

[kee/chi - nee/wesk] • **noun**

THE GREAT SPIRIT OF THE FEMALE SIDE OF LIFE OF ALL THINGS

# KCI-NIWESQ

**NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE**

**JULY • 2021**

**ISSUE N° 04**



**ART THAT HONOURS**

**MEET SKY DANCER**

**POLICE KILLINGS:  
WHEN INDIGENOUS LIVES DON'T MATTER**

**HEALING & BUILDING RESILIENCE**



Illustration of Chantel Moore, by Kyla Elisabeth

## INDIGENOUS LIVES MATTER:

04.

NWAC SAYS  
WE WILL NO LONGER BE SILENT

03.

### MIIGWETCH

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO/DIRECTRICE GENERAL,  
LYNNE GROULX

09.

### CRIMINAL TRIALS

RETHINKING HOW FIRST NATIONS, METIS AND INUIT WOMEN  
ARE TREATED AS VICTIMS IN CRIMINAL TRIALS

13.

I AM WOMAN, I AM E'PIT  
LORRAINE WHITMAN

16.

### NWAC BREAKS NEW GROUND

RESILIENCY LODGE

21.

### MEET SKY DANCER

LOUISE BERNICE HALFE, SKY DANCER

24.

### COMMEMORATIVE ART HONOURS AND HEALS

FROM STATUES OF JINGLE DANCERS TO PEBBLE  
MOSAICS AND RED DRESS INSTALLATIONS



WELCOME TO THE FOURTH EDITION OF KCI-NIWESQ, THE MAGAZINE OF THE NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA (NWAC).

YOU WILL NOTICE A THEME RUNNING THROUGH THE STORIES IN THIS VOLUME.

They are meant as a tribute to the Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people who have gone missing or been murdered in this country over the decades.

Early in June, NWAC released its 65-point action plan for addressing that violence, which a National Inquiry has determined to be a genocide. The steps that we will take, which align with the Inquiry's 231 Calls for Justice, are costed and NWAC's progress on enacting them will be measured.

We are not waiting for others to start their work on this critical issue. We are taking action to save lives and start the healing.

I am proud to bring you the latest edition of the magazine that we started publishing earlier this year to tell you about the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women who are represented by NWAC. Sadly, violence is part of their story.

You will learn about the frightening number of Indigenous people who are shot to death by police—and the fact that the officers who pull the triggers that end Indigenous lives rarely, if ever, face repercussions.

You will read about efforts that are being made to make the justice system more inclusive of Indigenous women who are victims of violence. You will also learn that they are often treated as though their lives are worth less than those of non-Indigenous people.

You will discover the beautiful new Resiliency Lodge that NWAC has created in the Gatineau Hills in Quebec near Ottawa. It is the focal point of our action plan to end violence against Indigenous women. It is also a safe space of Elder led healing which we are set to recreate across Canada.

You will find out about commemorative sculptures and other art installations that are in place, or planned, to commemorate missing and murdered Indigenous women. These commemorations provide solace to families and are gathering spots for vigils.

And you will meet two amazing Indigenous women.

One is Louise Bernice Halfe, the Cree also known as Sky Dancer who is the federal Parliament's Poet Laureate. Ms. Halfe is a residential school survivor who writes often about the trauma endured by Indigenous women.

The other woman is our very own Lorraine Whitman, Grandmother White Sea Turtle, who is the President of NWAC. In this edition, Ms. Whitman talks about the day that four of her siblings were taken from her family as part of the Sixties Scoop.

Thank you once again for opening the pages that follow. Thank you for reading the fourth edition of Kci-Niwesq. Please drop us a line and let us know what you think at [reception@nwac.ca](mailto:reception@nwac.ca).

MIIGWETCH.

LYNNE GROULX LL.L., J.D. | CEO

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA  
L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA



# INDIGENOUS LIVES MATTER

NWAC SAYS WE WILL NO LONGER BE SILENT





# “HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE A LOSS OF A WHOLE HUMAN BEING? THIS IS THE DAUGHTER THAT I CARRIED IN MY WOMB. I GAVE BIRTH TO HER. WHY IS CONST. SON STILL ABLE TO HAVE A JOB AND HIS FREEDOM?”

– MARTHA MARTIN

Special Photo Credit: Miv Fournier. Photos in this article from *We Remember: Press Conference for the Families*, Ottawa ON, June 19, 2021

**CHANTEL MOORE** answered a knock at the door of her apartment in Edmundston, N.B., in the early morning hours of June 4, 2020. Standing on her balcony was a police officer who had been dispatched to check on her safety.

The only account of what transpired next is the one provided by the officer, identified in media reports as Const. Jeremy Son of the Edmundston force, who pumped four bullets into Ms. Moore’s tiny frame.

According to a 20-page summary of evidence made public by the New Brunswick Attorney General, Const. Son says she backed him into a corner with a small steak knife and he feared that she would hurt or kill him. So he “had no other alternatives” but to shoot the petite 26-year-old from Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation in British Columbia multiple times “until the threat was no longer present.”

On June 7, 2021, more than a year after the killing and six months after the conclusion of an investigation by an independent agency in Quebec, New Brunswick’s Public Prosecution Service released a statement saying there was “no reasonable prospect of conviction” of Const. Son. No charges would be laid against him.

“It is our opinion that ... the officer in question did believe, on reasonable grounds, that force or a threat of force was being used against him by Ms. Moore, that he shot at Ms. Moore for the purpose of defending or protecting himself and that his actions were reasonable under the circumstances,” wrote the prosecutors. “The action of the officer was in response to a potential lethal threat approaching him quickly, having no other escape option available on the third-floor balcony he was confined to, and following repeated orders that Ms. Moore drop the weapon she was holding.”

Ms. Moore’s case is just one of many recent police shootings of Indigenous people in Canada. Rarely, if ever, have the police officers who pulled the triggers faced consequences.

“It is time that we, in Canada, understand that Indigenous lives matter,” said Lorraine Whitman, the President of the Native Women’s Association of

Canada (NWAC). “It is time for us to rise up and take to the streets in peaceful protest when Indigenous lives are ended by the firing of a police gun. It is time for us to say we will no longer be silent as our people are gunned down by men and women in uniform who walk away with impunity.”

Ms. Whitman has called for all police in Canada to be equipped with body cameras, for the revision of ‘shoot to kill’ orders to allow dangerous situations to be diffused by means other than deadly force, and for health professionals and social workers to take over some of the duties currently being performed by police.

The statement by New Brunswick prosecutors announcing there would be no charges in the death of Ms. Moore did not mention that Const. Son was shouting in French as he told Ms. Moore to let go of the knife—her first language was English.

Nor does it point out the size disparity between Const. Son and Ms. Moore or that he was also armed with a baton and pepper spray that night. Nor does the statement include the testimony of a neighbour who watched the scene from his balcony after shots were fired and told investigators he believes the police planted the knife.

None of these issues will be explored in a court of law as a result of the decision not to press charges.

Martha Martin, Ms. Moore’s mother, wants someone to be held responsible for her daughter’s slaying.

“How do you describe a loss of a whole human being? This is the daughter that I carried in my womb. I gave birth to her,” Ms. Martin said in an interview. “He killed my daughter,” she said of Const. Son. “Why is it that he’s still able to have a job and his freedom?”

Ms. Martin has retained New Brunswick lawyer T.J. Burke and plans to file a wrongful-death lawsuit against the City of Edmundston and against Const. Son. Mr. Burke told *The Globe and Mail* that it is important for him, as an Indigenous lawyer, to represent the Moore family because he has seen systemic racism at every level of the justice system.

(Continued on page 6)



(Continued from page 5) For her part, Ms. Martin says she is grieving the loss of her daughter, but she knows she is just one of many Indigenous families who have lost children to police violence across Canada. She has collected a list of Indigenous people killed by police in the three-month span from April 1 to June 30, 2020—around the time of Ms. Moore’s death.

