

Thank you

The idea for publishing this booklet came about in the summer of 2011. It was inspired by the many Indigenous women and their efforts to raise awareness on systemic violence and injustice, especially concerning the more than 600 missing and murdered Indigenous women. From attending the Women's World conference to walking from Vancouver, Coast Salish Territory to Ottawa, Algonquin Territory, these women continue to demand justice for our Indigenous sisters and relatives.

We would like to express our gratitude to all the contributors – Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and men from across Turtle Island and Abya Yala (aka South America) – for helping us in putting this booklet together in such a short time frame, particularly Suzanne K. Keptwo, Vera Wabegijig, Marcello Saavedra-Vargas, Brendon Mroz, Mixel Laquo, and Andy Crosby.

Kim Anderson	Jaime Koebel
Sandra Laronde	Simon Brascoupé
Sharon Syrette	David Groulx
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Dawn Dumont	Bridget Tolley
Cecelia LaPointe	Verna McGregor
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Jen Meunier	Marcello Saavedra-Vargas
Catherine McCarty	Sylvia Smith
Susan Heavens	Brigitte DePape
Craig Benjamin	Kristen Gilchrist
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Cover Artist: Susan Heavens, Fisher River Cree Nation

Graphic Designers: Brendon Mroz (trees) and Mixel Laquo (layout), Colin Daniels (leaves and birds), Jamie Koebel (flower), Simon Brascoupé (Deer Clan: The Power of Family and other paintings)

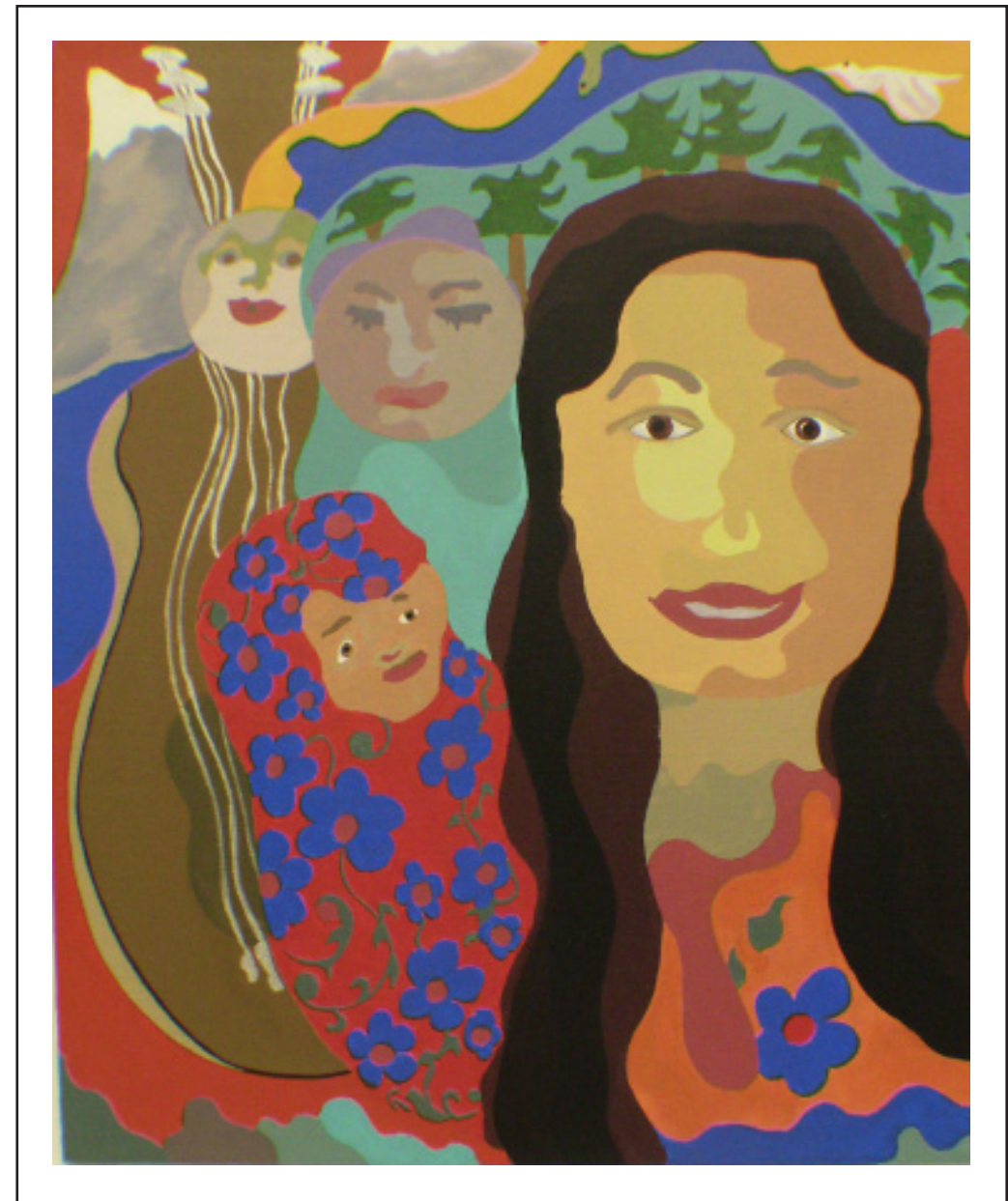
We would like to thank Patricia Monture-Angus and Taiaiake Alfred for their inspirational work.

We also would like to thank members of the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa for their support, advice and time.

We sincerely hope that this booklet inspires you to open your heart and connect to Indigenous women and Mother Earth, that we will work together to end violence against Indigenous women.

tân lâm tú vâ and wang pei-ju,
hard-working yellow warriors, for the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa
On unceded and unsundered Algonquin Territory, September 2011

Honouring Indigenous Women



Hearts of Nations - Vol.1

Action Groups

Amnesty International - Stolen Sisters Campaign

Since 2003, Amnesty International has worked alongside Indigenous women's organizations and other activists, first to draw attention to often ignored patterns of violence targeting Aboriginal women in Canada, and then to press for concrete, meaningful action by all levels of government.

