

Ontario Native Women's Association

Strong Hands Stop Violence

POETRY BOOK
VOLUME II





Chi Miigwetch

Thank you to all the writers who generously shared such beautiful and honest words about an issue that has touched your lives or the lives of someone you know. Your expressions not only help us to continue raising awareness about violence against Indigenous women, but they also give us hope - as for many, the healing journey has begun.

Special thanks to Collin Graham, Al Hunter, Jana Rae Yerxa, Melissa Henderson, Melinda Henderson, Audra Santa, Robin Ranger and Richard Tribe.



#orangetheworld

The **16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence** is an international campaign which takes place each year and runs from November 25, *International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*, to December 10, *International Human Rights Day*. It was originated by activists at the first *Women's Global Leadership Institute* in 1991 and is coordinated each year by the *Center for Women's Global Leadership*. It is used as an organizing strategy by individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

In support of this civil society initiative, each year, the United Nations Secretary-General's campaign **UNiTE to End Violence against Women (UNiTE)** calls for global action to increase worldwide awareness and create opportunities for discussion about challenges and solutions. In recent years, the UNiTE campaign has utilized the colour orange as a unifying theme running through all of its global activities. Orange is one of the official colours of the UNiTE campaign and in the context of its global advocacy, is used as a symbol of a brighter future, free from violence against women and girls.

endviolence.un.org

Strong Hands Stop Violence

The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) hosts an annual poetry night to raise awareness of Violence Against Women in support of the *United Nations International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women* #**orangetheworld** campaign. This day (November 25th) provides a great opportunity to create a space where Indigenous women can gather and celebrate strength and resiliency.

Poetry Night includes readings from both emerging and established poets, live musical performances, and a collective art project.

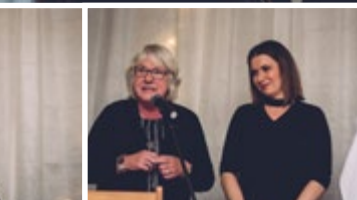
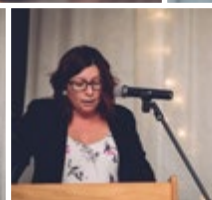
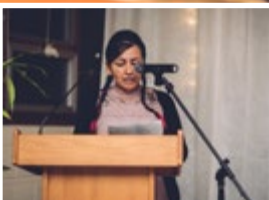
The ongoing, collective art project is called *Strong Hands Stop Violence*. Participants of the evening are invited to dip their hands in orange and blue paint and press on a canvas to signify standing together to eliminate violence against women and girls.

The name, *Strong Hands Stop Violence*, is also shared with this poetry book, which is filled with some of the beautiful expressions that emerged from ONWA's 2017 Poetry Night.





Thunder Bay Poetry Night 2017



Redwood

music and lyrics by Audra Santa

Make me a tall tree
Like a redwood stretching to the sky
I'll dream impossible things
That will outlast
Outlast this time

How long, how long, how long

Make me a tall tree
With roots that grow way beyond the soil
I'll stand a thousand years
I will outlast
Outlast this time

How long, how long, how long

With branches holding up the heavens
Deep roots way beyond the soil
I'll keep holding it together, holding
Faith found amongst the toil
Time passes ring upon ring upon ring
Drink deep the well is full
Drought has broke with lashes of water pooling
Birds fly beyond their call

How long, how long, how long

Make me a tall tree
Like a Redwood



Audra Santa is a singer-songwriter and musician who desires to create “art beyond the music”, curating art and experiences to enable people to connect to the hidden parts of themselves. After spending 10 years in Australia, Audra has returned to Canada and is finally pursuing her art and music with abandon.

Audra first performed the song, Redwood, at the ONWA’s Poetry Night for the UN International Day to End Violence Against Women (Nov 25, 2017) where the Grandmother Earth Dress, a red jingle dress, was unveiled to honour Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. She sang Redwood as a prayer that we all may leave a legacy beyond our time on this earth.

The album art (seen above), was created by Jordis Duke, artist, from a vision she saw during that first performance.