In none of those cases, did the police officer or officers responsible face legal repercussions for taking the life of the Indigenous person they killed, although some of the investigations have yet to be completed. This is Ms. Martin’s list:

- Eisha Hudson, 16, was shot and killed by Winnipeg police on April 8, 2020, following a pursuit in which police say she was driving a car that had been involved in the robbery of a liquor store. Manitoba’s Independent Investigative Unit (IIU) released a report in January 2021 recommending that no charges be laid against the officer and saying he did not operate outside the Criminal Code.
- Jason Collins, 36, was shot and killed by Winnipeg Police on April 9, 2020, after the police responded to a domestic incident. The officers say he walked out of a residence pointing a firearm at them. They opened fire and shot him three times. Mr. Collin’s firearm was later determined to be a plastic BB gun. Still, the Manitoba IIU determined there were no grounds for charges against the officers and that the use of force was “justified and unavoidable.”
- Stewart Andrews, 22, was shot to death by Winnipeg police on April 18, 2020. The police were responding to reports of a robbery and of windows being broken. The Manitoba IIU had not issued its report into that shooting by June 15, 2021, more than a year later.
- Everett Patrick, 42, died April 20, 2020, of wounds he had received eight days earlier when police in Prince George, B.C., responded to an alarm at a sporting goods store in that city. Mr. Patrick was taken to hospital after being arrested. He was medically cleared and turned

back over to police custody. Several hours later, police returned him to the hospital with the serious injury that ultimately caused his death. The investigation into his death had not been completed by June 15, 2021, more than a year later.

- Abraham Natanine, 31, an Inuk father of five who lived in Clyde River, Nunavut, was shot three times in the chest by two RCMP officers on May 5, 2020. It is unclear what led to the altercation at the residence where Mr. Natanine was killed, but the police say he attacked them with a knife. Mr. Natanine’s family members say a video taken immediately after the shooting shows no knife at the scene and they do not agree that the level of force used was necessary. The Ottawa Police Service, which investigated the killing but released no detailed report to the public, cleared the officers of wrongdoing, saying there were no reasonable grounds to lay charges.

(Continued on page 7)

**“IT IS TIME THAT WE, IN CANADA, UNDERSTAND THAT INDIGENOUS LIVES MATTER. IT IS TIME FOR US TO RISE UP AND TAKE TO THE STREETS IN PEACEFUL PROTEST WHEN INDIGENOUS LIVES ARE ENDED BY THE FIRING OF A POLICE GUN. IT IS TIME FOR US TO SAY WE WILL NO LONGER BE SILENT AS OUR PEOPLE ARE GUNNED DOWN BY MEN AND WOMEN IN UNIFORM WHO WALK AWAY WITH IMPUNITY.”**

- LORRAINE WHITMAN



(Continued from page 6)

- Regis Korchinski-Paquet, a 29-year-old Black-Indigenous woman, died on May 29, 2020, after falling from her 24th-floor balcony of her Toronto apartment. Toronto police were in the apartment at the time of her death after responding to calls about a domestic disturbance. The police say she slipped while trying to reach a neighbouring balcony. Ontario's Special Investigations Unit (SIU) cleared the officers involved. However, a lawyer for Ms. Korchinski-Paquet's family says the SIU report left out important details, and the results of a private autopsy conducted on behalf of the family differ from those of the coroner.

- Rodney Levi, 48, was shot to death by RCMP officers on June 12, 2020, after the police responded to a disturbance at a residence south of Miramichi, N.B. Witnesses say Mr. Levi had been suicidal in the days before his death. They say he was holding two knives when the police arrived. Mr. Levi was tasered three times but continued holding onto a knife as he moved toward one of the officers. He was shot twice. New Brunswick prosecutors announced in January 2020 that they would lay no criminal charges against the officers involved.

All of these deaths occurred around the same time that a police officer in Minneapolis, Min., killed a 46-year-old Black man named George Floyd by putting his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds. That killing, which was recorded on a cell phone and shared widely through social media, sparked riots across the United States and even in Canada, where crowds marched with signs that said Black Lives Matter.

Mr. George's death followed a number of high-profile police killings of Black people in his country, most of which ended in exoneration of the officers involved. Mr. George's killers have not been so lucky. Former officer Derek Chauvin has been convicted of murder and other officers involved in the death have yet to stand trial.

In contrast to the public response to the killing of George Floyd, there have been no wide-scale protests resulting from the police shootings of Indigenous people in Canada. Though some First Nations members rallied in New Brunswick in June after it was learned there would be no charges against Jeremy Son for killing Chantel Moore, some First Nations Leaders did express outrage.

(Continued on page 8)





(Continued from page 7) Chief Patricia Bernard of Madawaska Maliseet First Nation in New Brunswick said that, in most cases where someone makes a mistake that causes the death of another person, charges are still laid, even if the actions that resulted in the fatality do not meet the test of murder.

In the case of Chantel Moore, Chief Bernard said in an interview that the prosecutors seem to be saying,

**‘SHE DIED, LET’S MOVE ON.’ WELL THAT’S JUST UNACCEPTABLE. IF THIS HAPPENED TO YOUR FAMILY MEMBER, HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?’ NOW, POLICE OFFICERS DON’T HAVE ANY SORT OF PRECEDENT TO BE MORE CAREFUL, TO BE LESS NEGLIGENT.**

In Ms. Moore’s home province of British Columbia, there was similar anger.

“The biggest problem with this case is that we only have the police officer’s statement that the Crown depends on for a large part of the evidence,” said Judith Sayer, President of the Nuuchah-nulth Tribal Council. “I have never understood how an armed, large police officer was scared of a five-foot, 100-pound woman with a small knife in her hand, if she had one. Shooting four times is excessive force by anyone’s standards except the Crown counsel.”

Ms. Whitman, President of NWAC, said there may be times when police need to use force. “But the number of Indigenous people who are being killed in confrontations with police in Canada, and the fact that police are never found to have been at fault, suggests there is something very, very wrong with the Canadian justice system,” she said.

Ms. Martin says people often ask her if she believes that systemic racism is to blame for her daughter’s death. “My answer always is, at this point, they (the authorities) can’t say yes and they can’t say no. But, within our policing system, we have a problem, because we’ve had many Indigenous people who have lost their lives” at the hands of the police.

She points to the death of Julian Jones, a 28-year-old man from the same First Nation as her daughter, who was shot to death by RCMP officers at a home in the village of Opitsaht, B.C., near Tofino, in February. The police in that case say they were searching for a woman who was believed to have been in distress.

British Columbia’s Independent Investigations Office, which is looking into the death of Mr. Jones, has agreed to have a civilian monitor from Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation oversee its work in the case. That civilian monitor would also communicate with Mr. Jones’ family.

This courtesy was not extended to Ms. Martin throughout the investigation into Ms. Moore’s killing. The police and prosecutors rarely reached out to her, she was denied requests to see her daughter’s autopsy report, and she was not informed when the Quebec investigators concluded their work in late 2020.

Today, Ms. Martin is battling with depression and trying to hold things together to take good care of Ms. Moore’s seven-year-old daughter, who asks about her mother all the time and why she had to die.

“She asks things like ‘what if mommy had been staying with us, what if mommy didn’t move out?’” said Ms. Martin “Then she asks ‘why did the cop have to shoot her, why didn’t he use a taser?’ This is coming from a seven-year-old little girl. And it’s so heartbreaking to hear. Why did he have to shoot? Many of us have that same question.”





# CRIMINAL TRIALS

THE TREATMENT OF  
FIRST NATIONS, METIS, AND INUIT WOMEN





# RETHINKING HOW FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, AND INUIT WOMEN ARE TREATED AS VICTIMS IN CRIMINAL TRIALS



**LILLIAN DYCK, CANADIAN SENATOR**

The genocide against Indigenous women in Canada will not end until the justice system that is responsible for trying and sentencing their assailants values their lives.

This simple truth is at the core of two recent court cases in this country, both of which ended in the manslaughter convictions of the men who killed two Indigenous women.

This truth is forcing society to rethink how First Nations, Métis, and Inuit women are treated as victims in criminal trials. It's also forcing society to question whether the sentences being handed to those who harm them are proportionate to the crime.

In her final years as a Canadian Senator, Lillian Dyck introduced amendments to the Criminal Code requiring courts to consider the special circumstances of Indigenous women who have been targeted for violence.

"The aim is to make sure that women, Indigenous women, and the gender-diverse are given a fair shake during sentencing. Because the data shows that, even in cases of murder, there is leniency in sentencing when it's an Indigenous woman victim," said Ms. Dyck, a member of Cree Gordon First Nation in Saskatchewan who retired from the Red Chamber in 2020, said in an interview this spring.