Be a part of the Stolen Sisters campaign: http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters_overview.php

Families of Sisters in Spirit

FSIS is a volunteer grassroots non-profit organization led by families of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada with the support of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. FSIS was founded by Bridget Tolley, an Algonquin grandmother and activist from the Kitigan Zibi First Nation whose mother was killed by a Quebec provincial (SQ) police car in 2001, Beverley Jacobs, Mohawk grandmother from Grand-River Territory, whose cousin Tashina General, pregnant with her son Tucker, was murdered in 2008, and Kristen Gilchrist, a non-Aboriginal student and activist. Together we are working to end violence, challenge interconnected inequalities in Canadian society, and transform ourselves and the world around.

Learn more about FSIS: <http://on.fb.me/FamiliesOfSIS>

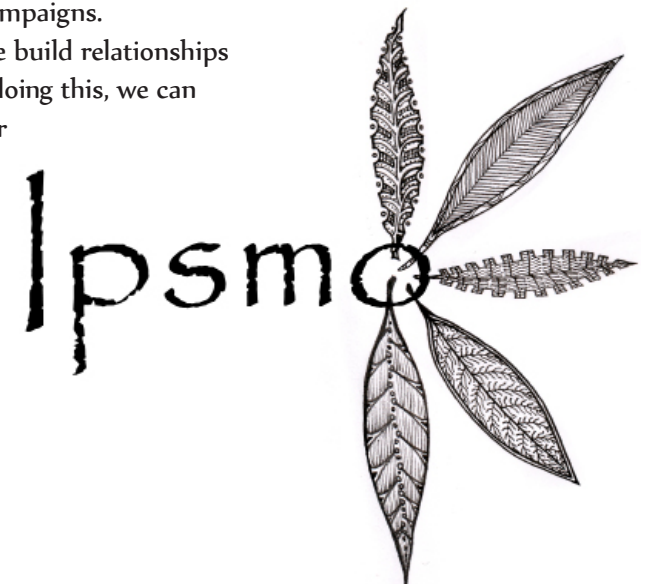
Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa

IPSMO is a grassroots organization that directly supports Indigenous peoples in diverse struggles for justice. We also work within communities to challenge the lies and half-truths about Indigenous peoples and colonization that dominate Canadian society. The organization is open to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and focuses on local and regional campaigns.

As we act in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, we build relationships where we can learn from Indigenous cultures. By doing this, we can further decolonize ourselves, and so learn to better challenge the racist and colonial ideas that dominate Canadian society.

We provide support to actions and campaigns for Indigenous sovereignty, self-determination, defence of the land, cultural revitalization, and the honouring of treaties and agreements.

Visit IPSMO: www.ipsmo.org



* Cover Artist: Susan Heavens, *Fisher River Cree Nation*

This painting is meant to evoke positive thoughts about Indigenous women. It is meant to dispel the dominant narrative that stereotypically depicts Indigenous women in a negative way. It is an attempt to restore the traditional model of Mother/Grandmother extending peace and happiness to her child/grandchild.

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Earth Tone

I am a woman of earth tones
no tropical fuscia for me,
I'm a woman, living alone
no, don't feel sorry for me.

I'm a woman of red and brown
no tiger striped marks on me,
I'm a woman, bare feet on ground
no, don't feel worried 'bout me.

I'm a woman of silver & turquoise
no gold or diamonds on me,
I'm a woman upholding a feather
no, please don't categorize me.

I am a woman of sunrise
no fragile, glass castles for me,
I am a woman: I am wise
no, never place judgement on me.

©Suzanne Keptwo



Teaching Song

Women are sacred at
all times
The eagle feather has
two sides
like life
follow the law of
the sky
Anishnawbe
Listen to your mother
the earth
Anishnawbe
that dance
like crows on deserted
highways



Jaime Koebel is Metis from Lac La Biche, Alberta. She is an artist, a performer, an educator and a public speaker. As a successful visual artist, she has been fortunate to have works that have been showcased world-wide and held in many prestigious personal and public galleries. Her art reflects fantastical plant life – all with a story! As a performance artist, She was a dancer with the well-known troupe, Jig on the Fly for five years until 2010 when she started a new dance group with her children called Jaime and the Jiglets. She also dances with the musical group, Fiddle Ground. Over the years, She has won many individual dance competitions in Canada and the United States. See her fantastic works on her website <http://www.JaimeKoebel.com/>

Cecelia R. LaPointe is an Anishinaabekwe of mixed heritage who strongly identifies with her Anishinaabe/Ojibway roots. Her work has appeared in the anthologies *Voice On the Water: Great Lakes Native America Now, Its All In Her Head*, and the planner *We'Moon 2012 – Chrysalis*. Additionally, Cecelia's poetry has appeared in online publications: *Native Literatures: Generations* and *Revista Ixchel*. She loves hiking in the Michigan forests, running, writing poetry and tea. She has a Master of Arts in Environmental Leadership from Naropa University and a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Wayne State University. You can read her poetry, writing, rants and ramblings on her website – www.Anishinaabekwe.com.

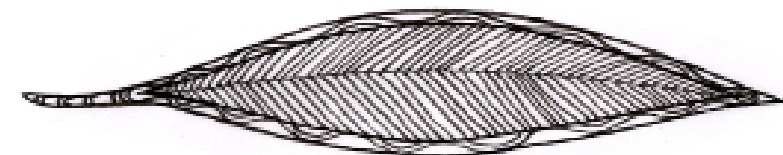
Catherine McCarty is an Ojibway of mixed blood, from Nipissing First Nation in North Bay, Ontario. She has been working as a nurse since 1987. Her poems have been published by the former *Native Beat* newspaper, *Native Women in the Arts*, and the Poetry Institute of Canada, where she received an Award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

Sandra J. Montour is a leader in holistic First Nations social work practice and is a highly skilled traditional First Nations therapist. Her inspirational commitment to recovery and healing from past traumas of Aboriginal peoples is widely recognized and admired. Montour has written a number of children's books, including the "Eagle Child Books" series, which focuses on sexual abuse prevention for children between age four and 12 as well as *The Return of the Travelling Star*, which focuses on healthy teenage relationships. A distinguished community leader, Montour is currently the Executive Director of Ganohkwasra Family Assault Support Services.

Sharon Syrette is Ojibwe from the Batchewana First Nation (Rankin Reserve) located near Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. She has been working for her community since 1979 as an office receptionist. She is a mother of three, James, Eugene and Melanie. Her life experiences are the inspiration for her poetry. She has now more than eighty poems in her collection. Her dream is to have her collection published in book form.

