

STRONG HANDS STOP VIOLENCE

POETRY BOOK VOLUME VI



#StrongHandsStopViolence

The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA)'s Strong Hands Stop Violence project raises awareness of violence against women and girls. It includes an annual [Poetry Night](#), an annual [Poetry Book](#), and an ongoing collective [Art Project](#).

Every United Nations International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25), ONWA hosts Poetry Nights across Ontario in support of the #orangetheworld campaign. This event features readings from both emerging and established poets, and live musical performances. It provides an opportunity to create a space where Indigenous women and families can gather and celebrate their shared strength and resiliency.

Submissions from Poetry Night and a community call out are considered for ONWA's annual Poetry Book, which highlights poetry written by Indigenous women. Poems submitted this year, will be published in a Poetry Book released at next year's Poetry Night.

The name Strong Hands Stop Violence comes from the Art Project. Participants of Poetry Night 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.

Art as healing trauma is a strong foundation of the work ONWA does, addressing violence from perspectives rooted in cultural teachings. ONWA is committed to supporting communities and providing hope to those on their healing journey.

onwa.ca/strong-hands-stop-violence

The Ontario Native Women's Association acknowledges Article 31 of the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples in that "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions." ONWA honours the importance of Indigenous women's voices and stories. Each submission of poetry is copyrighted to the owner of that poem or story. ONWA recognizes our responsibility to protect and make space for Indigenous women's voices in their advocacy work for ending violence against Indigenous women.

A close-up photograph of a carved pumpkin. The pumpkin is orange with dark orange outlines. The text "EVERY CHILD'S MATTERS" is carved into the pumpkin's surface in a white, stylized, sans-serif font. The words are arranged in three lines: "EVERY" on the top line, "CHILD'S" on the middle line, and "MATTERS" on the bottom line. The pumpkin's ribs are visible in the background, and the lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the pumpkin skin.

EVERY
CHILD'S
MATTERS

Our 6th annual Strong Hands Stop Violence Poetry Night honoured the voice and legacy of Lee Maracle who sadly passed to the spirit world on November 11, 2021

The Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) honoured our warrior sister's courage, wisdom, kindness, and humour throughout the evening. Lee Maracle's activism flowed through the power of her words giving voice and equitable narrative to Indigenous women.

As we grieve Lee Maracle's passing, we know her legacy will continue to warmly embrace future generations of Indigenous women and girls, encouraging their dreams as she soars with the stars in the endless night sky of Creation.

Our 6th annual Poetry Night also highlighted the voices of local poets, musicians and artists featuring Samantha Martin- Bird, Benjamin Murray, Jamie Labrador, Jasmine McGuire, and the iconic Keith Secola.



WAR

By Lee Maracle

In my body flows the blood of Gallic
Bastille stormers and the soft, gentle
ways of Salish/Cree womanhood.

Deep throated base tones dissipate,
swallowed by the earth; uproarious
laughter sears, mutilates my voice.

Child of the earth-tear of west
coast rain; dew drop sparkling in
the crisp, clear sun of my home.

Warm woman of the Mediterranean sunscape,
bleaching rough cotton-sweatshop
anniversary.

Thunderous, rude earthquakes that
split my spirit within. Tiny grapes
of wine console me.

Can I deny a heritage blackened by
the toil of billions, conceived in
rape, plunder and butchery?

In the veins, that fight to root themselves
in the wondrous breadth of my
homeland, races the blood of base
humanity.



European thief; liar, bloodsucker.
I deny you not. I fear you not. Your
reality and mine no longer rankles me.

I am moved by my love for human life;
by the firm conviction that all the world
must stop the butchery, stop the slaughter.

I am moved by my scars, by my own filth
to re-write history with my body
to shed the blood of those who betray themselves

To life, world humanity I ascribe
To my people... my history... I address
my vision.

UNTITLED

by Benjamin Murray

She spit in your face...

So what did you do?

Did you follow procedures

Did you follow through?

Did you notice the tears streaming down this girl's face.

Or the look in her eye when you put her in her place.

Let's face Facts. It's starts in the past.

Systemic oppression let's look at the math.

10 times more likely to end up in jail

But 95% are not granted bail.

