

CONNECTED IN CREATION

A Collection of Lived Experience through Cultural Expression



EDITED BY RENNIE LINKLATER

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through Cultural Expression*

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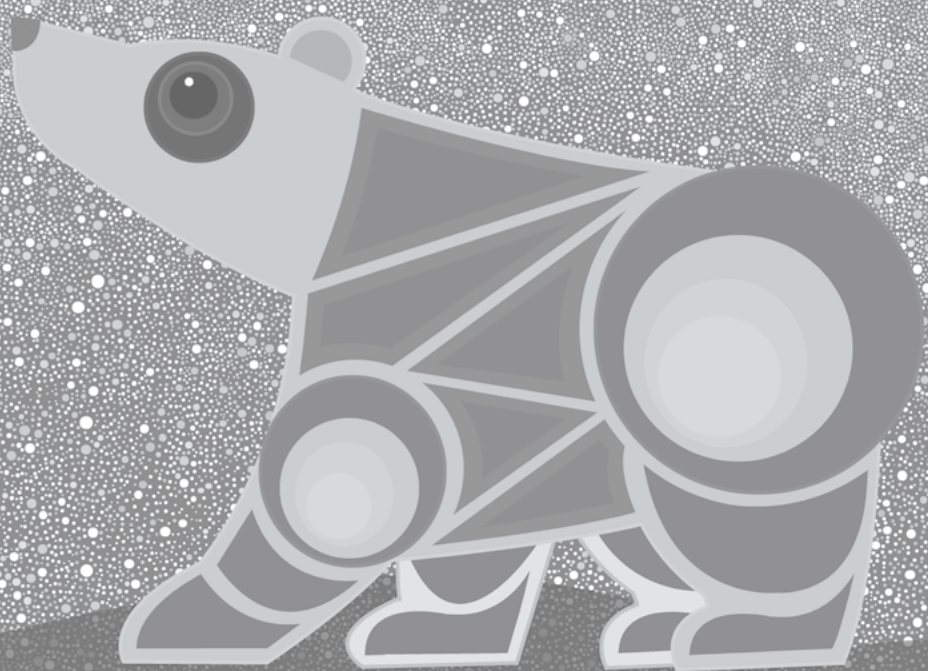
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PROLOGUE

Connected in Creation: A Collection of Lived Experience through Cultural Expression is a tribute to all those who bring forward their voices to inform service delivery and system initiatives. As members of the staff collective at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), we recognize that we carry many experiences related to our mental health and substance use issues or the challenges experienced by our family members; yet we are mindful not to take the place of clients', patients', and community members' voices, as we are in paid professional positions and acknowledge our inherent power as service providers. Still, as we too are part of our communities and are often accessing ceremonies and services to help us heal and maintain balance, we appreciate the opportunity to share our experiences and remain connected.

As we bring forth this collection of writing in the spring of 2020, I am reminded of the many prophecies and teachings we have heard throughout our lives that speak of the “changes” and “quiet times” we will see within our lifetimes. This time is now. Throughout the lands there are many ceremonies, prayers, songs, dances, and medicines that inspire our Spirits to stay connected, to feel life, and to offer love for Creation. We also know our world will never be the same again. There will be a painful and stagnant global grief, and many will be overwhelmed with sadness. As helpers and healers around the world, we will need to be thoughtful about our approaches and continue to support the healing of humanity. Spiritual leaders, Elders, knowledge keepers, wisdom carriers – young and old – will hold us in the light and support our journeys forward.

And finally, we put forth this collection of our lived experiences as an offering, in hopes that people will be inspired to join us in our efforts to ensure that those with lived experience find pathways to share their voices and inform system improvements and culturally relevant services to advance the healing and wellness of Indigenous peoples.

Miigwech,

RENNIE LINKLATER, PHD
DIRECTOR, SHKAABE MAKWA

Eighth Fire of the Anishinaabe

K'OKOMIS SHKABAYWIS / WALTER LINDSTONE

The eighth prophet will emerge – tall, with mixed blood, and having lived a difficult life. This new prophet will have reaped the benefits of many different wisdom keepers and Elders who reawakened their faith and belief in this world. The new prophet bears witness to the continued destruction of Mother Earth but vows to teach his children and all walks of life the original sacred four to continue to support each other and forever work together in peace and harmony. The eighth fire is not the final fire, as the four sacred beings have chosen the correct path to change their destructive ways and to work together after the teachings of the great cleansing from floods. Therefore, a ninth fire will be lit.

This new prophet will not offer false hope or promises. He will share all his new wisdom and ceremonies with the people and teach them how to cherish and honour Mother Earth. The focus shall not be on our people. In order to light the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and several other future fires, it is the job of the Anishinaabe (Red People of Turtle Island) to educate the other vessels on how to live according to the old ways: off the land; respecting Mother Earth; with the original language; and with the sacred governance shown to us by the animals (our first family). The Great Spirit will see our efforts and take pity on us, but it is still a long road ahead to untie what we human beings have done to Mother Earth. Great sacrifice must be continually made to appease the Spirits.

Zaagi'idiwin – Love

At the age of fourteen, I felt lost. I grew up not knowing that I lived in a household of dysfunction, with two parents who suffered from tremendous mental health issues. I had to grow up fast and take care of myself, having worked since the age of five here on the streets of downtown Toronto with no identity, no hope, no religion or spirituality. Now I look back from the age of forty-three. A proud father of five beautiful children,

I ask myself each day, “How did I survive?” My parents were both severe alcoholics, and my mother is a residential school survivor, suffering great trauma to this day. My father died from various health complications in his late fifties, but in my heart, he died much, much younger, due to his alcoholic ways.

Zoongide’ewin – Courage

A grandmother in my community came to live with us and break us free. When I say “us,” I mean that she saved a few of us youth. I was elated to meet her, and she gave me one of the most beautiful gifts you could ever imagine: my spirit name. I really enjoyed apprenticing with her, carrying her water, making her lodges, and keeping her fire. It was the best experience of my life, especially the day she acknowledged my spirit and told me I would one day dream. She said, “When you do, lay your tobacco down for that dream.” I did just as she asked of me.

Dabasendiziwin – Humility

I had the dream of all dreams. It was so beautiful. I dreamt of a lovely place in the bush just like back home, where everything was lush and fresh-smelling like spring: pine, maple, and moisture from the thaw. The sun was setting, and it became dark. I saw a shimmering light in the distance, so I naturally walked toward it. When I arrived closer, I could see an old cottage, its door open and a fire lit within. I heard a voice, an old voice, the voice of a grandmother inviting me in. “Bindigen,” she said. When I walked through the door, she was standing there in the middle of her worn wood-plank floor. She was old, looked wise, and wore a big smile with a beautiful braid of hair bridged on the top of her head, looking like sweetgrass.

Manaaji’idiwin – Respect

She pointed to the rafters in her lodge, and I looked up. On both sides, there were rows upon rows of ribbon shirts of all the colours of the rainbow. I was elated and curious as she reached up and picked one out for me – it was a beautiful sky-blue shirt with shiny white and blue ribbons on the chest, collar, and cuffs. She said, “This is for you, Man Who Watches the Moon.” Then I woke up.