Her amendments were passed into law before two high-profile Canadian homicide trials reached their conclusion.

Bradley Barton, a trucker from Ontario, was found guilty in February in the death of Cindy Gladue, a 36-year-old Métis and Cree woman whose body was found in the bathtub of an Edmonton motel room in 2011. She died of blood loss from an 11-centimetre wound Mr. Barton inflicted to her vagina.

It was Mr. Barton's second trial in the slaying. He was acquitted in the first. But the Supreme Court struck down that acquittal



**LISA WEBER, MÉTIS LAWYER**

saying the evidence presented to the jury was rife with myths and stereotypes of Indigenous women.

In that first trial, Ms. Gladue was repeatedly referred to as a "native" and a "prostitute." The tissue from her vaginal wall was displayed in court. Her dignity and her humanity were stripped away in a very public manner.

Meanwhile, in another equally disturbing case, Braydon Bushby was found guilty in the death of Barbara Kentner, a 34-year-old Anishinaabekwe woman from Wabigoon Lake Ojibway First Nation. Mr. Bushby threw a trailer hitch at Ms. Kentner in Thunder Bay, Ont., in January 2017, causing the injuries that led to her death six months later.

Mr. Bushby, who was 18 at the time he wounded Ms. Kentner, was originally charged with second-degree murder but this charge was reduced to manslaughter and aggravated assault.

The prosecutors said the reduced charges were necessary to allow a trial to take place in 2020, as Covid-19 infections were spreading. Murder trials require juries, and juries are difficult to put together during a pandemic, they explained.

It was an argument that failed to resonate with First Nations leaders, who said it was difficult to believe that Ms. Kentner's race was not the main factor at play in the decision to try Mr. Bushby for manslaughter. Glen Hare, the Anishinabek Nation Grand Chief, told the CBC "the Canadian justice system does not see Indigenous women as someone's daughter, mother, wife, sister, and barely the victim of a crime."

Ms. Dyck said this is an issue that has concerned her since 1971, when the body of Helen Betty Osborne, a 19-year-old Cree woman, was found in The Pas, Man.

Ms. Osborne was brutally beaten and stabbed more than 50 times with a screwdriver. The RCMP concluded a few months

(Continued on page 11)



**“THE MESSAGE THAT’S BEING CONVEYED IS THAT WE ARE OBJECTS, THAT WE ARE DISPOSABLE, THAT WE ARE AVAILABLE. AS A CONSEQUENCE, WE’RE VERY VULNERABLE TO THAT CONTINUED ABUSE.”**

**- LISA WEBER**

(Continued from page 10)

after her death that four young Caucasian men were responsible for her abduction and murder. But it wasn’t until 16 years later that one of those men was found guilty and sentenced to serve 10 years in jail. The others walked free.

“That case really stuck in my head and my heart, because it just showed you how unfair the justice system was,” said Ms. Dyck.

It informed her concern in 2014 when Bernard Valcourt, the man who was then the federal minister of aboriginal affairs, rejected calls for a national inquiry into the large number of murdered and missing Indigenous women. Mr. Valcourt said there was no point to such an inquiry when everyone knows the violence is attributable to Indigenous men.

“My first reaction was, well, it can’t just be Indigenous men because we know that a very large percentage, half of the indigenous population, lives off reserves,” said Ms. Dyck.

She undertook a research project with Melanie Morrison, a psychology professor at the University of Saskatchewan, to learn more about perpetrators and victims.

They found that, in nearly 30 per cent of the solved murders of Indigenous women, the victims did not know the perpetrators. And, in more than two-thirds of those cases, the perpetrators were not Indigenous.

They also found that, whether the convictions were for manslaughter, second-degree homicide, or first-degree homicide, a perpetrator was likely to spend less time behind bars if the victim was Indigenous.

“When I first heard about the possibility of leniency in sentencing, when the victim of murder or sexual assault or any kind of abuse happens to be an indigenous woman, I was really quite horrified,” said Ms. Dyck.

Gladue principles, which are based on a 1999 decision of the Supreme Court, say lower courts should take the adverse background experiences of Indigenous offenders into consideration during sentencing and, in light of them, should consider all reasonable alternatives to jail.

It is clear that, even though Mr. Valcourt overstated the amount of crime that can be laid at the feet of Indigenous men, much of the violence directed at Indigenous women is being perpetrated by their First Nations, Métis, or Inuit partners or acquaintances in their communities who can call upon Gladue principles to be recognized if they are convicted.

“My first thought was, we needed to counteract that so that the judge has to say those same factors apply to the victim but they play out in the real world in a different way that makes her more vulnerable,” said Ms. Dyck.

The amendments she successfully proposed to the Criminal Code call upon judges to balance the effects of colonization upon both criminal and victim, and to consider the need to denounce and deter intimate-partner violence.

The Quebec Court of Appeal used this same line of thinking in the fall of 2020 when it threw out a sentence of two years less a day given to an Inuit man from a community on Hudson Bay. His wife was airlifted to hospital in Montreal after losing a litre of blood due to the vaginal lacerations he caused with his fist.

“She too, as an Inuk woman and victim, suffered from policies of community dislocation, sedentarization, forced relocation, suicides, and shootings in the community,” wrote Justice Simon Ruel in the appeal-court decision that increased the man’s sentence to 44 months. “In cases of sexual violence against Indigenous women, the Gladue factors affecting the offender have to be weighed against the necessity to give appropriate consideration to historical and systemic circumstances of Indigenous women victims of sexual violence in the domestic context.”

Gladue principles were not at play for Mr. Barton or Mr. Bushby. They are both Caucasian.

But Ms. Dyck said her amendments could have an impact in those cases because, regardless of the race of the perpetrator, judges must consider the vulnerability of Indigenous women. And, the amendments affect all of those who are convicted of perpetrating violence against Indigenous women, not just intimate partners.

In the end, Mr. Bushby was sentenced to eight years in jail. He will be eligible for parole in 2.6 years. Mr. Barton’s sentencing hearing will take place at the end of June. (Continued on page 12)

**THE AIM OF AMENDMENTS TO THE CRIMINAL CODE REQUIRING COURTS TO CONSIDER THE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN WHO HAVE BEEN TARGETED FOR VIOLENCE “IS TO MAKE SURE THAT WOMEN, INDIGENOUS WOMEN, AND THE GENDER-DIVERSE ARE GIVEN A FAIR SHAKE DURING SENTENCING. NOW THAT MY AMENDMENTS HAVE BEEN ENACTED, EVERY JUDGE WILL HAVE TO CONSIDER THE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF INDIGENOUS FEMALE VICTIMS.”**

**- LILLIAN DYCK**

(Continued from page 11)

Lisa Weber is a Métis lawyer who works in Edmonton. She is also a board member of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW).

Ms. Weber took part in the appeal of Bradley Barton's acquittal at the Alberta Court of Appeal and then at the Supreme Court of Canada. She committed to Cindy Gladue's mother, Donna McLeod, that she would serve as her lawyer throughout the retrial and sit with Ms. McLeod and Ms. Gladue's daughters.

"We did not hear a reference to 'the native girl,'" said Ms. Weber in a recent interview. "And, obviously one of the most horrific things about the evidence during the first trial was the introduction of her preserved pelvis. That did not happen in the retrial. Believe me, if there had been even a hint of that, gloves would have been off. So that's an improvement."

But, during the second trial, the jury still heard evidence and arguments that in Ms. Weber's opinion, perpetuate myths and stereotypes about Indigenous women.

"The evidence was subtle: entering a picture of Ms. Gladue holding a cigarette, and suggesting then that she was a smoker and likely of poor health. From this, asking witnesses if a woman's poor health would mean she had a weak vagina. Keep in mind that Ms. Gladue's health was not a factor in that case," Ms. Weber observed.

"The manner in which the case played out," she said, "could be interpreted as suggesting that Indigenous women of poor health might have weakened vaginas, as if somehow it is then the victim's fault for the injury suffered. So, even in the second trial, evidence that perpetuated stereotypes was brought in through the back door."

Ms. Weber works mostly in child protection, not criminal law, but she advocates both formally and informally for Indigenous women who come before the courts.