The end for both of us

by Rachel Seguin

I'm lying helpless in a puddle of blood, once again I've been beaten and bruised
My last tear trickles down the side of my face, for the last time I have taken this abuse

My eyes close with heaviness as I slowly slip away
Thinking to myself "no more to endure", for killing me finally freed me today

I watch from above as you lean over me, your tears flooding both my cheeks
Once a violent and frightful man, now you sit pathetic and weak

You scream out how you are sorry, realizing what you have done
My death wouldn't be before you, if this violence hadn't begun

You now regret putting your hands on me, trying to take back all of the wrong
Nothing will reverse this last moment, by singing the "I'm sorry" song

In the distance the sound of sirens, the neighbours have called on us once again
Feel your stomach tie up in knots, this to you is an unfamiliar pain

The fear that I had felt with every blow, either physical or from words
This fear you are feeling you bastard, it isn't half of what you deserve

As the racing cars round the corner, all of a sudden a pounding at the door
This is how I felt inside every time I begged and pleaded...no more!

Thrown to the floor, knee in your back – limbs twisted and pulled
Like something that's no longer good enough or remotely useful

They cover me up with my last protective shield
You will never again look in my eyes, your hands shake – you've sealed this deal

You're cuffed to be taken being strangled at your wrists
Feel that tightness, like you can't breath - this is a feeling I won't miss

You'll stand to tell your side to 12 strangers known as a jury
You'll try to convince and justify, how I was the cause of your fury

These 12 strangers will listen to your words, be the ones to determine your fate
You will be made a prisoner in this world, like for years you did to me your wife and
soul mate

Grey etched walls and steel barred windows, cold cell blocks and a single sheet bed
By killing me this choice you made for yourself, your life too has come to an end.

HIT ME . . . HIT YOU

by Rachel Seguin

You said "I'd never hit you", then the Jekyll and Hyde flip
Some things were said that you didn't like, so fattened both my lips

Flowers said you're sorry, and that to me you would be true
And then again anger sets you off and you beat me black and blue

The bruises on the outside can be covered with layered clothes
But the bruises on the inside are the ones that hurt the most

You thought you took all of me by lowering my self esteem
One thing you failed to take from me was the strength I found in between

I stand today as a women vowing to no longer be a punching bag
And strongly above my head I surrender my white flag

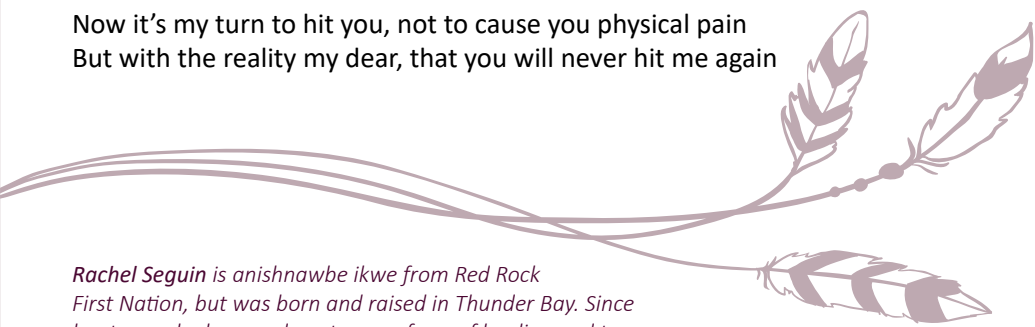
Not to surrender to you as your believe it is in your power
Powerless is what you are for hitting me makes you a coward

I am surrendering for all the women who didn't have the strength to get out
I surrender for all the children who wiped their mother's tears while she'd pout

No more keeping it behind closed doors, hiding all the abuse in silence
Hushed whispers can't be heard to break the cycle of violence

To my abuser I thank you for one thing and that's for giving me a choice
One thing that you beat out of me was the will to use my voice

Now it's my turn to hit you, not to cause you physical pain
But with the reality my dear, that you will never hit me again



Rachel Seguin is anishnawbe ikwe from Red Rock First Nation, but was born and raised in Thunder Bay. Since her teens she has used poetry as a form of healing and to express herself, but never shared them with anyone. In her adult years she was gifted a journal to keep her poems in one place and to continue to write, she was told "those are your words, own them and share them".



From Understanding, Still Comes Pain



by Nichole Barkman-Lands (Langdon)

A wise woman once told me *“even though we understand these things intellectually, it doesn’t mean it still doesn’t hurt”*.


I thought to myself, “who decides what mental toughness and strength is? Who decides we must ALWAYS hold our head high when our hearts are in the dirt?”

Sometimes, as an Anishinaabekwe my mind spins and my body aches. Sometimes, I feel like there isn’t an out to this colonial violence. Sometimes, I feel like I’m constantly exposed to the violence of this colonial structure. I can’t help it but I introvert.