Gwayakwaadiziwin – Honesty

The grandmother, Vera Martin, who came to live in our community helped me dream just as she described. I had *the* dream. Not just any dream, but the dream of all dreams. I ran outside and laid out my tobacco as I'd been taught, to protect it. That afternoon I went to Vera, presented her with a tobacco tie, and asked her to interpret. She too had a gigantic smile on her face as she said, "We will have a naming ceremony in one month's time. I will come with my pipe and facilitate the ceremony, but first you must follow my instructions and get ready." I eagerly obliged. Of course I did – I was starving. These were her instructions:

1. You must make the ribbon shirt you were given in your dream.
2. You must find four female and four male spiritual sponsors.
3. You must set a date and invite your family, friends, and the sponsors to the naming ceremony.
4. You must hand-make gifts for each and every person in attendance.
5. You must have four sacred foods present, including wild rice, fish/wild meat, corn soup, and berries.

Debweewin – Truth

For my fourteen-year-old mind, this was all overwhelming, and I had no clue how I would pull it off, but I did. I found my sponsors, prepared the feast, made my ribbon shirt, and hand-made all the gifts. It was a true testament to my faith and required a great amount of prayer through each step of preparation. I enjoyed every minute because I knew this was my identity. What I did not know at the time was that I was being taught something so special I would carry it for the rest of my life. The teachings of the first rite of passage – something you would usually receive as a baby.

Nibwaakaawin – Wisdom

This naming ceremony changed my life tremendously. It is the reason I am alive today. For everyone who reads this, I want to share strong, positive words of encouragement to let you know that if you are struggling with your identity and don't have a spirit name, please get one. It will

guide you and protect you for the rest of your life. If I told you what I have accomplished since then, you would be astonished; I never thought I would live to see a quarter of what I have learned. My life without this first rite would have been a disaster, and I am so glad the Creator listened to my prayers and brought this grandmother and my dream to me to help me find my way. I am forever in the Great Spirit's debt. Miigwech.

My EXISTENCE is RESISTANCE

KIAWENNISERATHE (BRIGHT DAY) / ALISON BENEDICT

My existence is resistance
500 years
Trauma, blindly recreated
Normal, normalized
Created, recreated
Until all are touched
Changed, shaped
500 years
Prayers, hope, waiting
The patience of Ancestors
Knowing our return
Knowing that even genocide cannot
Kill us
Connected by blood, spirit, earth
Creation
We remain
Beyond existing and resisting
Healing

Finding My Place among the Cedar Trees

LAURA GAGNON

It was spring and time to prepare for upcoming ceremonies; my first four-day fast was quickly approaching. I asked my husband if he would accompany me for a walk in the bush so I could harvest some cedar – the quiet time in the bush together would be calming. His presence alone was comforting, as I was incredibly nervous about fasting and felt inadequately prepared, given the overwhelming demands in my life at the time.

It was a beautiful April day and the sun's warm rays were shining upon us in northern Ontario. Shkagamik-Kwe (Mother Earth) still had a white blanket upon her, two feet of crisp, pristine snow. When we arrived at the unmarked trail, I set my intentions and put down my tobacco, and as we gathered our belongings for the long walk ahead, our dog, a mix of black German Shorthaired Pointer and Labrador, bolted out ahead of us, excited. We laughed, appreciating his enthusiasm for the afternoon ahead. It had been a long, cold winter, and this warm day brought relief that spring was no longer so far away.

We walked for a couple of hours, laboriously breaking through the snow crust as we moved deeper and deeper into the forest. The pressure of limited daylight was mounting, and I started to feel disappointment. Despite the vastness of the forest around us, there were no cedar trees to be found.

My husband sensed my displeasure. He expressed, empathetically, that, despite the lack of cedar, he was grateful for the afternoon together on our harvesting grounds because he had seen many remarkable things along our trek. I was dumbfounded; I had experienced nothing but frustration. Seeing my look of disbelief, he started to point out the scenic wonders of Creation all around me.

I began to awaken to my surroundings as we made our way out of the bush. I observed that slumbering bears were starting to stir; fresh evidence of their wandering was scattered around us. I noticed the delicate

tracks of foxes trotting in the snow that criss-crossed along our path. I marvelled at the strands of dense brown hair stuck in the branches of the saplings, indicating the direction a moose had recently travelled. I admired, along the ice-shored ponds, a seemingly abandoned beaver lodge, now evidently home to another creature.

Closing my eyes, I inhaled deeply, grateful for the moments I had almost missed. As we made our way back without any cedar, I realized how disconnected I was from the world around me and from Creation. I said to myself, as I had many times before, *You need to slow down and be more present.*

When we returned home late that afternoon, we noticed that the day's hot sun had started to melt the snow. Under a bedroom window, I spotted a circular patch of grass that had oddly appeared, despite the foot of snow surrounding it. Resting in the patch was a single cedar branch. My husband and I were stunned – we had no cedar trees on or near our property. Once again, I found myself inhaling deeply with gratitude. In my heart, I knew this was a sign of something I did not yet understand. I put down my tobacco and picked up the cedar to add to my bundle.

The following weekend, my husband and I visited family in our home community of Dokis. We knew the land well and found ourselves walking along trails where cedar grew in abundance. I spent the afternoon making my offerings and harvesting the cedar I needed for upcoming ceremonies. I listened to the songs of birds in the distance, the fast-flowing water of the French River, and the crunch of snow as my husband and dog explored the forest. Once again, we had a relaxing day in the bush, only this time I was present and aware of all that surrounded me.

A week later, filled with nervousness, I travelled to the ceremony grounds in southern Ontario. Two helpers greeted me and took me around to show me the spaces where I could set up. Despite their care and support, I did not feel any connection to the sites they presented to me. Unease soon turned to panic when I feared I would not find my place on this unfamiliar land. Knowing I needed solitude to calm down, I thanked the helpers for their assistance and made my way along the trail. Toward

the end of the path, I came across a flat patch of green grass between two rows of trees. Taking a deep breath, I hesitantly thought, *This could be fine*. I put my belongings down, held my tobacco tightly, closed my eyes, and began to pray. However, I found myself smirking, quickly distracted by the playful sounds of a squirrel jumping about in the trees around me. I opened my eyes, standing in awe as I awakened to my surroundings. What I believed to be two rows of inconspicuous trees was actually a row of pines, and behind them stood mature cedars. To my amazement, I was nestled in a horseshoe of cedar. It was as though this place had revealed itself to me the way the single branch of cedar had done only weeks ago.

My panic transformed into peace and calm. I made my offerings and put down my tobacco. I knew I had found my place among the cedar trees.

Identity

KAWENNANORON / CYNTHIA WHITE

It's a long road to discover our true identity...

We are told by the world to get an education and push to make our mark in the world. Make our own destiny. We are shown, through television, movies, advertising, and social media, we can be and do whatever we want. Forget your past. Forget your pain and reinvent yourself. But thinking you can reinvent yourself without transformation is an *illusion!*

I was blessed to have a doorway open. Through the doorway, I found healing for my mind, body, heart, and, most importantly, for my spirit. The doorway exists for all. I had to find the courage and strength to stay on the other side of the door, regardless of the force pulling at me to slide back. Inside the door is illumination.