Vera Wabegijig is an Anishnaabe mother from the bear clan who writes for expression and to connect with the larger world. You can read her blog at: <http://verawaabegeeshig.wordpress.com/>.

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edited by Joel T. Maki, published by Douglas &
McIntyre, 1995. Reprinted with author's permission.



Biographies

Kim Anderson is a Cree/Métis writer and educator living in Guelph, Ontario. She is the author of *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* and *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings and Story Medicine*.

Simon Brascoupé (Algonquin/Mohawk/Tuscarora) is a member of Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation, Maniwaki, Quebec. His originals and prints are made by the traditional Aboriginal stencil (pochoir) technique. His knowledge of Aboriginal symbols, values and teachings are reflected in his work. Simon's artistic vision is to communicate traditional values and teachings through the continuity of imagery and narrative. Simon's work has been exhibited in Canada, the United States, Europe, China and Cuba. He is represented in the collections at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Simon Brascoupé is a Lecturer at Carleton University and an adjunct professor at both the Department of Native Studies at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario and at Carleton University. He has a BA and MA from New York's State University in Buffalo, where he is also completing his PhD. He has a strong interest in traditional knowledge and sustainable development. He has forged considerable research of Indigenous sustainable developments, and has been a lecturer, delegate, and an organizer in a number of national and international sustainable development conferences and symposia. Simon is a published author of numerous books and articles.

Dawn Dumont, a Cree and Métis comedian, is the co-host for the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network's (APTN) *Fish Out of Water*. In 2010, she was featured in the 2010 CBC Comedy Special – "Turtle Island Too". Dawn is also a comedy writer and has written for the stage, radio, film and television. She was a Writer and Story Editor for *By the Rapids*, an animated comedy series on APTN. Her comedy writing has also been featured on CBC Radio's *Definitely Not the Opera* and "Celebrate: The National Aboriginal Day Special". Her first book, *Nobody Cries at Bingo* was published in 2011.

David Groulx was raised in the Northern Ontario mining community of Elliot Lake. He is proud of his Aboriginal roots – his mother is Ojibwe Indian and his father French Canadian. After receiving his BA from Lakehead University where he won the Munro Poetry Prize. David studied creative writing at the En'owkin Centre in Penticton, B.C. where he won the Simon J Lucas Jr. Memorial Award for poetry. He has also studied at The University of Victoria Creative Writing Program. He has published numerous books of poetry including *Night in the Exude*, *The Long Dance*, *Under God's Pale Bones*, and *A Difficult Beauty*. *Rising A Distant Dawn*, and *Our Life Is Ceremony* are due out in the Spring of 2012. David's poetry has appeared in a 116 publications in England, Australia, Germany, Austria, Turkey, New Zealand and the USA. He lives in a log home near Ottawa, Canada.

Suzanne Keptwo is Métis from Quebec of Irish, French and Algonquin heritage. She is the proud mother of two children. Formerly a teacher of Native Studies, Suzanne pursues independent work as a writer, editor, public speaker, consultant and facilitator of Aboriginal Awareness & Cultural Sensitivity training. She is also a contributing journalist for *Anishinabek News* and writes poetry to help process the world around her.

An advocate for Aboriginal rights, Suzanne has contributed to various councils, committees and boards throughout the region; her work includes co-developing Aboriginal education policies, anti-racism documents, and Traditional Healing Justice programs.

Introduction

A teaching from our elders that says you have to know your history.
You have to know what is behind you in order to know where you are going.
If you do not understand that history,
you cannot ever have any vision about where it is you want to go.

– Patricia Monture-Angus,
from *Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks* (1995: p.134)

Honouring Indigenous Women: Hearts of Nations is part of our ongoing efforts to support Indigenous women on Turtle Island (aka North America) and their struggle for liberation. We, the Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa, acknowledge our shared history of colonization with all Indigenous peoples and the various forms of violence against them, particularly against Indigenous women. We further acknowledge the tremendous strength of Indigenous women in reclaiming their distinct roles and responsibilities in our societies, and the crucial roles they play in the survival and evolution of our species.

This publication consists of five sections: Struggle, Resistance, Power, Liberation, and *Be Solidarity*. In each section, we strive to use different forms of creative expressions, mostly from Indigenous women, to draw attention to their lived realities. We acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous cultures and the multitude of gifted Indigenous women who have publicly expressed their experiences through various art forms. The work included here is a mere glimpse and cannot fully represent the voices of all Indigenous women.

Through this publication, we aim to augment the voices of Indigenous women in one of many efforts to break the silence surrounding the systemic violence perpetuated by colonialism. It is an act of solidarity, meant to encourage other acts of solidarity while building bridges between diverse communities and providing education to the dominant culture and recent newcomers about the genocide of Indigenous nations.

In Struggle and Solidarity,
Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement Ottawa
On unceded and unsurrendered Algonquin Territory, September 2011

STRUGGLE

Racism is an essential by-product of colonialism.

– Lee Maracle,
from *I am Woman* (1996: p.67)

The graphic of this tree is to be looked at as a whole. Separately, its roots, trunk and branches mean little. Together, they draw attention to the interconnectivity between the roots, manifestation (trunk), and consequences (branches) of oppression. The systemic violence carried out through the trunk – governmental policies and programs, legislation, and the “justice” system – has facilitated the genocide and femicide of Indigenous nations, including the growing numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women.

A Cheyenne proverb says:

“A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground.
Then it is done, no matter how brave its warriors nor how strong their weapons.”

The use of a tree to depict the violence against Indigenous women is a conscious choice. The tree evokes the body of a woman, her hair intertwined with the branches and her feet deeply connected to Mother Earth. When the Earth and women, both givers of life, are poisoned, the ensuing trail of destruction leaks into all aspects of life and affects every living being. The branches give us a glimpse of the consequences perpetrated by historical and ongoing colonialism. By invoking the image of the tree, we hope to provoke a sense of urgency in taking responsibility to end all forms of violence against Indigenous women.