At times, I need to retreat for my own sanity. I need to protect and guard my spirit. I need to disengage from the violence that feels like is forever going on around me. I need to avert.

When you’re a woman of colour you deal with violence’s sometimes beyond your understanding. At times as, a woman of colour this could make you unsure of yourself. I do know for sure as a woman of colour living in this colonial world, I will not leave untainted and unhurt.

Today is one of those days for me, but I know these days they don’t last forever. These days of mental torment may sting and scar but I know we come from greatness, I know we come from resiliency, everyday our ancestors they prayed for me and for you.



I have to remind myself. I have to take time for my human self. I am my own idea of strength, resiliency, and toughness. I have to remind myself to cry, to pray, to gift my ancestors, to smudge, to do me, I'm constantly needing to renew.

Even though the pain from understanding oppression is there, and the pain it may always lie underneath, I know I have to push through. I know my kookum, my nimamaa they didn't raise no quitter. So, I pick my heart up off that ground and I say "Kwe, you got dreams to pursue."

I have to remind myself that colonial attacks on my nish-hood is going to be a never-ending battle in my lifetime. I need to remind myself that one day understanding and coping with this violence will get easier. One day I will come through, after all from the depths of this colonial violence, from the depths of this assimilative structure; here I stand still a proud Anishinaabekwe, and from the ash here my spirit fire grew



BREAKING THE SILENCE

by Timothy J. Boulanger

Stop!

Why Are You Hitting Me?
This Is Life, We Are All Free

I Am A Woman
I Am Proud

Stop!
Stop It Now
I'm Strong, I Don't Back Down

I'll Look You In The Eye
While The Police Drag Your Sorry Ass To Jail
"I Will Not Lie "

Bravery
Why I'm Stepping Up

My Eyes Are Sore
From Crying

My Eyes
Will Shine Again

Finally
I'm Stepping Free

Breaking The Silence



Untitled

by Anonymous

“Slap” ... the blow grazes my cheek
Bulging eyes burn into my fear
Hot breath propels menacing words

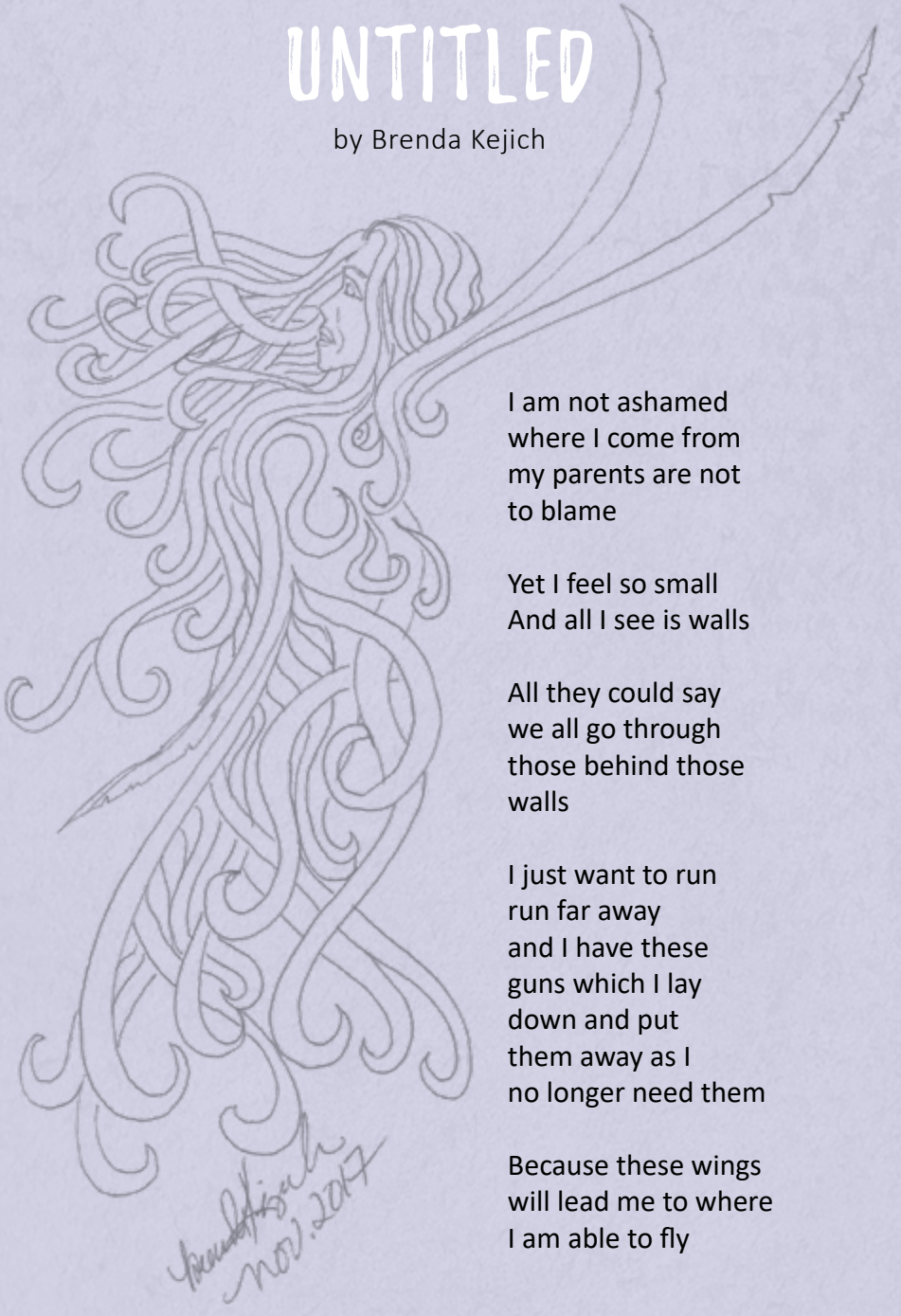
I crawl into a corner of my mind,
my windowless cell
which contains my dread