Often, we think of ourselves as being okay. We say to ourselves, "I have lived through some tough stuff, but I manage." When you find a teacher, you begin to see how life decisions are based on pain. The teacher tells us we are part of a great plan for the world. They help us to see the need for transformation to become part of that great plan. The teacher can create and maintain a sacred space for you to meet the One Who Made You. It is in that space I saw where and when pain entered my life. I had to humble myself and ask the One Who Made Me to lift the pain, and to ask for correction. I had to understand that some of what my family taught me was not necessarily in line with the original instructions by which we, as human beings, were meant to exist. My pain defined me, whether or not I realized it.

In the sacred space, at the sacred fire, I met the Creator. By surrendering, I allowed the Spirit close to me. I watched and I listened. I also had to listen to what my pain was telling me and how it informed my decisions so I could open myself to correction. For, as much as I wanted correction, I was not always open to it and even fought it. I think we all want to be right. I had to find it within myself to let go of control and give

it to the one with the plan, the Creator. Then, in the place of no expectation, answers present themselves. The answers can come in dreams and visions. The answers can come to your mind, and with them, a feeling of truth. The path forward, navigating life and life's challenges, comes from those who were there at the beginning, the Ancestors. They sit in a place of all-knowing and have themselves carried pain. They gather around us. They can allow us to see for ourselves how correction came before and how we are no different than they are. They can show us how to heal and walk with our spiritual gifts.

For, as much as we learn to embrace and align with the Creator, Spirit Helpers, and Ancestors, we must at the same time stand against the negative force that is the owner of fear, torment, and suffering. The illusion is that we have lost things, people, love, or that something was taken from us. The truth is, the original beauty and perfection we were born with is merely covered up with each instance of pain. We must take a stand against that which controls the darkness. Buy the illusions no more! We need to place ourselves in that space where we meet the Creator and maintain our alliances. In that space, the beauty can be uncovered. Expressions of gratitude and devotion polish the beauty. We renew our original relationship with the One Who Made Us. In knowing the Creator, we will truly know what love is and its power to heal and transform. The road of transformation also includes a renewed relationship with the Earth and all the elements of Creation. They hold knowledge of original instructions. Creation can offer guidance and healing.

Allow the Creator and the Ancestors to dress you in the finest regalia. You will see that you are whole and complete with spiritual gifts. We transform into real human beings. We are proud of who the Creator made us while we walk in the footsteps of our Ancestors. We are filled with love, kindness, and peace. We walk without fear, without pain.

This is who we really are.

Expectations

ARIZONA RESTOULE

Get to school
Start your work
Raise a family
No resting, don't lurk.

You're on a tight schedule
You must do what I say
You're expected to look
Talk and walk this way.

Let's create these drones
Let's do what we're told
This ignorant bliss
I must fit the mould.

But if I'm too much?
This mould is too small
I need to break free
I want to stand tall.

Am I bad for this want?
Will others be mad?
Will I still receive love?
Will my family be glad?

I won't know till I try
So I lift up one knee
My view is improved
It's my time to break free.

I love this new place
No expectations but mine
I'm loved by many
No mould, and I'm fine.

I've crumpled their schedules
I am me, not a clone
And I will rest when I need
Forging a path of my own.

Of Agony and Renewal

LOUIS BUSCH

Guy Hill, Brandon, Sturgeon, and Birtle...

Words that conjure the Wihtikowak – eaters of flesh and destroyers of souls – To pull language from spotted lungs and sew grief across nations, To hang adolescent dreams out on the trees; perverse trophies of a lingering genocide, To flood the nehiyawaskiy and spill cold mercury on brains; A sickness to power the blinded cities below.

The last Matriarch weeps for daughters torn from embrace, for sons bent from the red to venom, cage, and to grave. The old cast aside to wither and yellow, one final humiliation in a century of suffering.

The pain in my mother's eyes, a legacy of agony so woven into the fabric of our blood.

The curse does not dull: an injustice passed down, passed on, and passed by.

The way is opaque.

But then a flash in the dark, a birthright, a vision: a memory in blood. Colours of purple and red, of gold and light blue, given to float out on hot ember. With song and celebration, a battle cry idle too long. A bloodline, a nation, a shackle cast off. A sun slowly dancing, a moon released into sky. The red-tailed hawk and the white wolf beside. The seed that was planted crawls over rock and through trench. Hearts touch river, stirring the spirit at rest. Connecting all beings, the fire lighting two paths.

A gift of renewal brings young feet to the land. Language reaching for tongues as an old friend's embrace. Shame gives way to curiosity, to pride, to power. Carrying young brother, casting down mountain and thorn. Becoming the stars, destroying the Wihtikowak, its vessels of oppression devoured from the inside.

The strength in my mother's eyes, a legacy so woven into the fabric of our blood.

Nitaniskotapan, the rope tied and pulled, a life force extended. The doorway is open. Okanachihiwiw! Okanachihiwiw! Okanachihiwiw! – the one who gives a blessing – my daughter breaks them both free from its grip, carrying only the gifts while shedding the dark.

The way is clear.

My First Memory

MICHAEL MILWARD

They say people can retain memories starting around age three. This is my first memory, and my welcome into the world as I have come to know it.

In the middle of the night, I was startled awake to hear my mother calling for me from my parents' bedroom. There was panic and fear in her voice, so I needed to go to her quickly. I had become adept at getting out of my crib. From a standing position on the mattress, I would jump up and then lower my upper body down the outside of the crib. I would grab onto the railings, and swing my legs up and over onto the floor. You would think I was a gymnast.

My feet moved quickly across the floor, and then down the long, dark hallway to my parents' bedroom. As I stood in their doorway, my eyes scanned up the wood panel walls and then across the ceiling. The room was so dark, almost black. It seemed like a stage and my parents were the players for what I would witness next.

My father towered over my mother, and my mother cowered at his feet. The sound of my father's fists hitting my mother's face was brutal, unrelenting. It was as if someone was tenderizing a piece of meat with a mallet. The pounding went on and on.

While he beat my mother, my father was saying something, but I couldn't make out what. I would later come to understand my father was slurring his words – he was drunk. My mother was screaming and calling out to me for help: "Baby, come help me!" I stood there frozen. My feet were glued to the floor. In a state of panic, I felt my heart surrounded by electricity, which then radiated across my chest, like lightning. Later in life, I would have panic attacks with the same sensation of electricity coursing across my chest. I guess this could mean my first memory was also my first panic attack.

In the moment, and for many years afterwards, I was confused by my feelings toward my father. I loved him, but I also hated him for what

he did to my mother and our family. I don't talk to my father anymore. After years of his alcoholism and violence, my parents divorced. After we moved away, my father would come to see me. Over time, his visits became fewer and fewer, until he stopped coming to see me altogether. He became an absentee father who was more interested in his drink. I decided at a young age to write him off, and I haven't seen him since.