Our Elders tell us that a Nation is not defeated until the Hearts of the Women are on the ground. Ojibway Elder Art Solomon used to always tell Mary Lou and I that Cheyenne Quotation. So, we believe strongly in what you're doing. We support it wholeheartedly. My only thoughts are that our Elders tell us that we must know where we come from, in order to know where we are going. So, it's important for us, as men, to know our history. We should know that our ancestors used to always have a central teaching: that the men's role was to take care of the woman; and that the women's role was to take care of the man; and that both the men and women's role was to take care of the children. That is how we try to live. So, we were role-modelled this behaviour by several Elder-couples who showed us how to respect one another. In our teachings, the Clan Mother would watch the young boys and see how they treated their siblings, how they treated their mother and father, their Grandma and Grandpa, along with their extended family. And so the Clan Mother would see how he related to women, and how he showed sacred respect to her, as the giver of life. If he was respectful in all of his responsibilities, relationship and affairs with women, then, he would be regarded as a candidate for “royaner” or Chieftainship of the Clan and Nation. So, this is how our Chiefs were selected. They were selected by a woman, a Clan mother, who had this role and responsibility to ensure her Clan and her Nation were well represented by a Man who takes care of his clan family. So, this is where we have come from. Where the men had roles and responsibilities and the women had roles and responsibilities. This was a “gender equity” for lack of a better term. I can only think in academic terms, and will come up with a word from the language, that better describes our society.

Today, we have absorbed a negative learned behaviour, in the way we treat women today. We regard them in the same way that western Civilization, the Europeans did when they came to Turtle Island. They came with violence and they wanted our land and all the resources of the land. They didn't listen to us, when we told them that there was enough land to go around for everyone, and for future generations. So, we negotiated Treaties with the settlers on how we were going to “treat” one another. So, following this, the treaties were broken by a dishonourable Crown and a dishonourable Country of Canada. We always kept and honoured our side of the Treaty which said we would share our land and the Settlers would remain “unmolested unto perpetuity.”

Women have become commodified and they are treated with violence. This is the way the European mindset was, when they arrived on Turtle Island.

So, for us to work in solidarity with Indigenous Women is to reclaim our roles and responsibilities which was the gender equity that we used to exhibit, as a way of life. So, we find ourselves wanting to bring history forward by restoring Indigenous Women back to their roles and responsibilities in our communities, families, clans and Nations. Even in our agencies, schools, institutions et al.

– Dan Smoke, Seneca Nation

Is lighting a candle at the vigil for Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women
Is marching together at the G20
Is listening to the creation story of Turtle Island around the campfire
Is picketing against Urbandale's plan to clear-cut forests on Algonquin Land
Is cooking for Indigenous Sovereignty week
Is insisting that there be Indigenous speakers on an all-white panel
Is the only way forward

Solidarity is not a thing, it is a relationship. I am continuously learning how I can be/work in solidarity with my peers. Thank you to patient teachers.

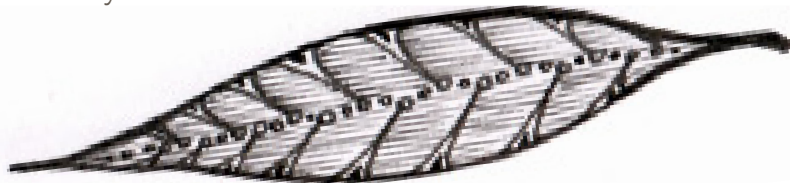
Like friendship, solidarity is a commitment – to just relations. At its core, solidarity is friendship, the truest kind - friendship for justice. – Brigitte DePape

Because Aboriginal women continue to pay a disproportionately high price for the legacy of colonization, I prioritize working in solidarity with Aboriginal women, respecting their leadership and supporting their concerns and issues. - Leighann Burns

Speaking out against the violence faced by Indigenous women is more than an act of solidarity. It's about taking responsibility for ending the injustice and discrimination in our society that has put Indigenous women at risk and denied justice to their families.
– Craig Benjamin

Being in solidarity with indigenous women... Well, as far as I am concerned I am the direct result of the magical process of indigenous women's creation power and nature. Not only by cosmically combining all four sacred elements or blessings from our True Mother (Pacha Mama) into this frail body I got, but more importantly, because my spirit also delves in the tranquil and pristine womb of my True Mother. Indigenous women are the ones closest to the mysterious resonance of Pacha Mama's innumerable rhythm and cadence. The real mission of my spirit (or any spirit) is conforming to that subtle yet all-pervading beating/breathing/giving-birth force of my True Mother, as expressed by the particular cycles of the female force field in my life.

The least we can do as males, in terms of thought, feelings and actions is forcefully show our true natures by bringing down the long nightmare of patriarchy. Solidarity must be exercised in these three realms with courage and humility if we are authentic in our respect to indigenous women.
– Marcelo Saavedra-Vargas, Quechua Aymara



The Token Indian

What is this you are asking of me?
Help you to understand, help you to see?
Does your curiosity wish to be satisfied
Are you sincere, or have you lied?

I am proud to be Native with culture galore.
No, our men not all drunks and our women all whores
I have been taught to be patient and always have hope.
No, our children not all addicted to dope.

If you think before you speak, I think you will find
Your ignorance is rude and not very kind.
I am not very good at this game that you play
You put me down to feel superior by the fancy words you say.
This simple woman has been taught to be honest and sincere
And not willingly intimidate others and cause them fear.

If you look and listen closely you will be able to see
The strong cultural values my grandmother invested in me
For I am no different than you in many ways.
“Respect free human beings” I believe is the phrase.

Remember when we were once the many and you were the few?

And we helped you to survive because we chose to?
While your hair was so different and your skin quite pale,
Still, we gave you the respect any human entails.

Now centuries later, I ask that you do the same for me
Do not stereotype and label as you think I should be.
Yes, the history of my people holds much pain which you see.
But I challenge you, look deeper: ask, what could the cause be?

You seem to only know the social problems of our race.
Do you have the courage to discover where the causes are traced?
Do you see the reservations that separate you and me?
Do you see its control, segregation and imprisonment, can you see?

And yes, let's look at the drug and alcohol abuse
that rope has already taken so many of us away.
"But those savages had to be civilized" the dominant way
And the many who just could not fit your world and died
Are now but statistics of cultural genocide

So please do not laugh at the way that I speak
and certainly don't ask questions if it's lies that you seek
For I will tell you the truth as I know it, it's simple but true
You've hurt more than helped, much more than you meant to
So I will play your token Indian, but be prepared to hear
Your questions and your ignorance just might uncover your fear.