"What I observe is, indigenous women are treated as having lesser rights or perhaps no rights as individuals, whether that's as victim, as accused, or often as parents," said Ms. Weber.

"They are often ignored completely in those (legal) forums, and I mean having their presence actually not even acknowledged in some instances, which I find absolutely humiliating and so dehumanizing," she said.

This boils down to racism, which is a pervasive reality in the justice system, she said. "A result, or consequence, of that may be more unwillingness on the part of Indigenous women to assert themselves" in legal matters

There is also the fact that Indigenous women don't see many other Indigenous women acting as lawyers or, especially, as judges, said Ms. Weber. "If the system is supposed to include you and be there for you, but you're not seeing yourself in that system, that's going to undermine your confidence in participating."

That means Indigenous women may be less likely to step forward if they are victims of a violent attack, she said. It may also embolden attackers. "The message that's being conveyed is that we are objects, that we are disposable, that

we are available," said Ms. Weber. "As a consequence, we're very vulnerable to that continued abuse."

Ms. Weber said she has seen little improvement in the way the justice system treats Indigenous women, despite the issues raised during the trials of Mr. Barton and Mr. Bushby, and despite efforts to force change in sentencing practices.

"What's happened is we (Indigenous women and advocates) are becoming more vocal about it. So that's a positive change. We shouldn't undervalue that," she said. "But, as somebody who's involved in the justice system in various forums, I don't see that much change, to be honest, which is really unfortunate."

Ms. Dyck is somewhat more optimistic.

Literature scans done before her amendments became law found instances in which judges asked why the special circumstances of Indigenous female victims should not be considered during sentencing.

"You could see that some judges were starting to think in that way," said Ms. Dyck. "But it was certainly not every judge. And, in all fairness, it should have been every judge taking that into consideration. And now that my amendments have been enacted, every judge will have to consider the special circumstances of Indigenous female victims."





A portrait of Lorraine Whitman, a woman with curly hair and glasses, wearing a red and white regalia with a sash and a pin. She is looking upwards and to the right. The background is dark, and the entire image is framed by a thick yellow border.

# I AM WOMAN, I AM E'PIT

LORRAINE WHITMAN



# I AM WOMAN, I AM E'PIT:

## LORRAINE WHITMAN SEEKS TO HELP INDIGENOUS WOMEN UNLEASH THEIR POWER

**LORRAINE WHITMAN** was a young woman when she learned lessons about equality, finding one's own path, and standing strong in the face of challenges.

Those lessons—and her deep need to fight for universal respect, dignity, and justice—have guided her into Indigenous leadership at the national level.

Ms. Whitman, who is also known as Grandmother White Sea Turtle, is the President of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). She is from Glooscap First Nation in Nova Scotia and takes great pride in her Mi'Kmaq heritage and her role as an Indigenous woman.

In recent years, one of the male elders in her community asked Ms. Whitman to explain what she does.

"I thought ok, this is a test of my ability to speak Mi'kmaq. So I answered that I am e'pit, which means woman," said Ms. Whitman in a recent interview. "And he said, 'yah, but what do you do, e'pit?' I said, 'Well, I try to do the best I can in helping our community, our elders, our youth; trying to make them feel valued and have a quality of life, and to use myself as an example, as a role model.' To this he said, 'That's what you are. You are e'pit.' He said, 'Women are powerful. So, so powerful.'"

Colonial society is paternalistic; it is an institution of men's power, said Ms. Whitman. "But we Mi'kmaq still go by the maternalistic way and we will continue to do so. It's in our blood. It's in our DNA. And it is right."

Ms. Whitman said her goal as NWAC president is to help Indigenous women understand that they have the immense power described by the Elder.

She is the daughter and granddaughter of chiefs. And, she is one of 14 children whose parents stressed the importance of maintaining traditions and respecting heritage.

"My mom wasn't academically educated but she was educated in life and in values and I just thank her for everything she's given me," Ms. Whitman said.

"She always instilled in us girls, 'you get out and you earn your own money and don't you think that a man is going to pay for you, because they won't.'"

Valuing independence and understanding self-worth is not always easy for Indigenous women, who feel the constant sting of racism and discrimination. Ms. Whitman has not been spared those blows.

**"NOW IS THE TIME FOR US TO OCCUPY OUR RIGHTFUL PLACE IN CANADIAN SOCIETY—TO CHOOSE OUR OWN LIFE'S DIRECTION IN EDUCATION AND OCCUPATION; TO STAND FIRM; TO END THE VIOLENCE THAT HAS TAKEN TOO MANY OF OUR SISTERS AND DAUGHTERS."**

**- LORRAINE WHITMAN**

"For me, it started when I was five years old and attending kindergarten. I was called a 'good-for-nothing dirty Indian.' My mother told me to turn the other cheek against my tormenters," said Ms. Whitman.

"But I couldn't contain myself. One guy said it to me just after a rainstorm and I pushed him into a mud puddle. The other kids saw me do it and told a teacher. So I had to print 'I will not push' over and over again on the blackboard during every recess and every lunch hour."

After a week, another teacher asked her why she was being punished. "When I told her why I had pushed the boy, she understood my motivation and my punishment was ended. That teacher was my ally, right up until she passed away a few years ago."

From that experience, Ms. Whitman said she learned that some wrongs can be made right by putting all of the facts on the table and understanding all points of view. She also learned that there are times when you just have to stand up for yourself, regardless of the consequences.

But Indigenous women have not always been able to do that, she said.

She tells the story of a girl from her community who became pregnant many decades ago when she was raped at the age of 12.

An Indian Agent took the girl from Nova Scotia to Montreal by train with a bag over her head. In Montreal, she stayed with the Grey Nuns until two years after the baby was born.

"She was taken from her home, and humiliated," said Ms. Whitman. "I don't want to see another innocent young child subjected to this type of humiliation. Things like that still happen today. Maybe they don't put bags over our heads, but Indigenous women and girls are still treated as less than second-class citizens."

When Ms. Whitman was young, four of her siblings were taken from the family home as part of what is now known as the Sixties Scoop.

"The authorities fostered them out because they said mom and dad had too many children and couldn't afford to take care of us all," she said. "That was just not true. I am not saying we had a lot of food. But we did have food, and we had warmth, and we had the love of our parents."

Her father was told he would go to jail if he tried to prevent his children from being moved away, and he couldn't afford to go to prison with so many other mouths left to feed. "So we watched our brothers and sisters being taken from us."

A couple of years later, her mother and father went to work in factories in the United States, leaving their oldest children, who were 20 and 17, to care for the young ones.

"The RCMP and the Indian Agent came and said my parents had to be home within 48 hours and, if not, they were taking us

(Continued on page 15)

**“MAYBE THEY DON’T PUT BAGS OVER OUR HEADS,  
BUT INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE STILL TREATED AS LESS THAN SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS.”**

**- LORRAINE WHITMAN**

(Continued from page 14) kids away,” said Ms. Whitman. “My brother, Lester, who was a hunter, came out of the bedroom with his shotgun and I thought, ‘Oh my God, he is going to kill someone.’ My brother said, ‘These kids aren’t leaving this house or it will be over my dead body.’”

The police backed down, and her mother was summoned home.

“That standoff was devastating,” she said. “But from those experiences I was taught the importance of family, of sticking together, and of standing up for each other, especially in difficult times.”

From a young age, Ms. Whitman said she intended to get a post-secondary education but a guidance counsellor told her she wasn’t wealthy enough, or smart enough, and Indigenous girls don’t go on to higher learning.

“I wanted to prove her wrong. I knew I could do far more. And eventually I did,” said Ms. Whitman.

After high school, she joined Katimavik, a program that allows young adults to volunteer in different parts of the country.

In Quebec, she took a French immersion course. In Esquimalt, B.C., she was introduced to the military. And then, in Wasaga Beach, Ont., she volunteered at schools for mentally and physically challenged adults, which was the start of a lifelong calling.

Ms. Whitman met her husband in the year she turned 21. He had an agricultural degree from McGill University and they moved to Saskatchewan and then to Alberta, where she went to college and university to become a rehabilitation practitioner.

They moved back to Nova Scotia in 1987 and Ms. Whitman gave birth to a daughter.

She worked as a social development counsellor at Glooscap First Nation, a job she held for three decades, and then she became a diabetes counsellor. It was during those years, that she began her affiliation with the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC).

