and guide
With one set of footsteps, not two, which walk along our side?
Do we remember the reformer, the advocate, the militant, and her dream?
The revolutionary, the radical, the outspoken and her regime?
Do we remember all of these, all existent in her gaze
Before the everyday strikes and protests so we may see better days?
Through a single mother's eyes - our dreams; our lives may become.
Through an invisible activist's reach - we have overcome.

Dedicated to our single mothers in the struggle

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Honouring Indigenous Women

To honour Indigenous women is to believe in self. Although film and television is a hard profession to survive in as a female Indigenous Dine' filmmaker, I stick with it because I love it and I do know any other skill to work in, except to teach film or video, manage a film-video festival, assist or take care of animals such as cats at a shelter. I started out idealistic at 22 and I still am. Also, I am a Dine' filmmaker who takes still photographs, writes songs, poems, stories, sings/ plays the open mic and dances modern dance and jazz dance classes. Like the police department, the movie-television field is a male dominated heterosexual non Indigenous field. Because of this, since the mainstream North American film industry began, more so in Los Angeles than in Canada, especially in regards to Indigenous women, not many intelligent film narratives have been written about Indigenous people. I thought when I received my MFA from UCLA graduate film school in 1986, film-video would have at least changed the stereotype of Indigenous images, but not a great deal happened.

To be idealistic: what happens to a person as me who expresses ideas to people very blatant without sugar coating the truth. I realize now some of those times when I spoke so bluntly, I could have been physically hurt or even killed. Yes, the world is positive, but very little is positive. The world is corrupt in different ways. I live a contemporary life as a Dine' artist in a conservative world. My film-video aesthetics are not as traditional as most Indigenous filmmakers, artists and juries. Since I was 22 I have tried to improve the racism, sexism and misinformation of manipulated images created about Indigenous people and women by making films and videos about the Indigenous peoples. The alternative news and the left-wing hackers are the only sources who get it. I see through and distrust the makers of mainstream media, the studios, the critics and others. To make films and videos or to manage a cable television network, and internet network and to make and screen films-videos can create change among all people. Such a huge task to begin. Sometimes the emptiness of the Indigenous presence in the mainstream creates pessimism within me, but somehow out of this, ideas formulate: create a) a not-for-profit organization for low income and Indigenous Filmmakers b) an Indigenous Women Filmmakers' Conference. Once I sent a description and requested a critique of the Indigenous Women Filmmakers' conference idea to various Indigenous people. Most did not respond. Such a great disappointment from

my own people. What choice is left for a better life to hope for in the future, since the mainstream media walls dominate? It comes together slow. At least it is positive to try to change our frozen in time images of Indigenous people, especially of women. To try because I have to know. I know I can do it because I have organized other time consuming, complex film-video projects. This showed me I have to believe in myself to create this Indigenous Women Filmmakers' Conference. A person has to believe in her/his self. No one else will.

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ARLENE BOWMAN received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Still Photography in 1971 from the San Francisco Art Institute. When she moved to Los Angeles in 1977, the still photography interest changed into filmmaking. She obtained a Masters of Fine Arts in Film Production at University of California-Los Angeles in 1986.

Currently, Arlene promotes the "Illegal Anger" video (2011), a 4 minute song poem called "To Hope For" and "The Graffiti," an experimental drama she completed in 2010. She also performs open mic, sings, takes modern and jazz dance classes and continues to shoot still photographs.

In the future she aspires to produce-write a feature drama or docu-drama, make an animation, and create an Indigenous Woman Filmmakers' Conference and a non-profit organization for low income and Indigenous filmmakers. For more of Arlene's work, please visit her web site: <http://visualeye.wordpress.com>

“Male feminist”

As an Indigenous, First Nation, male activist, I am often asked what does being a “male feminist” mean to me?

It means equality rather than superiority by either side, in every context, and living the value of respect infused with that precious equality.

To me, it means being willing to open one’s eyes and heart to the fact which, in our age of purported civic integrity and opportunity, that massive inequality that exists between men and women and that much work must be done so our collective walk matches our collective talk.

To me, it means we all have a place in the sacred circle; men and women. Young and old.

To me, it means understanding that our personal, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual selves are both masculine and feminine, both leaders and nurturers, each rooted and grown skyward with strength and resiliency, not accepting sharpened extremes, but rather a million shades of grey in-between.

To me, it means holding the utmost respect towards Two-Spirited persons who stand strong among those million degrees of distinction.

To me, it means understanding that because respect that is endemic to our indigenous culture; abuse and superiority over women is incompatible with claims of “Native Pride.”

To me, it means acknowledging the history in which patriarchy and deplorably-imposed institutional religion have affected the respect, balance, and conduct towards women.

To me, it means not only holding this awareness within, but spreading awareness and working to deconstruct and dismantle such inequality in the short time we are given in our lives.

To me, it means understanding that, traditionally, if women were acknowledged as the center of our families and as our life-givers; and if our Nations still stand; women are the center of our Nations and the future of the same.

To me, it means understanding that before we can take to the streets as activists, step to the podium as orators, or imagine that we are progressives, agents of change, or if we are challenging the power structures of inequality in our society; we must examine if our own conduct, ideologies, and actions truly stand for that same equality in our own households, in our communities, and in our workplaces; with our sisters, mothers, daughters, partners, elders, and life givers (from any place, background, or heritage) in our own lives.