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Being in solidarity with Indigenous women (peoples) is, fundamentally, a healing process that provides an opportunity to restore balance within ourselves, our families, our communities, and other living beings. The liberation of Indigenous women is tied to each and every one of us and our liberation is tied to theirs. We share the same objective: to dismantle the colonial structure and replace it with a world where our relationships with each other are based on love, equity, and mutual respect.

Solidarity is a personal and societal act of justice and the greatest expression of friendship, peace, and respect with a common understanding of the true history of the land.

Because we cannot speak for others, we asked several Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and men to share their thoughts on what being in solidarity with Indigenous women means to them. All of them have been active in working towards ending violence against Indigenous women. Their words inspire us, motivate us and give us strength to reflect in our solidarity work, so that we can continue our efforts towards ending all forms of violence. We hope they will do the same for you.



To be in solidarity with Indigenous women is to provide space and active support that honors First Nations, Inuit and Métis women's traditions and voices. It is critical that Canadians recognize and eradicate the continued oppressive, sexist, racist policies and legislation which only continue to perpetuate power imbalances and domination over Indigenous women's lives! – Anemki Wedom, Secwepemc Nation

THE WOMEN EMERGING are the hearts of the nation. – Megisi-turtle Mountain Ojibway.
Quote selected by Cecelia LaPointe, Anishinaabe/Ojibway Nations

Let us celebrate that we, as Aboriginal women, have been able to live on into the next millennium, due to the perseverance of our Grandmothers. They understood and accepted consequences, and still continued to pass on traditions to ensure the future of our birth rights and culture. – Catherine McCarty, Ojibway Nation

Knowing that my health and well-being and that of my children and their children, ultimately depends on the sovereignty, of all Indigenous women. – Sylvia Smith, grand-daughter of uninvited guests to Treaty 6 area

Be Solidarity

Eventual peaceful coexistence demands a decolonization process in which Onkwehonwe [original peoples] will be extricated from, not further entrenched within, the values, cultures and practices of liberal democracy. If the goals of decolonization are justice and peace, then the process to achieve these goals must reflect a basic covenant on the part of both Onkwehonwe and Settlers to honour each others' existences. This honouring cannot happen when one partner in the relationship is asked to sacrifice their heritage and identity in exchange for peace.

– Taiaiake Alfred,

from *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2005: p.156)

We HAVE voice - you NEED to listen. We HAVE space - and you're in it!

– Laura Holland, Aboriginal Women's Action Network

Solidarity takes various shapes and forms but it usually begins with listening. Listening to the Indigenous women who, for over 500 years, have been stripped of the crucial roles and responsibilities they held for their nations. Listening to their stories of survival, struggle and resistance. Once their stories are understood, the violence is so clear that it cannot be neglected.

Solidarity involves changing from within and shifting our perceptions of Indigenous women. It is opening our eyes to their lived realities and understanding that the systemic violence they have faced through governmental policies and legislation has created a hierarchical system of power and privilege. It is recognizing our complacency, knowingly or inadvertently, in confining Indigenous peoples to stereotypes, in silencing them, and in furthering their oppressions. It is knowing that the wealth of Canadian society has been built on Indigenous lands, by the forced displacement of entire communities, and the exploitation of what are commonly known as natural resources. It involves understanding that racism, sexism, and societal classism are undercurrents of historical and contemporary colonization. It further involves recognizing the roots of oppression, decolonizing ourselves, and collectively rejecting the divisions created by colonial violence. One concrete way to do this is by taking direction from Indigenous women and rejecting the notion that we know what is best for them.

Solidarity, from a non-Indigenous perspective, can be expressed by using our positions of power and privilege to ensure that we are not stepping in Indigenous women's spaces, that we are no longer silencing them. It could be, for example, taking part in, or organizing workshops and demonstrations centering on the struggle of Indigenous women, standing with Indigenous peoples at blockades to protect the land and their traditional ways of life, or educating ourselves and others about Indigenous women through their own voices, as expressed in this booklet.

Good Stories

One night dad kicked mom
left a gash in her leg,
she didn't make a sound
just looked up in surprise
I was in my room
trying to think about good things
my sisters cried and screamed
I ran from my room
I didn't see the kick
but saw the blood pour
from her leg thru her jeans.
We left that night as he slept
went to my auntie's house.
My mom drove - I never asked
if her leg still hurt.
She and auntie talked all night
I lay on the floor and listened
to them whisper,
my mom about my dad
my auntie 'bout her man
Mom said she would leave him
Auntie said she would leave Sam
I remembered hearing that before.
I guess I fell asleep
Tho' my belly felt like something
was biting from inside
and I couldn't find a story
to make my dreams real good.
We woke early and got dressed
in yesterdays' clothes
and grabbed our lunch and books
Mom dropped us off at school.
my friends gave knowing looks.
My teacher asked
why my homework wasn't done
and I sat there in my silence
making up good stories
and played them in my head.

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We are taught to keep silence.

we are taught to keep silence.

we were taught to keep silence when the priests came at night in the rows of beds,

we were taught to keep silence.

we were taught to keep silence when we spoke our own words, nmoshim, g'zaagin,

we were taught to keep silence.

we were taught to keep silence when our fathers began drinking away the pain, through pain,

we were taught to keep silence.

we were taught to keep silence when our mothers kept silence,

we were taught to keep silence.

we were taught to keep silence when the cops beat us down in alleys, in camera-less cells,

we were taught to keep silence.

we were taught to keep silence when our spiritual leaders chastised our womanhood,

we were taught to keep silence.

we were taught to keep silence when our political leaders silenced our voices,

we were taught to keep silence.

we were taught to keep silence when speaking out against men's violence meant more violence,

we were taught to keep silence because it could mean death to us, to our babies.

threatened with death by our own brothers, raped, shot and killed by our own brothers,

we were taught to keep silence.

we have been sisters in a spirit of shame and fear, a silenced sisterhood. the brotherhood's lesson:

we were taught to keep silence.

But as I speak, she speaks. As she speaks, they speak. As they speak, we speak, setting the pace on your mark get set... And our voices are running through the land, running down the streets, running into rooms and out of rooms and through locked doors and prison walls and institutions and running through the maze of tangled lives and running into each other and running together and this was a man's dream about a woman, but it has showed this woman that we must not wait to be led and to follow: we must run hard and fast in the paths set for us by our grandmothers, mothers, aunties and daughters, and they who will follow will follow or be left behind.