Breath ... Breathe.

Dry-eyed I weep tears
Which bathe the face within...
And turn a brave smile on the world.

UNTITLED

by Brenda Kejich



I am not ashamed
where I come from
my parents are not
to blame

Yet I feel so small
And all I see is walls

All they could say
we all go through
those behind those
walls

I just want to run
run far away
and I have these
guns which I lay
down and put
them away as I
no longer need them

Because these wings
will lead me to where
I am able to fly

*Brenda Kejich
Nov. 2017*

Dreams

by Jana Rae Yerxa

(first published: Impact: Colonialism In Canada (2016))

Imagine
if we saw one another
as sacred
treating each other this way

If we honoured our relationships
to one another and ourselves
as much as we are taught
to honour and respect protocols, items and ceremonies

Imagine

Allow yourself to remember
what many seem to forget

You are your own sacred item
how you carry yourself
in the world
is your ceremony




Jana-Rae Yerxa is Anishinaabe from Couchiching First Nation located in Treaty #3. She has published academic and creative writing in addition to poetry, but poetry has always been her preferred style of expression.




HANDS

by Kyla Kokokopence

I do not understand how you still
call yourself a man,
even after you laid your hands on a
young girl who has your blood in her veins.
And I cannot comprehend the fact that my heart
Was left for you, because the first daddy I knew
Abandoned me due to the fact that he could
Not handle the truth. The truth showed
that he was not worthy,
but that did not make you any more better.
I was once a young girl, so pure,
But you entered my world and tore it to pieces.
You came in, and shattered my skies,
and crumbled my feeble walls.
You left me standing bare in the flames
that burned my childhood passions and dreams.
To this day, I still have to remind myself that
you can no longer interfere, but I was left
with these scars that trigger my many fears.






And among the mix, you are still very much here-
within the darkest corners of my mind.

Your hands can still sear my skin, and your breath
can still make me tremble in the worst ways.

The fact that you still haunt me leaves me feeling
so utterly hopeless, because you should
no longer matter. But here I am, drunk and
impure, and so terribly trapped by
the ghost of you.

And within your cold and cruel
hands, my heart still remains,
but it's in pieces that can no longer
be seen by the human eye.

And now I cannot fully trust any other man,
because I can still feel your touch,
but in his hands.