Two years ago, she was elected president of NWAC.

When she was a teenager, Ms. Whitman went with her father to Indigenous meetings. “We were talking about many of the same things we are talking about today. Women have pushed for equality and to be an equal part of society in a positive way. But it’s never really happened,” she said.

Indigenous women can make change if they work together, said Ms. Whitman. “Yes, we have a lot of challenges. Yes, we have to climb mountains.”

But now is the time, she said, for the Indigenous women of Canada to stand up and speak with one voice.

“Now is the time for us to occupy our rightful place in Canadian society—to push the bullies into the mud; to choose our own life’s direction in education and occupation; to stand firm in preventing our children from being taken from us; to end the violence that has taken too many of our sisters and daughters,” said Ms. Whitman.

“Now is the time for all of us to be unified and powerful. Now is the time for us to be e’pit.”



Photo: Lorraine Whitman, President of NWAC



# NWAC BREAKS NEW GROUND

RESILIENCY LODGES:  
PLACES OF REFUGE, HEALING, SAFETY, WARMTH, AND CONNECTION







## RESILIENCY LODGES: PLACES OF REFUGE, HEALING, SAFETY, WARMTH, AND CONNECTION

IT WAS THE ELDERS WHO SAID THE HEALING MUST BEGIN ON THE LAND.

It was the wise Elders who said the only way to repair the wounds left by decades of colonization was to create spaces where those who have been harmed can reconnect with the world of their ancestors and with the ancestors themselves.

A healing place must be part of Mother Earth, they said at a gathering held to discuss the opening of a healing lodge even before the release of the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This healing lodge needed to be a place of ceremony and of spirituality.

That critical teaching was the inspiration for the Resiliency Lodge that the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has built and is now operating in Chelsea, Que., and is planning to replicate across Canada.

"The Resiliency Lodge is s created by Indigenous women for Indigenous women," says NWAC CEO Lynne Groulx. "It is a place where we will work on violence prevention and intervention and it is holistic. It has trauma-informed services, including Elder support, navigation, healing through art expression, and ways to help women get back in the workplace or start their own businesses."

It is a concept that is based on a model created in Mexico called Casas de Mujeres after advocates in that country realized mainstream support services were not working for Indigenous women. The Casas are colourful houses located in the centres of more than 30 towns and villages, which provide support and services to Indigenous women escaping violence or just sharing common cause and companionship.

The United Nations has endorsed the Casas de Mujeres as a best practice in healing. NWAC has taken that concept and adapted it to the Canadian context at its Resiliency Lodge, which opened last fall but is operating online because of the ongoing pandemic.

The Lodge is an expansive mid-century building of wood and stone set into the Gatineau Hills. It has been fully renovated and its rooms reflect distinctions-based themes. There is a First Nations, an Inuit, and a Métis bedroom for women who attend multi-day one-on-one healing sessions.

There is an indoor pool for relaxation and therapy, as well as a copper bathtub for medicinal treatment.

NWAC has installed several wood-burning fireplaces for indoor ceremonies. There are many rocking chairs because the rocking motion is therapeutic. The large kitchen is ready for the preparation of traditional foods and cooking classes.

The Indigenous art that adorns the walls has been collected from across Canada. It has been selected to give women

positive feelings and pride in their community and their culture, said Ms. Groulx. "We used the strength of the building that had quite a bit of cedar and wood on the ceilings and on the walls to give that warm feeling."

Outside, there is a spirit trail through the woods. It is a path meant for contemplation. Inspirational or commemorative messages have been painted on rocks that line the trail. A red dress hangs from a tree. There is a tipi for talking circles and an arbour for those who wish to paint or meditate in the forest.

Closer to the house area patio for outdoor traditional cooking, a small greenhouse, and a sweat lodge that is just big enough for two people.

Over the garage is the Makers' Space. This multi-roomed area has been furnished with all of the equipment and materials needed to create a wide range of artisan crafts, from doll-making to painting to leather and beadwork.

The original plan had been to hold arts and craft classes in person. But COVID-19 changed that. Now NWAC is running online workshops out of the Makers' Space. Indigenous women are mailed the materials they need to take part and then join in the sessions via their phones or computers. Hundreds of these workshops have been held since the fall of 2020 and have been attended by thousands of women.

"The workshop art expression program is part of the healing," says Ms. Groulx. "The idea is to find something that you love to do so you can start your healing path. If you find 'oh my gosh, I love doing the beading thing,' you do that and you use that as meditation; that is helping your mental health. It's not going to heal somebody with severe trauma overnight. But, certainly the Elders and those who do these workshops will tell you this is their healing in art expression and crafting."

It also allows Indigenous women to share their experience in a safe place and enjoy social time together, even when COVID-19 makes getting together in person difficult or impossible.

An Elder attends all of the workshops to provide a prayer and teachings.

Online support is a major focus of the Resiliency Lodge. Help lines have been established for women who need urgent care or just someone to talk through tough situations.

When the pandemic restrictions are lifted, support will also be offered at the Lodge, both for groups and for individual women.

There will be classes in language and culture. Agricultural and environmental knowledge will be transferred. Outreach and commemoration events will be developed and Indigenous art displayed. As well, courses will be offered to help Indigenous women gain skills that could become sources of income and lead to their economic independence. (Continued on page 20)

## A LOOK INSIDE THE RESILIENCY LODGE



### RESILIENCY LODGE BEDROOMS

There is a First Nations, an Inuit, and a Métis bedroom for women who attend multi-day one-on-one healing sessions. The Lodge is fully renovated and its rooms reflect distinctions-based themes.



### RESILIENCY LODGE & WATER

Water plays a central role in The Lodge, there is an indoor pool, enriched by Grandfather rocks, for relaxation and therapy. As well, The Lodge is home to a copper bathtub for medicinal treatment.



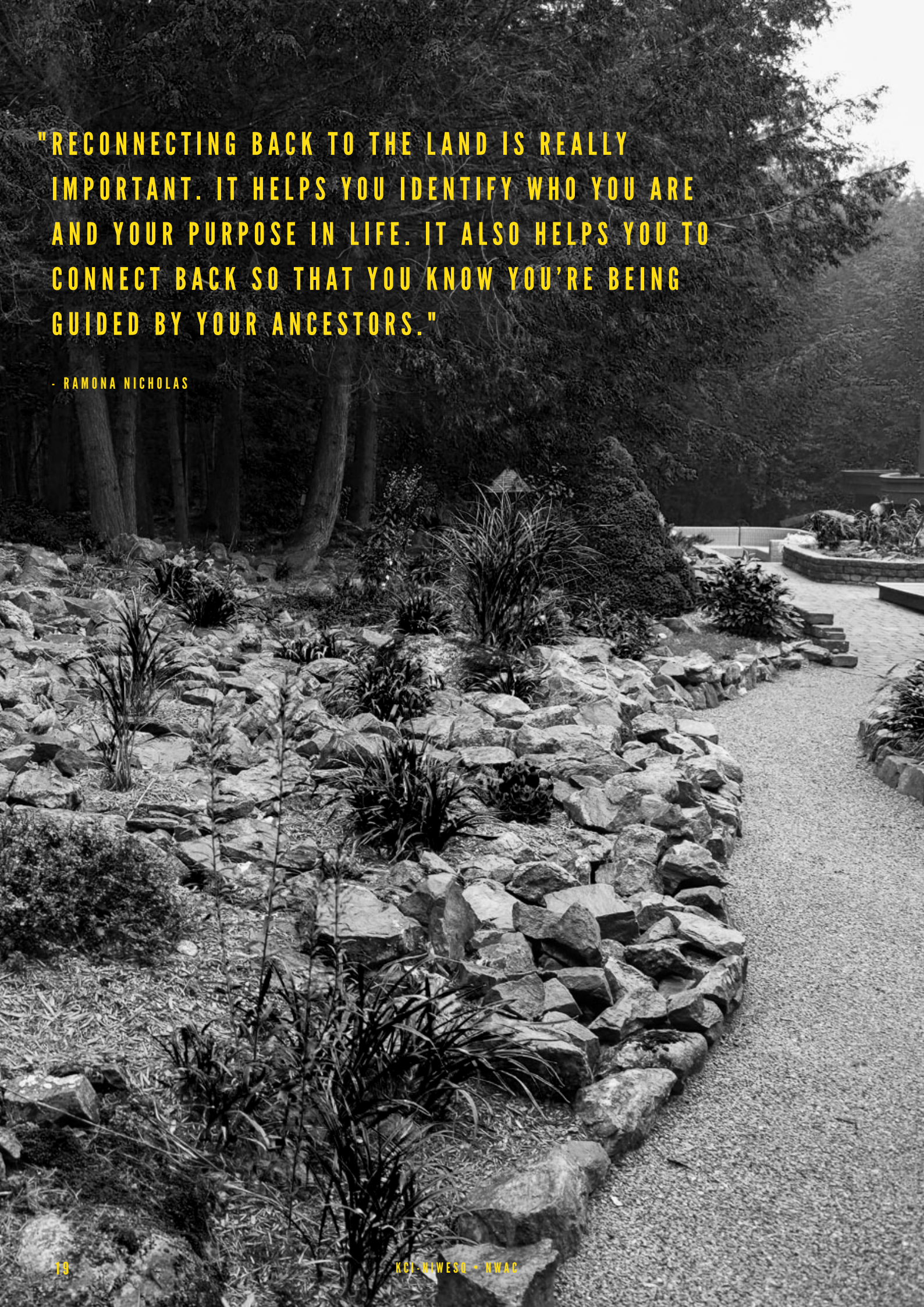
Resiliency Lodge: (this page)