All you brothers, run for us, run following us, run with us!

All you lovers, run for us, run following us, run with us!

All you sons, run for us, run following us, run with us!

All you fathers, run for us, run following us, run with us!

All you grandfathers, run for us, run following us, run with us!

This poem is dedicated to Anna Mae Pictou Aquash

©Anishinabe Kaawin-Zhoonya

Oh, how I thank you my elders

You have long since gone from this great land

Without your struggle, we would have lost the strength

And, now I can only speak to you in spirit

I hear it calling to me all the time

I believe you're telling me to return to the ways of Mother Earth

It's time to go home, Nooshenh, the spirit is calling

This year – 1993 being the International Year of Indigenous People, I want to dedicate to all the ELDERS of the First Nations people both past and present to give them the honour and remembrance they deserve.

Native people have always given thanks to the Great Spirit for all that he provided. Whatever they took from the earth, they gave back to the earth. All they had to do was look out at creation and they knew there was something greater than themselves.

He has always been here – THE GREAT CREATOR.

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©Simon Brascoupé (Algonquin Birchbark Basket Design: Make Your Path)

Resistance

We've been status and non-status
We've been reserved and suppressed
We've been enfranchised and converted
We've been incarcerated and paroled
We've been oppressed and exploited
We've been sterilized and confiscated
We've signed treaty after treaty
We've been separated and relocated
We've been massacred and faced genocide
And, still they fight us for the little that is left of Mother Earth

Oh, how I mourn for you my elders
You were never given a fair chance at any thing
You couldn't write, or read, or speak the white tongue
You gave them your promises by your great words
And, still they feared you
Your traditions seen as enemies of power
You were calm and caring, loving and sharing
You were their scouts and guides to this Turtle Island they claimed -- DISCOVERED!
You welcomed them with open arms and intrigue
And, still they thought you to be savage and an inferior people

Oh, how I love you my elders
Your spirits live on in your people
We hear you calling and we're coming home
The drum is once again beating the heart beat of Mother Earth
They're singing your songs of honour
Your children are dancing the ways of the old ones
The sweetgrass is burning
Your circles are growing bigger
Your languages and teachings are returning
We've educated and escalated to where our white brothers now stand today
They want our medicines and midwives back
And, now they must listen to your GREAT WORDS of YESTERDAY

Oh, how I want them to pay for what they've done to you my elders
But, it is not your way, or the ways you held strong to us
Keep your spirit coming and give to us the guidance and strength for the long, hard road ahead
Your fight is still going on, slowly we are winning, but the end is nowhere to be seen
Help us save Mother Earth, so our children can remember that there was blue skies, green grass,
sparkling water and warmth to the land

Aboriginal people are the only people in the world for whom killing was a sport and became a children's game: Cowboys and Indians...the foundation of murder in this country still marks us. No one plays cowboys and Blacks, cowboys and Asians, cowboys and Irish, though for sure, all suffered at the hands of the same colonizer.

The murder of Indigenous women is an indication that the killing has never ended. We are utterly absent in the history books, at school, on the street, except as victims of violent crime. I was doing a film last summer and one of the persons working with the producer had a friend in the back yard where the shoot was taking place. After meeting me she said "You don't look Aboriginal – you are beautiful". I asked if that meant Aboriginals were ugly. She blushed. After a few minutes of blustering she apologized. This is the support for the killing, people who do not see our value, do not recognize our beauty and do not much care that the words they blurt out are hurtful. We must find a way through our actions, not just to protest our murder, but to open the hearts of Canadian Women and encourage them to care.

– Lee Maracle, Stoh:lo Nation



©Simon Brascoupé (The Tree of Trees: Good Medicine, Resistance and Power)

Our Grandmothers

They spoke of tribes no one has ever heard about
Sang songs people said made no sense
Celebrated in ceremonies that were desecrated
Held on to traditions and prophecies, politicians won't ever understand
Brought back what was destroyed and told it never existed

When speaking of truth, were alienated
Stood up for themselves, then threatened
Refused to change their name and given a number
Grew their hair long and forced to cut it

Spoke their own language and were beaten
Died unknowingly, and told they had it coming
Wanted freedom, but needed authorization
Crossed the line and were persecuted

They've seen their brother's scalps in museums
Sacred belongings and clothing at auctions
Continued to dance and dress from their days
And saw their designs bring profit your way

They've watched society make wealth from their land and resources
Honoured all treaties and saw them diminish
Asked for self government and new constitutions were written
And have a Great Law that has been ignored

They are all my relations, the countless gone, but never forgotten
The life lines of our people you met centuries ago
A nation that endured, the proud women, you called "Indians"

The Spirit is Calling

Oh, how I long for the old ones
How I wish I could see their faces
Those beautiful, strong and proud faces
Their beautiful skin and long braided hair
To live when they lived,
To learn the ways they held sacred

Oh, how I yearn to see the dreams they dreamed
And hope that some day they will all come true
They were always right, oh yes, they were
They knew change was coming, an uncontrollable and unfortunate change
They spoke of it for 500 years
Now, the ones who took it all away, want their knowledge and guidance again

Oh, how my heart aches inside from what I have seen done to you my elders
What centuries have tried to eliminate, but never quite succeeded
You spoke of the Great Creator and our spiritual connectedness with Mother Earth –
TO NEVER LET IT DIE!

Oh, how I admire you my elders for your courage and strength, in those harsh and cruel times
Times when society was crushing you, murdering you, and devastating the culture and spirituality of our people
Oh, how they wanted us to vanish and never be remembered
But, I still hear your spirits calling

Oh, how I have missed you my elders
Come back to us soon, the spirit is calling
They never broke your spirit
And it's alive, oh yes, it's ALIVE!
Something white man and money could never buy

Oh, how I feel lost without you my elders
I'm confused because we've been so used, and terribly abused
I see what the results of bettering our people have done
We walk with one foot in both worlds
We've been assimilated and displaced
Our lands claimed, reclaimed and cautioned
And given what whites have no use for

©Catherine McCarty

Catherine McCarty received an Award of Excellence in the 2000/2001 Canadian National Poetry Contest from the Poetry Institute of Canada for this poem. Reprinted from Sky Woman: Indigenous Women Who Have Shaped, Moved, or Inspired Us, edited by Sandra Laronde, published by Theytus Books, 2005, this poem was first published in the former Native Beat newspaper. Reprinted with author's permission.