Identity, Land, Memory

HOLLY SMITH

My memory draws a map of Sour Springs back on Six Nations. I walk down these rez roads many times in my dreams, almost always in the nighttime. I grew up around family and spent a lot of time on the land. I would play outside by myself, making mud burritos from the flat, broad leaves that grew in the swamp or stirring up potions in an old pot I had found. The pot sat on a piece of concrete I used as the stove. I collected turkey meat that I had chipped away from old rotten logs to add to the stews.

In the summer, I was left to my own devices when I was old enough to look after myself. I would walk across the road with my two sisters to Sour Springs Plaza and rent movies from Mohawk Video. We cycled through the same movies over and over. The movie store sold long plastic sleeves of stale, over-buttered popcorn that we would sometimes take advantage of if we felt like picking corn from our teeth for the next few days. Sometimes we'd head to the convenience store a few doors down to pick up some ice cream cups, strawberry shortcake popsicles, or one-cent belly-button gummies. We got a lot of amusement out of handing a dollar to the cashier so they could use tiny plastic tongs to count out one hundred belly buttons. They caught on to our game eventually and started to fill up the little brown paper bag about a third of the way with the gummies. Game over.

On the weekends I would get dropped off at my grandpa and granny's house to play with my cousins. The three of us would play road hockey in the driveway, and they would take shots on me in the net. Other times we'd play one-on-one until someone got high-sticked or slashed in the hand, or just got mad and quit. Many creeks were dammed up, and trees were made into forts. The winter nighttimes were the best. The whole gang of cousins would play hide-and-seek outside, trying not to be afraid of the bush in the dark.

The three of us would go four-wheeling on a quad in the fields and through thick bush. We would ride on beaten-down trails made by the quads that had gone before us to carve out a path. My designated seat was on the very back. I'd sit on the metal rack and hang on for my life as we raced through the bush and jumped over grassy culverts. I never fell off, but I bet one of those boys would have if they'd had to sit on the rack. Being in the bush was my connection to the spiritual and physical world. I am taken back to that place again and can smell the sour sulphur of swamp water as we'd bog through it. I can feel the caked-on mud drying on my skin. I can smell the exhaust of the old muffler that burned my calf when I squeezed my legs to the bike to keep from falling off.

The land was freedom and comfort. It was connection to something I didn't understand. I was shown many stories from the land. One of the greatest lessons I learned was that when you're flying out of control through the air over hilly terrain, sometimes the only thing to do is hang on.

The Ache

RENNIE LINKLATER

And then I discovered more layers
layers between layers
layers make fabric strong

looking at the threads
woven together
become solid
in thickness

strings have kept the compartments separate
like a net with clearly defined borders
the string was pulled
the compartments merged
giving me full view of my
struggle, connecting my cells
opening the pathways between
my heart and body

feeling the ache is a relief
there were years I could not feel
it was how I survived.

Questions of Discovery and Balance

SHE WHO BRINGS FLOWERS / ALEXA HARRIS

Who am I?

Will I ever figure this out?

Can I ever accept the other side of my heritage?

Will others accept the person in me who I do not look like?

Did the Spirit Helpers still help me when I did not know their names?

Have I always been the Badger? Or is my spirit awoken only now that I have accepted it?

This new information has been life-changing – but also life-affirming.

The land, the wind, the water have always called out to me, but now I am truly listening.

So what does this all mean?

A new identity? A new culture? A new beginning?

I want to know more and I want to be the person my Ancestors know I can be...

But what do I truly want?

What is this new identity? What was my old identity?

How can I express it?

All of this makes so much sense, and yet every day is so confusing.

The duelling cultures that live within are constantly at odds.

I feel as though I do not fit in, as though I will never be accepted by anyone.

Why has this part of my identity been hiding for so long?

Why do I feel choke-held by *accepting* an identity?

It feels foreign to practise my new culture.

It feels wrong to practise my new culture.

But I always feel whole when practising *my* culture.

The smell of the sage, the beat of the drum, the power of the pipe;
it feels as though they have always been a part of me.

Like a reminder from my childhood – a memory that never existed.

To be Métis is to be proud of the unknown, to be proud of mixed
ancestry and part of an enriched community and tradition.

Then why do I and so many others like me feel this conflict inside?

Can I ever accept it? Why do I even feel compelled to?

Do others feel conflicted by their heritage?

Do others want answers?

Do they even ask?

*

These were questions I found myself asking when I began to accept the
spirit that lives inside me.

I still ask these questions to this day and I do not have any answers.
Although now these questions do not hold as much weight.

And every day the heaviness lifts and I find myself more confident in
who I am as a strong and proud Indigenous woman.

The Grandfathers have helped me to see what to accept and what to let
go of.

And what I have been shown is that identity is a balance of accepting
what I feel, what comes to me, what embraces me, and what connects
me to something bigger.

My identity is not the amount of blood I hold, not the years away from my culture, not the colour of my skin or the people I am supposed to “belong” to.

My identity is my experience, my challenges, my chokeholds, what I choose to embrace and what I choose to let go of.

I will never have answers to any of these questions. But I will always have my spirit, as long as I allow it in. Always.

Connected, Through the Land

NADIA T. G. GREEN

.....
I remember walking through the forests (with you).

Sometimes it was early fall,
with the crunch of the leaves beneath our feet.

Sometimes it was winter,
forging paths in the snow.

Sometimes it was spring,
leaving trails of footprints in the mud.

And sometimes it was summer,
listening to the birds singing and the warm breeze
making its way through the leaves of the trees.

We walked through the four seasons together, countless times.
How I wish I could walk those same trails with you one more time.

I would listen more intently,
to the stories of years gone by, of days long passed.

I would take photos of you, to remember your hardiness among the wood.
I would tell you how much I love you, Dad.

Despite the changes that time brings,
I am thankful for those moments and memories,
shared and captured along paths carved into the land.

Walking along those same paths, I am reminded of your spirit.

The trees remember you and so does the Earth,
and through them I feel your presence.

We remain, forever connected, through the land.

Falling in Love with Creation

KAHONTAKWAS / DIANE LONGBOAT

The hot noontime sun burned through my cotton dress, and cicadas buzzed like electrical lines overhead. My mother herded my brothers and me down the path, through the cow pasture, to the raspberry bushes to pick some juicy red ones before the birds got the best of them. Our baskets seemed full as we left the patch, but the walk to the bush meant a lot of snacking went on before we reached the cool shade of the hickory, chestnut, and elm trees. Cows gently swayed through the lush green of the pasture, mooing to make sure their young ones were close by.

A soft breeze wafted through the trees at the entrance to the bush, revealing a dark archway of tree branches over the pathway, and we felt as though we were entering a magical place; and it *was* magical. The walk was punctuated by Mom's words, sharing her love of the trees, identifying them for us, testing us on their names and characteristics. She instructed us on mushrooms, both edible and those whose poison could turn you inside out! On those long walks we saw mayapples, trilliums, and wood violets, tobacco only certain folks could pick, and gooseberry bushes, along with blossoming wild crabapple trees.