Tipi for talking circles and an arbour for those who wish to paint or meditate in the forest.  
(following page) Spirit trail through the woods. It is a path meant for contemplation.

**“WHEN AN INDIGENOUS WOMAN WALKS THROUGH THE DOOR OF THE RESILIENCY LODGE, I WANT HER TO FEEL SAFE. I WANT HER TO FEEL CONNECTED. I WANT HER TO FEEL WARM. I WANT HER TO FEEL RELAXED.”**

- LYNNE GROULX



A black and white photograph of a garden. In the foreground, a low, rustic stone border separates a gravel path from a garden bed. The garden bed contains several clumps of dark, spiky plants, possibly ornamental grasses. In the background, there are large, mature trees with dense foliage, and a small, light-colored structure is partially visible through the branches. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

**"RECONNECTING BACK TO THE LAND IS REALLY IMPORTANT. IT HELPS YOU IDENTIFY WHO YOU ARE AND YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE. IT ALSO HELPS YOU TO CONNECT BACK SO THAT YOU KNOW YOU'RE BEING GUIDED BY YOUR ANCESTORS."**

**- RAMONA NICHOLAS**



(Continued from page 17) All of this is outlined in Our Calls, Our Actions, the action plan developed by NWAC to address the Calls for Justice developed by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The Resiliency Lodge is at the centre of that plan.

“We matched up the Calls for Justice to the activities,” said Ms. Groulx.

The Resiliency Lodge model follows the directives of the Inquiry Commissioners, she said, who said that measures to address the Calls for Justice “should be determined by indigenous women themselves, rather than have the government say ‘we want you to design your healing program around a shelter model’ for example. Our model deals with both prevention and intervention, and it deals with healing.”

The next step is to build additional lodges in all provinces and territories of Canada. Women in Alberta are looking at properties, and land has been purchased on the Saint John River in New Brunswick for a lodge that is expected to open in the coming months.

Alma Brooks is one of the Elders who is steering that project and will offer Elder support there once it is running. “We’ve got a beautiful piece of property—16 acres of land. There’s a private road that goes all the way to the water’s edge and there’s a beautiful island just offshore,” said Ms. Brooks. There is an older farmhouse on the property that needs to be refurbished, with a gathering space, a pantry, and a commercial kitchen, as well as a garage, barn, and gazebo.

“This program is going to be on the land, where Indigenous women can come for healing,” she said. “We’re hoping to build 15 units for people to stay in.”

Like the lodge in Chelsea, the New Brunswick Lodge will offer educational workshops and training, and combine the teachings of agriculture and traditional medicine with mentorship of Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

It could be a place, for instance, where Indigenous women might go for additional spiritual reconnection after they have completed a drug or alcohol rehabilitation program, said Ms. Brooks.

“We have professional counsellors on staff right now and they’re doing a lot of online counselling,” she said. “This program is going to be unique. It’s going to be Elder-driven. Elders are going to be heavily involved in an advisory capacity as well as participating on the programming side.”

Ramona Nicholas is another Elder who is helping to create the New Brunswick Resiliency Lodge.

“What I envision is a gathering space, a place for women to go and learn about reconnecting to the land, a place where there’s Elder support and teachings,” said Ms. Nicholas.

It also has to be a place where there is ceremony, she said, and where there is a garden that can be used to promote food sovereignty.

“Reconnecting back to the land is really important,” said Ms. Nicholas. “When we’re talking about colonization and all those things that come with that, connecting to the land really helps you identify who you are, and through the ceremonies, your

purpose in life. It also helps you connect back so that you know you’re being guided by your ancestors.”

The federal government has provided some infrastructure and some operational funding for the Resiliency Lodges.

But there will have to be stable, long-term financial support from governments or private investors to keep the Resiliency Lodges running and to build new ones, she said. The federal government especially “needs to look at Indigenous-led initiatives, and take those seriously, and look at ways to fund them.”

Through the online and telephone support, the group workshops, and healing circles, the Resiliency Lodges will help thousands of Indigenous women annually, said Ms. Groulx. The in-person visits, which will start at both locations when the pandemic is over, “will initiate a path to healing,” she said.

“When an Indigenous woman walks through the door of the Resiliency Lodge, I want her to feel safe. I want her to feel connected. I want her to feel warm. I want her to feel relaxed. I want her to feel the cultural connection,” said Ms. Groulx. “And even if she’s inside, I want her to feel connected to the land because the inside and the outside are both connected that way. I want her to feel the beauty and the pride.”



Photo: Children's nook in The Makers' Space at The Resiliency Lodge

A close-up portrait of Louise Bernice Halfe, an Indigenous woman with short, wavy grey hair and glasses. She is smiling warmly at the camera. She is wearing a brown suede jacket over a red top, adorned with a traditional beaded necklace. The background is a solid dark grey.

# SKY DANCER

MEET SKY DANCER, THE FIRST INDIGENOUS  
PARLIAMENTARY POET LAUREATE

**LOUISE BERNICE HALFE, WHOSE CREE NAME IS SKY DANCER, IS CANADA'S PARLIAMENTARY POET LAUREATE. IT IS AN HONOUR SHE HAS HELD SINCE FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR.**

*Ms. Halfe is the ninth person to hold the position and the first to come from an Indigenous community. A survivor of the Blue Quills Residential School in St. Paul, Alta., she has a Bachelor in Social Work from the University of Regina. But poetry is her passion. Her written work is inspired by her life as an Indigenous woman, and she often "code-switches" between Cree and English.*

*The author of six books, Ms. Halfe is the winner of numerous awards and her poetry has received widespread critical acclaim. Her most recent book, called *awâsis – kinky and disheveled*, was released in April. NWAC talked with her this spring.*

## INTERVIEW WITH SKY DANCER

### NWAC

Where did you grow up, and what do you remember of your days before residential school?

### LOUISE HALFE – SKY DANCER

There were four of us in my family—a sister who's 13 years older than me, two brothers who have since passed, myself, and my eldest sister's daughter that my mother raised so I call her my little sister-niece. So we could say there were five of us. I grew up on a reserve in Saddle Lake, Alberta. And we worked in the sugar beet fields in southern Alberta—in Taber, Coaldale, Raymond, Lethbridge—where it was slave labour. We also worked on a reserve where we picked rocks and wood off the ground to make room for grain fields, or whatever it was that people needed. At some point in our lives, we were shipped to residential schools. I was about six-and-a-half or seven when Indian Affairs showed up in the evening to pick up my niece and me to go to a residential school.

(Continued on page 22)





“THERE’S NO DOUBT IN MY MIND THAT WE’RE SPIRITUAL PEOPLE. WHILE WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO STILL IN OUR HEALING, WE’RE GETTING THERE.”

SKY DANCER

Photo: Fom Cover of: *The Poetry of Sky Dancer* Louise Bernice Halfe

## NWAC

Did you know they were coming?