And If We Cry

If we cry,
We are not weak,
We are healing,

If we cry,
We are not powerless,
We are learning our power,

If we cry,
We are not silent,
We are speaking through our tears,

If we cry,
We are not beaten down,
But rising up,

For it was not long ago,
When our tears,
Fell to the Earth in silence,
The Earth listened,

Our tears turned inward,
A violent rage,
An unnecessary oppression,
Internalized oppression,
Onto ourselves,
Families,
Communities,

Overflowing onto our reservations,
Trickling down the street,
Into the forest,
This isn't right,

In city streets,
Urban areas,
We fight with other races,
We become even more invisible,
Because we were supposed to be dead,
Annihilated,

To be "normal," in suburban towns,
Looks like we are picture perfect,
White middle class,
Reaping the benefits of white culture,
Turning inward,

Outward,
We are outcasts,
The fire inside,
The fire inside our homes,

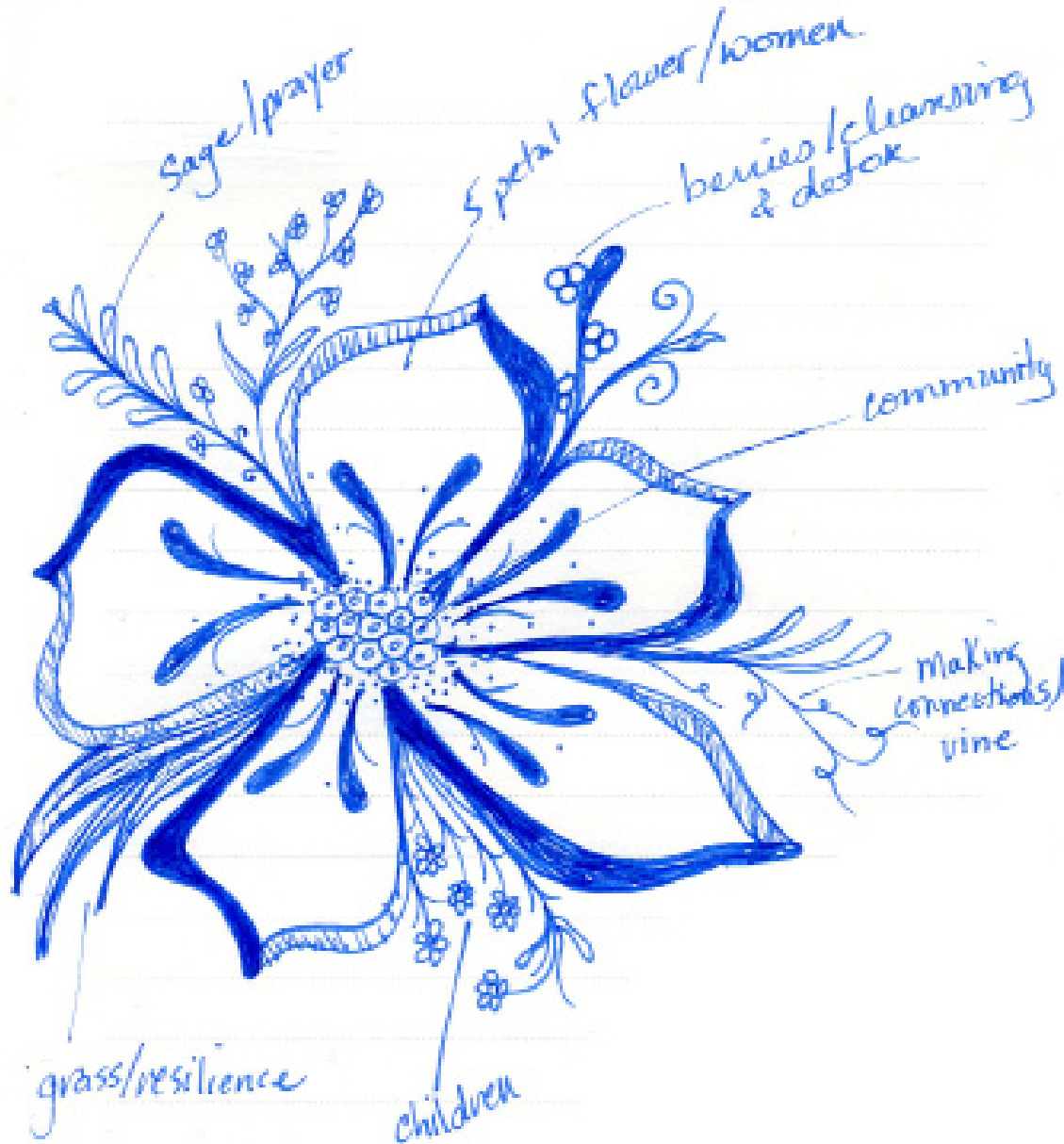
If we cry,
We are releasing generational pain,
The burden of the ancestors,
We cannot describe the sorrow,

If we cry,
We have no shame,
We have no guilt,
We are not to blame,

The culture gives us no space,
To cry,
Sometimes we cry alone,
Filling up our pillow with tears,
Crying over the kitchen table,
Pacing back and forth,

If we cry,
We are gaining back our identity,
We are integrating the pieces,
There is no order to integrating the soul,
The order is chaotic at times,
Its our job,
As we fight with the majority culture,

If we cry,
We are not crying alone,
We cry with the ancestors by our side,
We cry with the future generations alongside us,
When we cry we are reclaiming who we are.



J. LaPointe
2011

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Jingle Dress Dance

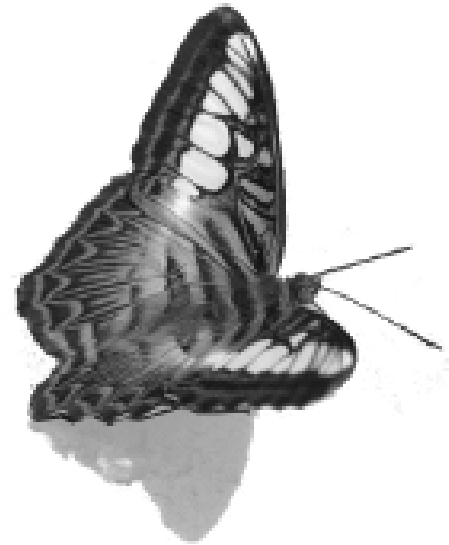
The Jingle Dress
Symbol for the healing
Spreading the spiritual teachings
Through the dance.