Some of the pine trees in the sunny clearing were so old and tall that the bed of needles below their branches ran deep. The wide spread of the lowest branches made the tree seem like it was inviting small ones to make a playhouse under the protection of its long arms.

Not far ahead was the creek, its dark waters filled with small fish that thrilled my brothers with their makeshift fishing poles and bread for bait. The cool of the stream was too tempting to miss, so we took off our shoes and waded close to the bank in the wet clay. Getting wet and dirty was part of the day! My mother had made a lunch of lettuce sandwiches on white bread with mayo, a cold rhubarb pudding for dessert, and a mason jar of refreshing lemonade.

We were never sure how long we'd walked, how far, or in which direction. But we never got lost, even as we grew older and were trusted

to walk without our mother accompanying us. Funny how that sense of direction enabled us to find our way home after we'd spent hours in the bush, rarely keeping track of direction and never fearing getting lost. The sense of direction gained by looking up at the sky enabled me as the older sister to direct my younger brothers on how to get home. We read the sun's descending light through the trees for timing on when to leave the bush and made sure we were close to the barnyard when Mom called out to us that dinner was ready.

A large two-acre garden tended by my mother was our grocery store. Every fall, the bounty of that garden and the orchards enabled my mother to can about seven hundred jars of fruit, vegetables, jams, and sauces to last a year. We helped manage the garden as her pickers and runners.

My father worked hard, too, to keep the bush tended to and clear of fallen branches, sick trees, or infestations of worms or moths. Although we thought we were largely alone in the bush, we didn't know that my father kept watch over us. He often moved the bulls from one pasture to another and needed to know our whereabouts. A large working farm meant there could be mishaps without proper checking for location and movement. As my brothers grew older and learned to fish and hunt, my father always instilled in them respect for living creatures. Whatever they hunted had to be used properly. The farm, where we employed the best of organic methods for animals, grains, and gardens, not only fed our family but enabled us to share with our community members at a time before social assistance and other forms of government aid after WWII.

The memories of my young days of childhood meant freedom to discover the wonders of the natural world, to embrace the seasons, the changing light of storms, to experience joy for the bounty of the land, and to be grateful for all of the Life Beings on the land and in the water. A visit from one of the Clan Mothers to my home later in life placed my childhood experience in a lens to be shared with everyone: "To be truly happy in this lifetime," she said, "one must fall in love with Creation."

My name is Kahontakwas, "She Is Picking Sweetgrass," one of the four sacred medicines of Mother Earth. I am Mohawk from the Turtle Clan at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. It was and is, always, my home, my land, and my people.

Denial of Miscarriage

LISA WABANGE

It was a cold January evening, and I was working in a rural community. Going for a walk with my colleagues, I experienced pain in my lower stomach. I blamed it on the food I had eaten at the restaurant we had just left. As we continued to walk, I mentioned to my colleagues that I had to go back to the hotel – I did not feel well. We decided to walk back together. When we reached the hotel, I ran to the washroom. I felt like I had wet myself. As soon as I sat on the toilet something was coming out of my womb; I panicked and flushed the toilet. I said to myself, “It’s got to be a cyst. I have my tubes tied, and it cannot be.” I pushed the thought of any possibility that it was a miscarriage out of my mind. Reflecting back, I see that I did this to protect myself and the work I had to do within the community that week.

About two weeks later, one of my colleagues with whom I had gone to the rural community told me, “I did not like the hotel we stayed at.”

“Why?” I asked her.

She said, “I had a dream that I had a miscarriage in the toilet at the hotel.”

I was shocked; my jaw dropped and I thanked her for sharing her dream with me. I asked her if I could share something personal about me.

“Sure,” she said.

I told her that her dream was something that had actually happened to me at the hotel, but I thought it was a cyst. Denial is powerful; even when there are dreams and signs, we don’t want to see them.

After hearing about my colleague’s dream, I booked an appointment to see my gynecologist, who confirmed that I had in fact had a miscarriage and that my tubes were tied and still in place. The gynecologist then asked me, “Have you ever had a miscarriage before?” I had had one six years earlier, I informed him, my tubes being tied even back then.

Moving forward from that day, I made a decision to use an additional

contraceptive to prevent having children in the future. It was a hard decision and I grieved for the fact that I could never again be a mother; this was the last time I would have been able to carry a life inside me. I shared my experience with my husband, close family, and friends, and this sharing helped me to heal. As to my grief, it's continuous, and there are special people Creator put in my path to help me through this difficult time. I went to my colleague to thank her for sharing her dream with me, explaining how she had helped me out of my denial, and I let her know I had, in fact, had a miscarriage.

About eight months later, I found myself working with a community agency in another city. I chose to sleep at a friend's house rather than a hotel. As I arrived at her place, I was so tired from the travel I lay on the bed she provided me. I loved her nicely decorated room, and touched her quilted blanket as I lay there. I felt the love that came from the blanket. I asked my friend, "Who made this blanket?"

She said, "My aunt made it for me, why?"

I told her, "She made it with love for you." I later found out that her aunt had passed away a while ago.

That night, I had a lot of dreams. The dream I remember most clearly was early that morning I was holding a baby about a year old in my arms, knowing this child was mine. I could not see the face as I held her or him, and we were in a truck, watching Aboriginal men harvesting a moose. The child could not talk but pointed at my husband. I knew what they wanted to know. Who was my husband? What was he like? I shared with the baby, "That is your dad, he is a wonderful man. He is funny, he is very loving, and also he is a great provider." We looked on as he hauled the moose leg onto a table. At that moment, the child disappeared from my grip and I woke up from my dream, hugging myself and crying so hard I could not stop. I prayed to Creator to help me know the gender of the baby we had lost and if the baby was okay in the spirit world.

That same day, I was working with community members within the agency, and a lady I have never met before came to me and said, "There is something I have to tell you personally about you."

I asked her, "Can you speak to me at break?"

"Yes," she said, "I hope I don't forget."

So once break time came, we met in the hallway and she shared with me that she knew I had had a miscarriage recently, that it was a girl and this girl was so happy to be in my womb even for such a short period of time, and she was waiting for us in the spirit world. I thanked the woman for sharing and asked if we could talk again at the end of the day. She agreed.

I was able to continue with the community work that day, and when, finally, the end of the day came, we met. I thanked the woman for sharing her knowledge with me, and she reflected that she should have waited until after work, for it was a heavy message she had delivered to me. I shared with her that her vision and insight were right, and told her how I had prayed to Creator this morning and how Creator had answered my prayers by gifting her with her knowledge.

Wiping my tears, I thanked her for giving me closure and healing. I knew Creator had answered my prayers and I thanked Creator out loud for answering my prayer. I also asked the woman for permission to share my story of this beautiful experience we had. She said, "Yes, if it provides healing to you and to others, go ahead."

After she went to her car and disappeared down the road, I climbed into my car and cried for a very long time, a cry that came from the pit of my stomach. After I was done crying, I was happy that the baby girl was fine in the spirit world.

When I arrived at my friend's house, I called my husband to tell him about the dream and the message the gifted woman had shared with me that day.