## LOUISE HALFE – SKY DANCER

No. There were no phones back then and nothing to inform us that this was happening. We lived in a log shack in a bush. My niece cried all the way to the school. I didn’t know what was happening. I remember sitting in that car, observing.

The (residential school) was not a pleasant experience. I was there a total of seven years, although my parents took me out for a very brief period of time and then returned us. It really disrupted our family system. I never got really close to my other siblings and it tore apart our family.

## NWAC

It is clear from your poetry that the residential school experience had a profound imprint on you. What do you tell people when you’re asked about it?

## LOUISE HALFE – SKY DANCER

The psychological, deep trauma of separation from family, the sense of being perhaps rejected by our own families, the sense of abandonment, the sense of loneliness, the sense of alienation and isolation. Even though a lot of us in that system were related to each other, we didn’t know that. Because on the reserve, too, we were isolated. Residential school left its profound impact on our families, our parents, because they too had gone to residential school. So there was already this fraction in our communities.

## NWAC

Why do you write poetry? What is it about poetry as an art form that drew you to it?

## LOUISE HALFE – SKY DANCER

I didn’t choose poetry, it chose me. I started writing it when I was 16 and, at the time I didn’t even have a word for poet. I was just writing poetry. And then I quit because there was really no nurturing of my writing, and nobody to turn to. Also, I didn’t have a safe place to keep my work because there was no home base. I was basically homeless after residential school, and I needed some self-expression, so I started to write this poetry. As usual with any teenage anxiety, it was about suicide, and my funeral, the feel-sorry syndrome. Then I left it for a long, long time. Then I went in search of my parents. I found them in the mountains living in tipis and tents with my relatives from Hobbema, Alta. I started dreaming about my grandparents teaching me how to read and write in syllabics. It took many, many years before I understood the dreams that predicted my writing world. I went to my home reserve and went on my first vision quest, or my fast, not only to explore my spiritual name, which I was given, but to honour my writing career and to figure out if that was what I was supposed to do.

## NWAC

Did the poetry then just start flowing from you?

## LOUISE HALFE – SKY DANCER

No, I had been keeping a journal. I met my husband in the mountains in 1973 and I’ve been with him since. When we got together, I had been keeping a journal. We moved to Northern Saskatchewan, where he worked, and it was during a journal-writing process that the poetry came back to me and I just embarked on it. I never argued with it. I tried different genres, but I’m not any good at them, and they didn’t speak to me.

## NWAC

I sense that land, the wilderness, the experiences of indigenous women, are the major threads running through your work. Am I correct in that, and are there other threads that I’m missing?

## LOUISE HALFE – SKY DANCER

Land, for sure. Spirituality. Women’s issues. I’ve written about some of the legends. I’ve written a lot about residential school, and the lateral violence that occurs in our communities.

## NWAC

How do you decide what you’re going to write about on any given day?

## LOUISE HALFE – SKY DANCER

It tells me, and I sometimes invite it. I’ll leave the thoughts, the last thing on my mind at night when I go to bed, and it will flow out of my fingers when I’m journaling in the morning. A theme will come out from it, and then it becomes my passion, my obsession, and I just follow the call of the theme.

## NWAC

How has the genocide that’s been committed against Indigenous women affected your poetry?

## LOUISE HALFE – SKY DANCER

I grew up in a home of family violence where I watched my father assault my mother, spiritually, emotionally, physically, mentally, for a long, long time until she finally had the courage to leave, and that was after we were all grown up. Violence is learned behaviour. And I learned it. When I went into therapy, I had to unlearn my own emotional violence. I attempted physical violence, but it never worked because my husband of course is stronger than me, and he would just hold me down while I raged. I had to learn to deal with my anger and to be proactive with it rather than be horrible with it. I think that’s something women don’t talk about. We learn these behaviours. We become inheritors of whatever is passed on from our parents, whether it’s emotional or physical abuse. We learn it, and we perpetrate it until we learn how to go into therapy and to deal with it. (Continued on page 23)

“WHEN I WENT INTO THERAPY, I HAD TO UNLEARN MY OWN EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE. I HAD TO LEARN TO DEAL WITH MY ANGER AND TO BE PROACTIVE WITH IT RATHER THAN BE HORRIBLE WITH IT. I THINK THAT’S SOMETHING WOMEN DON’T TALK ABOUT. WE LEARN THESE BEHAVIOURS. WE BECOME INHERITORS OF WHATEVER IS PASSED ON FROM OUR PARENTS, WHETHER IT’S EMOTIONAL OR PHYSICAL ABUSE. WE LEARN IT, AND WE PERPETRATE IT UNTIL WE LEARN HOW TO GO INTO THERAPY AND TO DEAL WITH IT.”

- SKY DANCER

(Continued from page 22)

#### NWAC

Is poetry a part of that equation? Was it an avenue for you to express that rage? Or, is it completely divorced from it?

#### LOUISE HALFE – SKY DANCER

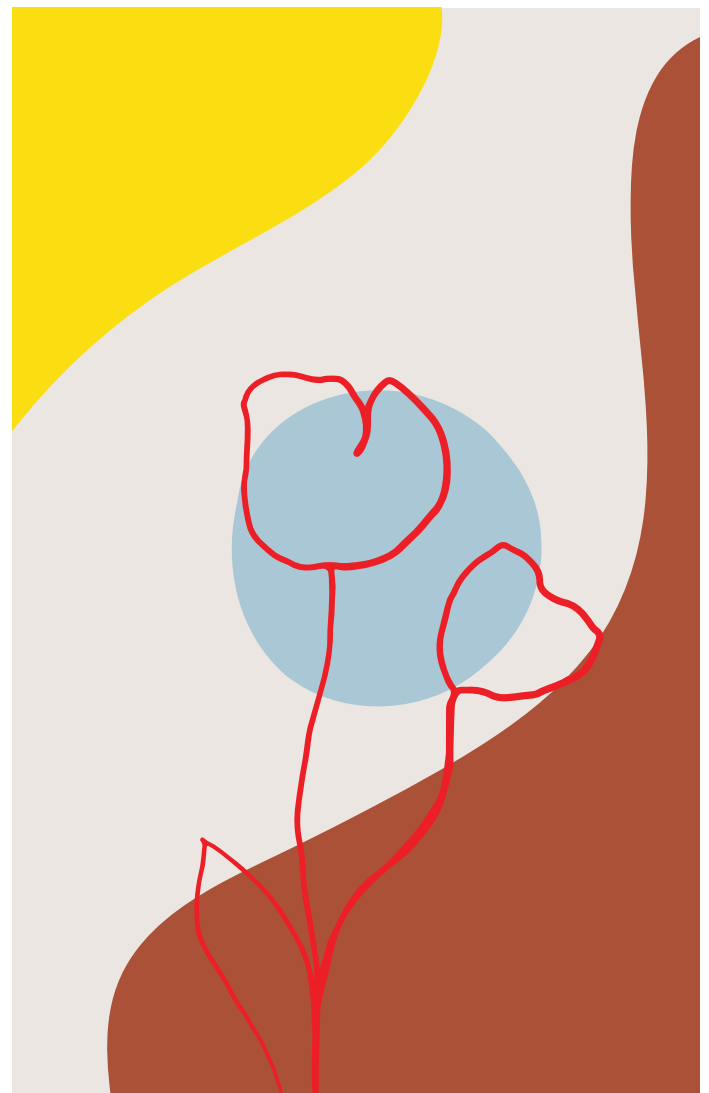
It’s completely separate. I went into therapy at a young age, in my late 20s or early 30s. I had a wonderful psychiatrist. Later, when I was learning about addictions and residential school, I went back to into therapy with a psychologist. I also worked with various Elders and with ceremony to work through a lot of stuff. If I hadn’t done any of that homework, if I hadn’t had the courage and the ability to risk, and look at myself, and accept who I am on all the levels—the good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful—I wouldn’t be able to write the things that I do, because it is painful. It opens all kinds of doors. In and of itself, poetry doesn’t heal anybody, art doesn’t heal anybody. It preoccupies our time. There’s no doubt about. It helps us feel productive and useful. But does it heal? No. We have to do the work.