The unique designs
Created from dreams
Moving ever so in the sunlight
Like twinkling stars in the moonlight.

The clans coming alive
And together as one.

The powerful, vivid dream is seen
Consisting of the four grandmothers
And the four grandfathers
Who come with instructions.

Oh Keeper of the sacred Jingle Dress
Teach in your mother tongue – Ojibwe
While the drum beats on
And the healing continues.



©Sharon Syrette

Reprinted from My Home As I Remember, edited by Lee Maracle and Sandra Laronde, published by Natural Heritage Books, 2000. Reprinted with author's permission.

Clear Vision

I see a place
trees
waving
watching

untold stories of generations
sit folded in their branches
their wisdom honoured
they wait

there's time.

the children,
gifts
so gently nurtured
sing full songs
their knowledge lovingly places,
simple verses
at the centre of community.

the mothers,
waters
moving freely in their work
lifegivers.

The fathers
recognize life
see beauty
and colour
bursting from rocks
giant swashes
spirit paint
like northern lights

love

creeping softly
through small cracks
shines inside
out
the face of mother

earth

smiles

There,
we only see and know
relations

feel all actions

no Other
us
them
that those

but
all my relations

past
present
future

this understanding,
massaged into relationships

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Liberation

We cannot have strong nations without strong women; and the solution is not to adopt external values concerning gender relations or to impose male-defined roles for women (in what is still, after all, a colonial context). Montour-Angus points to the solution: 'My ability to re-claim my position in the world as a Rotinohshonni woman is preconditioned on the ability of our men to remember the traditions that we have lost.' There are twin responsibilities for men and women: men must acknowledge, respect, and work to help eliminate the heavy burden that women carry; women must commit themselves to making the nation liveable from within the culture. Neglect of either one of these responsibilities will lead to the eventual destruction of our peoples.

– Taiaiake Alfred,
from *Peace, Power, Righteousness : An Indigenous Manifesto* (1999: p.95)

What will the world look like when colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy and white supremacy are dismantled? With what can we replace these four taken-for-granted ideologies? Another world is possible and necessary, but how can it be realized? The elders' Teaching found in the introduction of this booklet resonates here:

“You have to know your history.
You have to know what is behind you in order to know where you are going.
If you do not understand that history,
you cannot ever have any vision about where it is you want to go.”

Our vision of a better world depicted here is not new; it has been given to us for hundreds of years. However, we have been so blinded by Eurocentric superiority that the majority of us cannot envision other ways of living.

This tree, alive and full of good energy reaching out to the blue sky, is nurtured by the Teachings we have received from elders. We believe that these Teachings, which are thousands of years old, are the foundation for a society where everyone experiences a good life (mino pimatisiwin), and lives in harmony with each other and other beings.

Ancient Anishinaabe Teachings (commonly known in Algonquin and Objibwe culture as the Seven Grandfather Teachings) teach us the “Good way of Life”. Love, respect, humility, wisdom, honesty, truth, and courage are the guiding principles for building sustainable relationships. Complemented with an understanding that all things are connected and related, and that we do not own the land or any other being, these guiding principles instruct us to act with responsibility and compassion towards each other.

Through these teachings we can mutually co-exist in this world free of violence and abuse.

POWER

There are considerable differences between the Indigenous nations of the Americas. Nonetheless, the values, lifestyles and systems that existed in our communities prior to the arrival of Europeans generally secured the status of Native women. Many Native cultures, values and practices safeguarded against the kinds of abuses permitted – and often encouraged – by western patriarchy. We had ways that protected us against the “isms” – sexism, racism, ageism, heterosexism. Our cultures promoted womanhood as a sacred identity, an identity that existed within a complex system of relations of societies that were based on balance.

In my personal exploration of Native female identity, I have looked at some of the ways our cultures traditionally promoted womanhood...I think this is information that every Native women should know. We should be aware that every Indigenous society had a sense of a woman's power and position within the community. Some societies, however, matrilineal or matrifocal societies, more readily demonstrated the status of their women. It is also important to know that life was certainly not always good for all Native women. Yet what we shared was a common sense of power, a power that was not part of the European woman's experience.

– Kim Anderson,
from *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* (2000: p.57)



anishnawbe:kwe

on your breath
is wild rice, salmon and three sister soup
calling me home

in your hair
is smokey sweetgrass, cedar and sage
leading me home

on your skin
are lakes, rivers, creeks and oceans
bringing me home

anishnawbe:kwe
your beauty is the rising sun
your strength is the moving rocks
your laugh is the wind in the trees

anishnawbe:kwe
i celebrate you.

dedicated to all life-givers. remember who you are and celebrate who you
are as women. may you all be protected, celebrated and remembered.

©vera wabegijig



this skin is white birch bark

with each layer are struggles
anishnaabe:kwe who got up and began walking
around all the great lakes, to pray and honour water,
bringing awareness that our water is in jeopardy
women who walked to parliament hill
to protest the Indian act over and over again
women who walk for justice for all of our life givers
who we hold a vigil for a safe return and to never forget
women who step in and take a drum away
from men who do not respect women because they forget
where the first beat began, in a women's womb
and with each layer there is a celebration
women who stand up and say no more

with each layer lies stories
sitting beside our grandmothers, aunts, mothers, and sisters
while cleaning fish, making baskets, braiding hair, weeding in a garden,
putting up a teepee, starting a fire
stories of how our women became mothers
teachers, lawyers, doctors, writers, sex educators, mid-wives
and the reason why women do it
because there are women in this world that need us to do it for them
women need us
to believe in them
to fight for them
to write down their stories
to educate the ignorant ones
to teach safer sex, having the right to say no,
to stand up and say i am worth it

with each layer there is a purpose
women, and men, need us to help give birth to a new generation
who will carry on what we do today
understanding that we need to work together in solidarity
to have each other's back because what we do today
is not just for ourselves
but for all humanity, and the natural world because all is at stake

having skin like a white birch bark tree
if i were to peel it back those layers
i see generations and generations of women
who are just like me
who make decisions based on that responsibility
of being a women
and that responsibility is life
by making things better for those who will walk after us

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