To our leaders: to our Brothers AND Sisters: May we “Walk our Talk” on every level – from our homes to our cause.

So, as an indigenous, First Nation, male activist, what does being a male feminist mean to me?

As an activist, this means, in a word, pure and simple: Integrity.

Lessons from a Suburban Garden

Ever since I can remember, trees have always been important to me. I love the wind in the leaves, the green and the rustling sounds. I have always felt at home amongst trees.

I remember at age eight, as I was walking home from school one day, I noticed a wild and overgrown garden. It was full of trees and shrubs and long uncut grass. It felt lush and alive. Each day I would stop in front of the garden peering in, getting lost in this world which seemed so alive, free and wild. This sensation felt alive inside of me too.

One day I met the person who lived in the house, an old man, and he invited me into the garden. I was so excited to be in there, no longer the outsider looking in. The only communication that we had was me telling him how much I loved the garden and how I felt right at home. He too, loved his garden and we equally enjoyed just being there. It was an unspoken knowing between us, old and young, in nature together.

I continued to visit each afternoon, always looking forward to being in the garden and appreciating its naturalness. It truly was heaven to me, a perfect place; a sanctuary. I was so happy to be there.

Not long after, as I was walking home one day, I saw that something terrible had happened to the garden. It had been completely destroyed. Stunned, I was totally devastated by this. There I stood looking at what had only a day before been a flourishing garden, in perfect balance, now totally annihilated and desolate. I wondered how people could have done this. It really perplexed me. How could this beautiful garden have been willfully destroyed, and turned into such a sterile place?

It felt as if I had lost a great friend. I never saw the man again. I presumed that he had died...and with him, his garden too. It was a devastating moment, as it was a great and irretrievable loss.

For a long time afterward, I felt rather disorientated because each time I went past the place where the garden once stood, I was forever hoping to see it had returned. Instead, I saw a plain, ugly front yard which now had a blanket of concrete and totally devoid of life. Infertile and barren.

Why can't people see the sacredness in the life of trees and plants? I cannot understand why some people do not feel their life and their goodness to us. I am truly ashamed of those who justify the destruction, exploitation and degradation of our mother earth. I would love to see a global change of consciousness so that we do respect nature, rather than seeing it as a commodity for our material ends and financial profits. I think that this is a war against the sacred and it is a big war.

The Indigenous women that I know have helped me understand the cultural and environmental wars that have been going on for them for a long time. They have helped me understand that they have been drawn into a battle for cultural survival against those who wish to profit by destroying land and life. Is this not a continued colonial mentality of domination and control? As life-givers and as custodians of the land, Indigenous woman know how important it is to care and protect the gifts of life from the creator and know that this is sacred.

Although the garden that I loved as a child was very small, for me it was a microcosm of a bigger picture where there are always forces that will avail themselves to destroy life without thinking about the impact that this has and it is sad to see wanton aggression and destruction. Ironically through the tragedy of losing the garden, it did awaken and confirm my sense of the sacred in nature and my desire to protect it.

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SIMONE NICHOL is a teacher, and a theatre director. She has always been an environmentalist, and loves collaborating on community-based arts projects.

Naandwedidaa (healing one another)

Namaa	S/he is praying
giiskonye	s/he is undressing
ngamo	s/he is singing
damna	s/he is playing
naadmaage	s/he is helping
keh twaa giizhgat	Special Day
niimi	s/he is dancing
maandaa	miraculously
bi-tkobnaan	come and animate
gtwe	despite everything do it
maamwi	together
niiganaasnok	morningstar (one that leads the light)
naandwedidaa	healing one another

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GREG MACDOUGALL is a member of IPSMO, the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa. More of his writings are online at www.EquitableEducation.ca



Honouring Our Bundle

The logo of the Honoring Indigenous Women's Campaign,
an Initiative of Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa,
designed by Metis Artist Jaime Koebel
(<http://www.jaimekoebel.com/>).

Honouring Our Bundle

Baby's Breath

From the whispers of children we are guided towards respecting the world that they will grow into.

Grass

One of the most hearty and common plants, it speaks to resiliency as a social, political and cultural staple for Indigenous women.

Mid-Section

Indicated within the centre of the flower is the sense of community facilitated by the Indigenous women surrounding it.

5 Petal Flower

Significant for the representation of Metis women; however, this five petal flower is non-traditional in that it can be used to represent all Indigenous women.

Sage/Prayer

Gender balance and connection to the universe through thoughtful prayer and communication.

Berries

Healing qualities in berries are an important medicine for cleansing and detoxifying. It is an important exercise for reflection

Vines

Making connections and networking contributes to the forward-thinking that creates strong ties between Indigenous communities and all people and cultures

A bundle is a sacred collection of items that may include plants and medicines that belong to an individual, a community or that are created for a particular issue. The items collected are done so in an honourable and genuine way. This bundle represents the genuine contributions from individuals and communities for the purpose of honouring Indigenous Women. When Indigenous women are supported and recognized, our communities and our nations flourish. Using this bundle in a good way imagines this value into reality.

Please visit www.ipsmo.org for more information about this campaign.