#### NWAC

I want to end by talking about your latest book, awâsis – kinky and disheveled. It’s full of laughter. I felt very lighthearted, when I read it.

#### LOUISE HALFE – SKY DANCER

That’s so good to hear. That’s what it’s supposed to do. I’m exploring other topics at the moment. My previous poetry has some laughter in it. But a lot of it is dark because I’m covering historical events. Our history is full of darkness. But it’s also full of joy. People don’t see that part of our lives. We’re not the stark noble Indians people talk about. We have a sense of humour. And there’s no doubt in my mind that we’re spiritual people. We have a long way to go still in our healing. But we’re getting there.



I DIDN’T CHOOSE POETRY, IT CHOSE ME. I STARTED WRITING IT WHEN I WAS 16 AND, AT THE TIME I DIDN’T EVEN HAVE A WORD FOR POET. I WAS JUST WRITING POETRY.

- SKY DANCER



# COMMEMORATIVE ART HONOURS AND HEALS

FROM STATUES OF JINGLE DANCERS  
TO PEBBLE MOSAICS AND RED DRESS INSTALLATIONS



Photo: Sisters in Spirit rock monument, Grande Prairie Regional College





## LIONEL PEYACHEW WAS TORN.

The artist had been selected to create a statue to honour missing and murdered Indigenous women. The statue, which would stand outside the Saskatoon police station, was to be a sculpture of commemoration and remembrance.

“So you try to think of something that will give solace, but it is a hard subject,” Mr. Peyachew, a Cree who teaches art at the First Nations University in Saskatoon, said in an interview. “Do you want it to be happy? Do you want it to be sad? You are really pushed in various directions on how to come up with a design and a concept.”

Across Canada, commemorative art is being created to honour the thousands of Indigenous women and girls who have been lost over the decades to the violence that a national inquiry has determined to be a genocide. Some of the pieces are joyous, some are sombre. All have become focal points for ceremonies of remembrance, and places for prayer and quiet mourning by the families who have been left behind.

During his research for ideas, Mr. Peyachew read a newspaper story in which Gwenda Yuzicappi talked about her daughter, Amber Redman, a 19-year-old from Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation who went missing in July 2005. Her remains were located three years later on Little Black Bear First Nation near Fort Qu’Appelle. She had been beaten and stabbed and a man pled guilty to her murder.

Ms. Yuzicappi told the story of seeing a herd of buffalo gathering in the Fort Qu’Appelle hills on the day her daughter’s body was found. One of the animals was spinning and kicking up its feet. Amber had been a fancy dancer and it seemed to Ms. Yuzicappi that the buffalo had been taken over by her spirit.

Mr. Peyachew read Ms. Yuzicappi’s description of Amber being “very athletic and really very light on her feet, dancing like she was flying like an angel on top of a cloud.”

It created powerful images in his mind and provided the inspiration for the statue, which depicts Amber with her shawl flying upwards like wings as she dances. She could be an angel, said Mr. Peyachew, or she could be an eagle in flight.

“It was breathtaking, it was beautiful ... to see her dancing again,” Ms. Yuzicappi told reporters after the statue was unveiled.

Mr. Peyachew said he wants the artwork to be a comfort to those who have lost a child to violence. “You want to be able to go here, to be able to contemplate,” and to have some assurance that the police are doing what they can to bring killers to justice, he said.

Since it was created in May 2017, the statue has been the start and end points of walks for missing and murdered Indigenous women. It is a “place to gather and give each other hope, and

give each other a shoulder to lean on,” said Mr. Peyachew, “and just to inspire a way of healing and giving solace.”

Perhaps the best-known image commemorating the missing and murdered Indigenous women is the red dress. It started as an art installation by Jaime Black, a Métis and Finnish artist, at the University of Winnipeg in 2011.

With the REDress project, Ms. Black said she wanted to draw attention to the gendered and racialized nature of the crimes that were being committed against Indigenous women and to “evoke a presence through the marking of an absence.”

That art project has grown into Red Dress Day, which is marked every year on May 5 by people across Canada who hang red dresses in windows and trees. It is a time to reflect on the lives that have been lost and what must be done to stop the killings.

Since Ms. Black’s red dresses were first hung, many permanent tributes have been created across this country to honour the missing and murdered Indigenous women.

There is a Strength and Remembrance Pole in the Stella Jo Dean Plaza in North Vancouver, B.C., which is meant to be a beacon for victims’ families.

There is a statue of a jingle dancer that is known as Kakigay-Pimitchy-Yoong Pimatizwin, which translates into “life flows forever,” that sits on Sagkeeng First Nation in Manitoba.

There is a pebble mosaic in Peterborough, Ont., that honours sexual assault victims as well as missing and murdered Indigenous women. It is part of the Countdown Public Art Project, which has placed other similar tributes across the province. (Continued on page 26)

**ACROSS CANADA, COMMEMORATIVE ART IS BEING CREATED TO HONOUR THE THOUSANDS OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN LOST OVER THE DECADES TO THE VIOLENCE THAT A NATIONAL INQUIRY HAS DETERMINED TO BE A GENOCIDE. THE PIECES HAVE BECOME FOCAL POINTS FOR CEREMONIES OF REMEMBRANCE, AND PLACES FOR PRAYER AND QUIET MOURNING BY THE FAMILIES WHO HAVE BEEN LEFT BEHIND.**



(Continued from page 25) The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has commissioned an original commemorative sculpture for the roof garden on top of its new Social and Economic Innovation Centre in Gatineau, Que.

And there are others, including the Sisters in Spirit rock monument, which sits behind the Grande Prairie Regional College in Grand Prairie, Alta. The Grande Prairie Friendship Centre created this as a tribute to missing and murdered Indigenous women.

It was intended to bring awareness to the violence directed at Indigenous women, Miranda Laroche, the Friendship Centre's executive director, said in an interview. "But, also," said Ms. Laroche, "we needed a place in this area for families to be able to go and pray for their missing and murdered loved ones."

The college donated the land, which is near a reservoir and also on hiking trails that connect with the city's Muskoseepi Park. The blank stone was already in place when the Friendship Centre started thinking about commemorative monuments.

During a consultation to determine what would be most appropriate, the community and Elders said the families of victims need a place that they can go to light tobacco, give prayer, and remember their lost loved ones, said Ms. Laroche.

**"IT WAS BREATHTAKING, IT  
WAS BEAUTIFUL ... TO SEE  
HER DANCING AGAIN,"**

**GWENDA YUZICAPPI**

Through additional consultations, they arrived at the idea of etching the stone with the picture of a jingle dancer, which is a symbol of healing, she said. A staff member at the Friendship Centre drew the design and a local company recreated it on the rock. The etching was unveiled on Oct. 4, 2019, the day of the Centre's annual Sisters in Spirit vigil.

A copper bowl has been fixed to the top of the rock to gather the rain, which is symbolic of tears.

"People sometimes put messages on the rock," said Ms. Laroche. "People are going there to pray and to remember their loved ones and, as sad and heavy as it can get, it's still a place of healing."

The woman at the Friendship Centre who was instrumental in getting the etching in place was Delaine Lambert English. She took her own life a few months after the project was completed. So it now also serves as a tribute to Ms. Lambert, said Ms. Laroche, because she was such a big advocate for missing and murdered women.

"For anything that we do regarding our missing and murdered women, we go there," she said. "We host ceremonies there, we have gatherings there. And even throughout COVID, it's become our place of comfort and prayer."



Photo: Statue of Amber Redman, a 19-year-old from Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation who went missing in July 2005, by artist Lionel Peyachew

## KCI-NIWESQ

is a monthly magazine of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). Its objective is to highlight the work of the organization and to tell the stories of the Indigenous women of Canada.

NWAC, which was founded in 1974, is a national Indigenous organization representing First Nations (on and off reserve, with status and without), Métis, and Inuit women, girls, and gender diverse people in Canada. Its goal is to enhance, promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of Indigenous women within their respective communities and Canadian society.

## EXECUTIVE EDITOR

LYNNE GROULX  
NWAC Chief Executive Officer

## EDITOR

JOAN WEINMAN

## WRITER

GLORIA GALLOWAY

## SPECIAL PHOTO CREDIT

MIV FOURNIER

## DESIGNER

KYLA ELISABETH



# KCI-NIWESQ

NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA MAGAZINE