The Aftermath

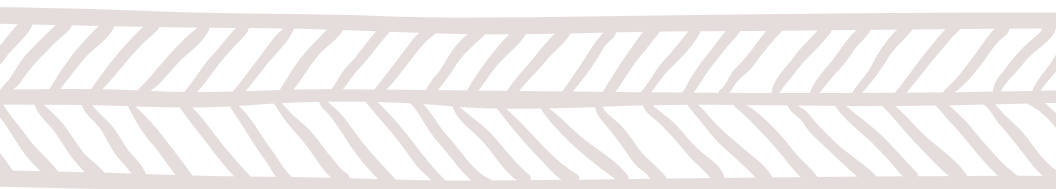
by Kyla Kokokopence

She says to me,
“You are an abused woman”,
I don’t want to be. I didn’t ask for this.
I know that no woman ever does,
but why is it reality?
Why is it normal for women to be
used, abused, and abandoned?
Why are so many girls left without father figures?
Is it that hard to love a little being that
you created? Or, to just simply tell her
how she should be treated and loved in the future?
I never knew how it felt to be treated well,
and here I am- used, abused,
and left sitting here asking myself where I went wrong.
I can only imagine how every other woman feels.
The fear they felt, the tears they shed,
their pleas for mercy. The way their children sat
quietly in their bedrooms, wanting so badly to help her-





but fearing the outcome of a ferocious drunken
father on rampage.
And when her mother finally finds out, she'll breakdown
as she sees the heartbreak in her birth-giver's eyes.
Apology after apology, fearing that she fucked up,
although she was the abused one.
My mother held me as I wept,
she ran her fingers through my hair.
She never said "I told you so",
she only said,
"I experienced that too, Boo.
You're worth much more than you think.
One day, you'll realize that,
and you'll laugh because karma
will get each and every one of them.
You'll rise above it all,
and love yourself more
than anyone else ever could.



DON'T PIMP MY LAND!

by Dan Ducker

I love our Land, She does so much.


With you, I have seen a different story
Did you love your land only for what she could do for
you?
You felt rewards when you dirtied your hands and sweat
over hoe
She made strong bountiful plants of corn, wheat, peas
and beans
She fed your cattle, hogs, chicken and lamb
While you commanded... and she demanded praise for
your work

And then you stripped her of her treasures and energy
Ordaining yourselves with jewels and Power

You were well, and felt rich and rewarded
You worked hard to make her what she is
You compartmentalized and classified her
You surrounded her in barbed shackles
She was good for - this here, and that there

You stole her
You sold her

You ditched her, drained her and injected stimulants in
her veins when she could no longer comply.
You applied ointments to kill her diseases as the cure
filtered through her skin and poisoned her blood.
Her body is blemished with you tumours.



When she was tired, you deserted her, buried her under
concrete, dissected her and transplanted her organs
to the back yards of suburbia.

You forced her, failed her and tried to rehabilitate her.
She looks tired and strung out.
You look perverse

In my land I am free, but bound to Her
We navigate life together, arm in arm

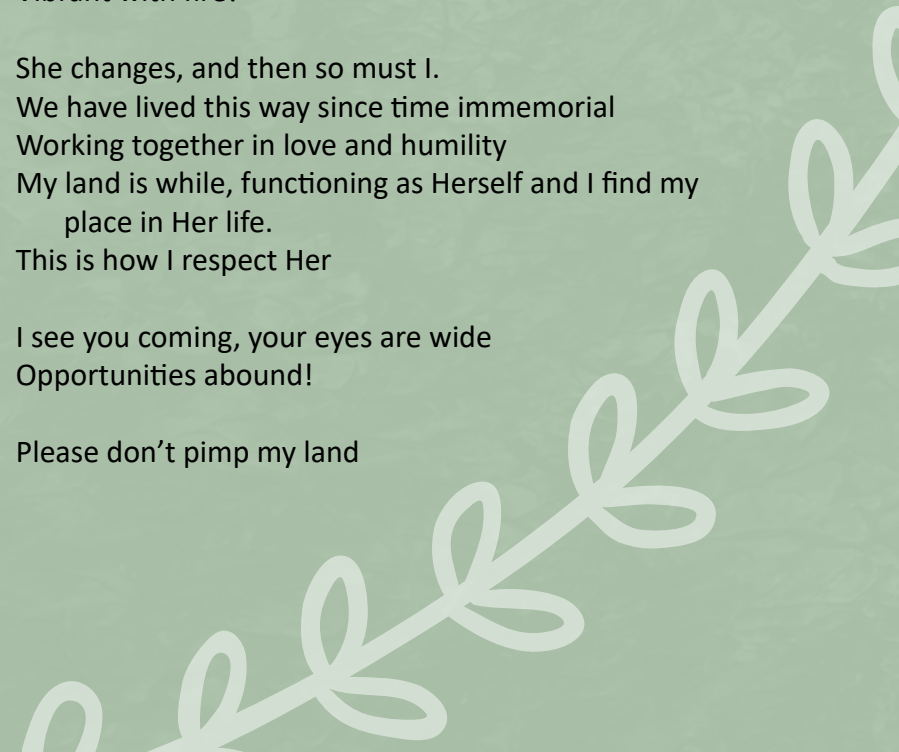
I do not know what She wants, but She speaks to me
I hear Her pulse and feel the flow of Her pure blood
Her blood gives me life, strength and spirit

I know when things are not right, She acts different
Vibrant with fire!