My husband cried on the phone, he was so touched by the experience. He said, "Our baby came to see you; she would have been born about this time, right?"

I told him, "You are right, that is why she came to see us! To let us know she is okay!" My husband and I were able to talk about the loss of our baby girl, and it gave us comfort knowing we will see her again in the spirit world.

In my culture, when people help you heal or provide guidance, if you are able to provide a gift to them, it is encouraged. The next day, I went to a craft store and was shopping for a gift for the woman. I felt that her spirit was that of a thunderbird. There was so much to pick from

in the store, I met the Aboriginal artist and said to her, "I am looking for jewellery with a thunderbird on it."

The artist said, "I just finished making this thunderbird healing bracelet."

I looked at it and right away said to her, "I love it, I will buy it." The bracelet had a thunderbird and four eagle feathers representing the four directions. I purchased this bracelet and wrapped it up, then went to see the woman at my work and provided her with this beautiful gift for the healing she had given me and my family.

As she opened it, she was shocked; she said she and her family are healers and she is part of the Thunderbird Clan. She loved the bracelet and knew it was a healing bracelet without me telling her, because she was so gifted. She told me, "You are gifted as well, for knowing my family clan was the Thunderbird Clan and our history of healing." She thanked me and added, "I will wear this bracelet when I provide healing to people, wherever I go."

White Feather Woman Can Fly

KRYSTINE ABEL

Rain was born to Kwesens, a beautiful red-tailed hawk. Kwesens welcomed her daughter Rain into the world; she was born with two white feathers streaked in her reddish-brown tail. Kwesens herself had endured a life of pain and didn't fly high like the other hawks. She kept her distance, hiding herself and her baby Rain away from the other red-tailed hawks, because, for Kwesens, this was the only way to keep them safe.

Rain was just a wee hawk when Kwesens drank from muddy waters along the edge of the city. Not knowing any other way, Rain watched as her mother drank the murky water, time and time again, with sadness in her eyes. Rain didn't know how to fly yet, so Kwesens carried her in her talons wherever they went. Rain knew that when Kwesens drank that dirty water, she would gleefully fly, soaring high with Rain in her talons, but would quickly fall right back down to the ground. Sometimes Rain had to cry to make sure Kwesens knew the erratic flight scared her. Sometimes Kwesens listened, other times not.

One night, after a visit to the muddy waters, Kwesens again carried Rain high up in the sky, and they sailed through the city. Rain could see everything below: the streets, people having fun, people who were hurt. Rain also saw food, food that would be delicious to eat, but Kwesens never thought of hunting and bringing it to Rain. They continued to sail through the sky until Rain saw only nothingness. The pitch black was illuminated by the moon and the stars, and Rain looked down and all around. What was below was terrifying to see – the blackness swayed rhythmically back and forth, making menacing crashing sounds along the concrete line of the city, kilometres away. Rain was scared of the nothingness below, but always felt safe in Kwesens' grip.

Suddenly, Rain slipped out from her mother's grasp and fell hundreds of metres into the nothingness. Rain cried and tried flapping her tiny wings but was too small to fly on her own. Kwesens tried to catch

Rain but it was too late – Rain had fallen through the darkness and smashed through a wall of water, her breath knocked out of her. She was now in the depths of a lake, not sure whether she was going up or down, struggling for air. Kwesens rushed to her baby, frantically searching for Rain by gripping her talons under water until Rain finally emerged, gasping for breath. From that day forward, Kwesens vowed never to drink the muddy water that would make her drop Rain again. She also never again flew high, teaching Rain to stay close to the city’s ground, and certainly never again flew with Rain across the vast expanse of lake that cradled the city’s edge.

As Rain grew up, she stayed close to the concrete walls of the city, perching high upon the tallest of buildings, never letting Kwesens know, because she knew Kwesens would worry too much. Rain loved to watch the sunrise and sunset over the lake, kilometres away. She loved the way the water glittered in the sun, breathing in and out. She knew that other red-tailed hawks gathered with other birds of prey in that area, and that all the birds would gather there to pray, feast, and share stories that their fathers and grandfathers had shared with them before. They also spoke in a language Rain didn’t recognize but felt in her heart. Growing up, Kwesens never did bring Rain to be with those other hawks, instead choosing to go north with birds that prayed differently, didn’t feast or share the stories from many moons ago. These birds Rain had been raised with liked to drink muddy water and collect shiny nickels that they found outside a big building with flashy lights that humans went into.

Despite Rain’s yearning for the water and the connection to those other birds, she was shy, too scared and frightened to go. She was a quiet, gentle hawk, not as vocal as those other hawks, and not as good a hunter, and she certainly didn’t speak their language. This made Rain sad, and for years she continued to fly alone, never feeling she could fit in anywhere, except to gather at the murky waters with the other hawks who had surrounded her as she grew up.

Rain loved Kwesens so much and would visit her as often as she could. She hoped to hear the stories she knew were being shared down by the water. Surely Kwesens knew of these stories. Sometimes Kwesens would share a bit of the past and tell Rain about where their family was from, but as soon as it got too deep into the story, Kwesens would fly away,

as she had her own experiences of being plunged into darkness. Rain knew this and accepted that her mother was fearful, and so never had the heart to ask what had happened.

But Rain was determined to make it to the water. One day, she flew swiftly toward the lake and perched herself up on the rocky edge of the park, overlooking the other hawks, who screeched and called out to one another. Rain looked longingly at the group, admiring their warrior spirits and how high they flew over the sparkling water. They ate delicious rodents, while Kwesens and Rain ate city squirrels. Rain got a little closer and mustered the courage to join the group. But a deep voice broke Rain's gaze at the delectable frogs they were eating and asked, "You. Where are you from?"

Rain froze as all the other hawks turned toward her. Despite being a little bigger than the rest, Rain said with her little voice, "From the city," and pointed to the urban landscape that hugged the lake.

"No, where are you *from*," the old hawk man's voice boomed again, and this time Rain knew he was asking about where Kwesens was from.

"I don't know, my mom hasn't told me."

The old bird screeched and turned away. "Well then, you don't belong here!" The other hawks turned their backs as well, embarrassed for Rain, while those who respected the old hawk man stood beside him in alliance.

Rain flew away, close to the ground, sad and defeated. No wonder Kwesens stayed away from the water and the hawks that gathered there – they were mean and unwelcoming. After this incident, Rain would often hide among the trees and listen to the way they spoke. She heard their prayers in the language she didn't know and she would feel it cut under her wings – as beautiful as it was, she wished she could speak it too, to be with the others, and feast to honour Creator together. She tried to learn the way the old hawk man spoke, but Kwesens couldn't understand her. Rain rarely used the language in front of other hawks again, fearful of rejection and being made fun of. Then she felt angry that Kwesens had never taught her or shared their history of where they were from.

One day, Rain saw an old hawk woman who lived close to her mother. She was hungry and too old to fly. Rain brought her a field mouse and nudged it over to her.

“Miigwech for this food,” said the older hawk. “I have a hard time flying and I’m very hungry.”

Rain perched with the old hawk woman while she ate, and asked where she was from.

The old hawk woman replied, “I am from the place between two cliffs, called M’Chigeeng. But I left that place a long time ago.” She then said she had known Rain’s mother, and her mother’s mother, and knew of the prayers, and the feasts of hawks from that place.

Rain perked up and exclaimed with glee, “This is where my family is from too!”

The old hawk woman nodded. “Do you know why your mother’s name is Kwesens?”

Rain shook her head.

“It is because she was young when her mother – your grandmother – died. And your grandmother’s last request was for her older sisters to take care of her little girl. She has the spirit of a little girl, you know.”

Rain sobbed in tears. She never knew her grandmother had died when Kwesens was so young. Rain did know that despite the fear, hardships, and secrets her mother held close, Kwesens still had a curious, childlike way about her, even as her feathers started to turn grey with age.

Rain, still sitting with the old hawk woman, pointed to the lake. “I wish I could go over there and be with the other hawks, where they are praying and feasting.”

The old hawk woman gently wrapped her wings around Rain and said, “You are a part of this Creation, and the water needs to hear your prayers too. I will teach you, Waabske-miigwan-kwe.” Rain didn’t know what that last word meant, and before she had a chance to ask, the old lady hawk lifted her wings to the sky and said, “Introduce yourself to Creator, Waabske-miigwan-kwe, White Feather Woman.”

Waabske-miigwan-kwe zoomed across the land, introducing herself to all the two-legged and four-legged beings. She flew over the lake, up high to the stars, until the air felt thin, and then dove right into the glistening waters, the fish scattering from where she broke through the surface. She rested, out of breath, on the still water, flapping her wings, not realizing she could paddle on the water, let alone eat the wonderful fish that Creator had left there for her from the beginning of time.

Waabske-miigwan-kwe would continue to meet and sit with whom she would now call Nookimis, forgetting all about the others at the lake. Sure, she wanted to sit with them, but there was so much to learn from Nookimis. For example, that she, too, was a part of Creation and had her own ceremonies, and that with practice she would also one day be able to speak the language. Waabske-miigwan-kwe would visit Kwesens and share all the things Nookimis told her about, and Kwesens would fill up with quiet pride.

One day, Kwesens broke down. “I kept these stories from you, my child, because I was afraid. I was told as a young child that we could not use that language or pray. I drank the muddy water because they told me that’s all I deserved in life. I wanted so much for you, and now I see you are whole, Waabske-miigwan-kwe.”

Waabske-miigwan-kwe hugged Kwesens and understood. And it was okay. They were going to heal and fly high again, together. Waabske-miigwan-kwe took Kwesens, who was now as old as Nookimis, to the highest perch of the city, showed her the sunrise and the sunset, and where all the great food was. Kwesens looked healthier in her old age than she had ever looked when she was younger. Gone were the days of eating city squirrel.

Time went on, and Nookimis passed into the spirit world, while Waabske-miigwan-kwe had her own little hawks that she raised close to the water with their father and with Kwesens by their side. They prayed and feasted together, in the language. Waabske-miigwan-kwe’s babies grew to be part of the bigger community of hawks, and were taught to welcome in all walks of life those who wanted to pray and feast.

One evening, as the sky grew darker, Waabske-miigwan-kwe realized the water didn’t look like the black void she remembered from when she was small. Instead she saw Nookimis in the moon, shining down and sharing her love and light with all of Creation.

What It Means to Be Native

CORA-LEE SIMON

Who am I, you ask
I am Anishinaabe-kwe
I have different spiritual beliefs than you
I have a different culture and traditional values too
Women were revered and are the epitome of life
Colonization has affected our ways
but will never be forgotten as it is a part of who I am
My culture was taken away for a while
But it has always been there, deep down
I pray and offer semma to Creator and the directions
I smudge and take various Indigenous medicines
Our stories and teachings are ours and belong within our lives
Just like our language is inherent in our identity
I believe in togetherness and that we stand strong against all adversity
I am diverse and resilient
I AM INDIGENOUS

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

KRYSTINE ABEL is an urban Anishinaabe-kwe, and a member of M'Chigeeng First Nation. Krystine is the Manager of Wellness Innovation with Shkaabe Makwa at CAMH and is passionate about educating and developing approaches to Indigenous health and healing through culturally grounded interventions. Krystine has a Master in Education and is currently working toward a Master in Social Work, focusing on Indigenous Trauma and Resiliency.

LOUIS BUSCH is a Bear Clan member of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba. For more than ten years, Louis has worked as a behaviour analyst to support individuals living with autism, dual diagnoses, and forensic mental health needs. Louis is a Community Support Specialist with Shkaabe Makwa and hopes to contribute to positive social change through the advancement of behavioural health services and educational initiatives that promote the recovery and empowerment of marginalized peoples.

LAURA GAGNON is a member of Dokis First Nation and Muskrat Clan. She brings more than a decade of experience working in Indigenous health and wellness, as well as post-secondary education, where she previously led the development of initiatives and services to support Indigenous learners on their academic and personal journeys. Laura is a registered social worker and holds a Master in Social Work (Indigenous Field of Study) from Wilfrid Laurier University as well as a Master of Education from Ontario Tech University. Her commitment to supporting learning and wellness for helpers, as well as contributing to system-level change, is the focus and inspiration of her role as the Manager of Workforce Development with Shkaabe Makwa.

NADIA T. G. GREEN, RN, MN, works as a Knowledge Exchange Coordinator for Shkaabe Makwa at CAMH. Nadia is originally from Berens River First Nation in Manitoba. She received her Bachelor's degree in Nursing from the University of Manitoba and a Master's degree in Nursing from the University of Toronto. Nadia has worked as a nurse, nurse researcher, clinical instructor, and course instructor for the University of Toronto's Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing. She is passionate

about improving the health of Indigenous populations living in both urban and remote communities and hopes to redefine health care provision and enhance access to essential health care services through her work and academic endeavours.

KAHONTAKWAS / DIANE LONGBOAT, BA, BEd, MEd is a member of the Turtle Clan, Mohawk Nation, at Six Nations Grand River Territory, Canada. She is a ceremonial leader, traditional teacher, and healer. Since 2013, Diane has served as Elder for CAMH. In 2016, Diane became the Senior Project Manager, Guiding Directions Implementation, the CAMH strategy to improve practices and partnerships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. Diane led the development of the Ceremony Grounds for CAMH to establish the Sweat Lodge, Sacred Fire, and medicine gardens, including the policy development required to support traditional Indigenous healing as a standard of practice. Diane is a professional educator with a Master's degree in education. She has published extensively on Indigenous education law and policy for the Chiefs of Ontario and the Assembly of First Nations. In 2017 and 2018, Diane was the Indigenous Education Advisor to Premier of Ontario Kathleen Wynne and the Ontario Minister of Education (Minister Naidoo Harris and Minister Hunter).

KAWENNANORON / CYNTHIA WHITE is from the Mohawk community of Akwesasne. Her lineage is Onondaga Snipe Clan. She currently lives at the Six Nations Grand River Territory in southern Ontario. Cynthia has been actively engaged in personal healing and spiritual training since 1996. She is a traditional healer in Aboriginal Services at CAMH. Cynthia assists First Nations, Inuit, and Métis individuals in developing their own connections to Spirit for transformation.