She changes, and then so must I.
We have lived this way since time immemorial
Working together in love and humility
My land is while, functioning as Herself and I find my
place in Her life.
This is how I respect Her

I see you coming, your eyes are wide
Opportunities abound!

Please don't pimp my land



UNTITLED

by Anonymous

Let the path you walk on
bring you happiness, joy, and peace.
This is a nice pen.



Remember Me

by Donna Simon

I'm so Scared there won't
be anything left for me to say
or to do to leave my MARK.

How will my children's, children's,
children's, children's, children's,
children's, children Know that
I was Even here.

Let me make this clear it is me
that I want them to know that came
before them & why.

I ask is it important that I tried.

7 Generations after me know who
I was so they can stand proud
and Tall & Humbled & filled
with Grace as I hope to
be while I love in this time
& place.





The journey


by Verlin Lloyd James

Daylight peaks through the trees this very dawn,
As night goes way, as the family wakes.
For the Manitou, maker of all greets
The boy as he leaves the bark covered home.
“Shomis, where did my father go just now?”
The bright eyed boy asks the grandfather there
As he too, exits the bark covered home.

To him, his Shomis replies with kindness;
“He is doing what is required of him,
As being born Anishnawbe is good
And Just...He is making an offering
To the maker of all, to the mother
Beneath our feet before our journey’s walk”...

To this through, dark locks, through raven eyed sight
The boy, eyes abright, asks him, his Shomis
As he adds tinder to the fire began
By the boy’s father that very dawn.
“What offering, and why to the mother?”

The grandfather thinks while the kettle boils...
“A long time ago, when the world was young,
When we traveled with our brother, the wolf...
All beings born were once, family then.
No matter how great and small, all were loved
By the mother below, she who gives us life.”




“Now, at the time, Father Sky loved the earth;
She, who lives beneath our feet and gives us life...
And like a young man with a young woman.
There is a time, where they learn how to live.
Once, they marry and walk the trail as one.”

“Father Sky in the early dawn one day,
As he covered the earth with his blanket,
As he kept her warm and their little ones.
He thought with joy as he heard their children
Below as they awoke and offered them.
They, their mother and their father above...
The honour that all should show to each other.”

“Now, he, Father Sky saw in the deep
In the darkness, once the Grandfather sleeps.
A falling Manitou, one from the start
Of when the world began, he asked him then..
*‘Elder, from where do you travel this day?
Will you stop and rest and meet my beloved?’*
Nothing was the reply from the elder.”

“But, as he neared, Father Sky thought he was
A Bahgek, a spirit who roams the night...”

“Then, as he looked closer the journeyed one
Was a Windego, come to devour all.”



The kettle boiled as the little boy
Sat amidst the spruce branches as his heart
Thumped and thumped in the early winter dawn...
While his hand reached for his wooden rifle...

“Shomis, what did Father Sky do to him,
The Windego so near his family?”

His grandfather then said as tea was placed
In the kettle...”Being Anishnawbe
Is a privilege and an Honour born.
You carry the duties given you by birth
And the dodem, which I’ve given your father.
Is yours to uphold, you are to live life
As Father Sky, for that dawn he loved her
His wife, the mother who grants us life...
And he protected her, and did battle
With the Windego come to devour all.”

“That is what your father is doing now...
He is Father Sky, and his role is nigh.”

Verlin Lloyd James is a poet from Mishi Sakahiganing (McDowell Lake First Nation) and is from the clan of the Little Cranes. He is a former US Marine, and was raised in the traditional manner of his people the Anishnawbe.



Untitled

by Sheila Santa

I am but a drop of rain
in a small unnoticed puddle,
But I made that puddle
ripple and added to its depth.





A COMPILATION OF POEMS
FROM THE ONTARIO NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION'S

Poetry Night

November 25, 2017

IN SUPPORT OF THE *UNITED NATION INTERNATIONAL DAY OF
ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN*

#orangetheworld
#OrangeDay
#hearmetoo



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