KIAWENNISERATHE (BRIGHT DAY) / ALISON BENEDICT, MSW, RSW, is Kanien'kehá:ka from Akwesasne, Wolf Clan. The roots and inspiration of her life work come from the teachings of the Peacemaker. Her professional experience has focused primarily on Indigenous communities throughout Turtle Island, as a healer, mentor, problem solver, organizer, and educator. She has worked with mainstream/colonial institutions, helping them understand what happened (through a trauma-informed approach), and taught about the diversity between and within First Nations. Alison's practice is holistic and inclusive; incorporating traditional teachings from the diversity of Elders, who have taught her alongside Western, evidence-based practices.

K'OKOMIS SHKABAYWIS / WALTER LINDSTONE, a member of Batchewana First Nation, is the proud father of five children. His spirit name is K'okomis Shkabaywis and he is of the Marten Clan. He started in the winter of 2020 as an Implementation Specialist with Shkaabe Makwa at CAMH. Before this, he was an Indigenous

Centred Social Worker within Aboriginal Services at CAMH for five years. Walter has worked in the community of Toronto for over twenty years, managing and coordinating various projects within the Aboriginal health sector, specializing in homelessness, mental health, and addictions. Walter has completed a specialist in Aboriginal Studies from the University of Toronto, a BSW from First Nations Technical Institute, an MSW from Wilfred Laurier University, and began a Doctorate of Philosophy at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Social Work. He continues to look forward to utilizing his expertise to assist in narrowing the well-being gap for his community and peoples respectively.

RENNIE LINKLATER, PhD, is a member of Rainy River First Nations in northwestern Ontario. Her Anishinaabe name is Ozhaawashkobinesi and she is Nigig Dodem (Otter Clan). Rennie has twenty-five years' experience working with Indigenous healing agencies and First Nation communities. Her passion has brought her to work across the health and education sectors as a front-line worker, program evaluator, curriculum developer, educator/trainer, and researcher. She is an international speaker on trauma and healing and the author of *Decolonizing Trauma Work: Indigenous Stories and Strategies*. Rennie is the Director of Shkaabe Makwa at CAMH and is active in several system-level initiatives across the province.

MICHAEL MILWARD, BSc, is a member of Beardy's & Okemasis' Cree Nation in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. He arrived at CAMH from a private firm, with a management background in investments and contracts. His financial experience proved valuable in financial and human resources planning, as well as supporting the recruitment, credentialing, and onboarding of physicians to CAMH. Michael completed his Bachelor of Science at the University of British Columbia before continuing his education toward a Human Resources Management Certificate at the University of Calgary. He is the Manager of Provincial Initiatives of Shkaabe Makwa at CAMH, where he plans, develops, and manages the portfolio as it relates to provincial initiatives in the Indigenous mental health system.

ARIZONA RESTOULE is an Anishinaabe-Kwe of Dokis First Nation. She graduated from Canadore College as a mental health and addictions worker, and immediately began working as a front-line counsellor at Ojibway Women's Lodge. With a passion for working with Indigenous people in the helping field, Arizona jumped at the opportunity to join Aboriginal Workforce Development with Shkaabe Makwa at CAMH as Project Assistant. After an incredible couple of years with CAMH, Arizona returned home with her growing family to her community, where she is currently excelling as their first communications officer.

SHE WHO BRINGS FLOWERS / ALEXA HARRIS, MSW, RSW, is a member of the Métis community, with ancestors from the Winnipeg region. She and her family grew up in Thunder Bay, Ontario, where she was able to explore her culture in her early twenties. Alexa is a social worker and therapist who predominantly focuses on addiction- and trauma-based intervention in her position at CAMH's Aboriginal Services. There, Alexa provides one-on-one counselling, ceremony with our traditional healer, psycho-education, and program development for individuals who identify as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. In addition, Alexa provides adjunct lectures at the University of Toronto that address moulding and reshaping Westernized therapeutic interventions for specific populations, cultures, and individual needs. As a new social worker in Toronto, Alexa is working to redevelop and restructure Westernized therapeutic interventions, increase the conversation of diversity and representation, and work to make the field of helping more impactful for the diverse needs of our community.

CORA-LEE SIMON, MEd, is a member of Thessalon First Nation. She has lived in Toronto for many years, working and volunteering with various Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations within the city. Cora-Lee graduated from the University of Toronto with a Bachelor of Arts in the Aboriginal Studies Specialist program. She also received a Master of Education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto with a focus on Leadership. She is committed to helping, supporting, and making change within our communities by working as an Implementation Specialist at CAMH Shkaabe Makwa.

HOLLY SMITH is Kanien'kehà:ka from the Six Nations of the Grand River territory. She is trained as an Occupational Therapist and has worked in the mental health and addiction field for eight years. Her creative passions include self-expression through writing, storytelling, dance, and music. She journeys to understand how these art forms can be used in the healing of intergenerational trauma for herself and her community. She also seeks to explore the intersections of Haudenosaunee and queer identities within a patriarchal and colonial society.

LISA WABANGE, MSW, RSW, is a member of Migisi Sahgaigan First Nation (Treaty #3) in northwestern Ontario. Through her role as Community Support Specialist with Shkaabe Makwa at CAMH, she provides evidence-based and culturally informed professional development training to Indigenous mental health and addictions workers across Ontario who provide direct services to First Nation, Inuit, and Métis people. She enjoys being part of the healing process at an individual and community level.



ABOUT INK WELL BOOKS

InkWell Books is the publishing arm of InkWell Workshops, a collective of professional writers with lived experience of mental health and addiction issues. InkWell offers creative writing workshops to people with lived experience and publishes the best of their writing in annual anthologies.

We believe passionately in creating inclusive community spaces where diverse stories can emerge. InkWell builds ability, establishes new and vibrant voices, and strengthens connections between individuals who, too often, have been silenced or ignored.

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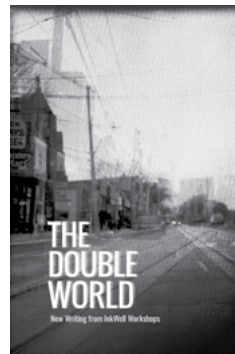
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THE DOUBLE WORLD

New Writing from InkWell Workshops (2017)



“We put forth this collection of our lived experiences as an offering...to advance the healing and wellness of Indigenous peoples.”

— RENNIE LINKLATER,

author of *Decolonizing Trauma Work: Indigenous Stories and Strategies*

Connected in Creation is a wide-ranging anthology of poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction written by fifteen First Nations and Métis staff at Toronto’s Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. With powerful clarity and an abundance of wisdom, these writers speak of the hurt and losses of colonization, along with the hope, resilience, and fierce resistance found through Indigenous ways of knowing and healing. “There are many ceremonies, prayers, songs, dances, and medicines that inspire our Spirits to stay connected, to feel life, and to offer love for Creation,” Rennie Linklater writes in her prologue.

These writings are among them.