90% have to serve a full sentence

If your white it's alright only 60% is

First Nations woman make up only 4% of us all

Yet make up 16% of those murdered overall

So I ask you today. On the river of tears

Have we not travelled this water for to many year's?!

When will we admit to what's going on

nothing gets better when curtains are drawn

Open your hearts your eyes and your souls

Keeping in mind for whom the Bell tolls.

Will you stand up for those who don't have a choice.

We're given one life. One world. One voice.





A PEBBLE IN THE OCEAN

by Lisa-Ann Laforme

A Pebble in the Ocean Ripples

Mother Earths heart beats in unison with all of creation

Echoing the sorrow, the anguish, of indignation

A womans heart beat is the first sound that a child will hear

She echoes the essence of unjust fear

Broken women, we hear you, acknowledge,
picture and join you

Many tears have fallen, for justice so due

Heart of our nation, giver of life

Your voice is not silenced amid the rife

Sisters, we envision you, dancing on the clouds,
in your inherent beauty

Gracefully twirling, in a long flowing dress

No longer a part of this unnecessary duress



UNTITLED

BY Susie Q

Past and present thoughts
melt into one
Scared young voices
swirled into chaos
Don't let dad get mom.

We shush each other as
we hear the heavy steps
Breathing quickens
Quietness, please be with
us tonight

As we hear the
drunken cursing
We cower in fearfulness
We hang on to each other

Don't let dad get mom
We whisper tethered
to hope
But only to hear the
brutal sounds
Wishing for silence but
It scares us...the stillness.

SIRI

by Samantha Martin-Bird

siri says for the next three hundred and seventy-four
kilometres continue straight

siri says for the next ten thousand years continue straight

siri says the prairie is an ocean

siri says pîsim will set at nine twenty-four pm today

siri says wherever you go, there you are

siri says kisiskâciwan skies overflow

siri says in three hundred metres turn left onto the
saskatchewan twenty-two

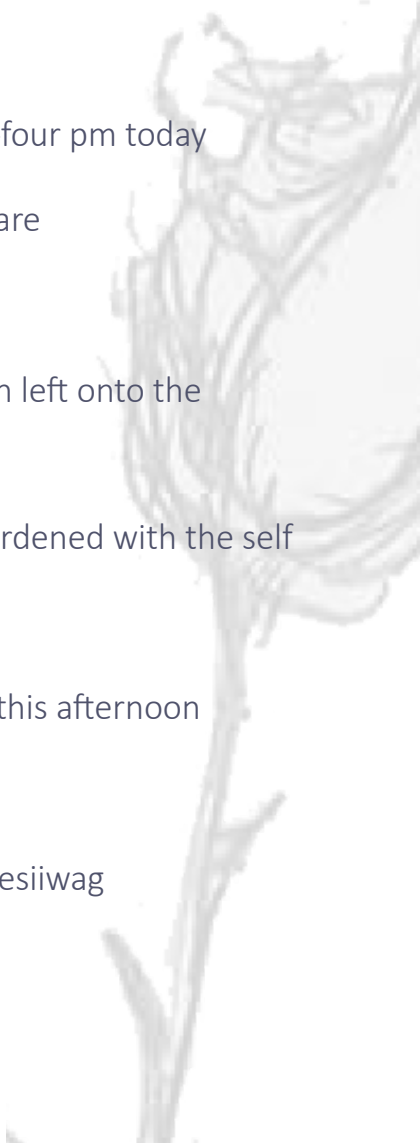
siri says wherever you go, you are burdened with the self

siri says it's the valley who calls

siri says expect thunderstorms early this afternoon

siri says home means easy exhale

siri says the mountain belongs to binesiwag













FINDING LIGHT IN THE RUBBLE

by Sherry Leigh Williams

So much pain
Nails in my chest
A knife turning in my gut

I teetered at
The edge of
What I came to know
As the

black hole

Separation from you
My flesh
My heart

Was

Blackness descending
Like tar
Covering all that was
Joy

The devil himself
Was turning the rudder

Destruction
Everywhere

You were a child,
You only wanted what
children want,
Freedom, security
It was not your fault

How could you
possibly understand
what I was facing?

Death was creeping
closer
It seemed,

No escape
No hope

I lost myself
years before
When he raped me,
Choked me,
When he had
Someone do the same
As he watched

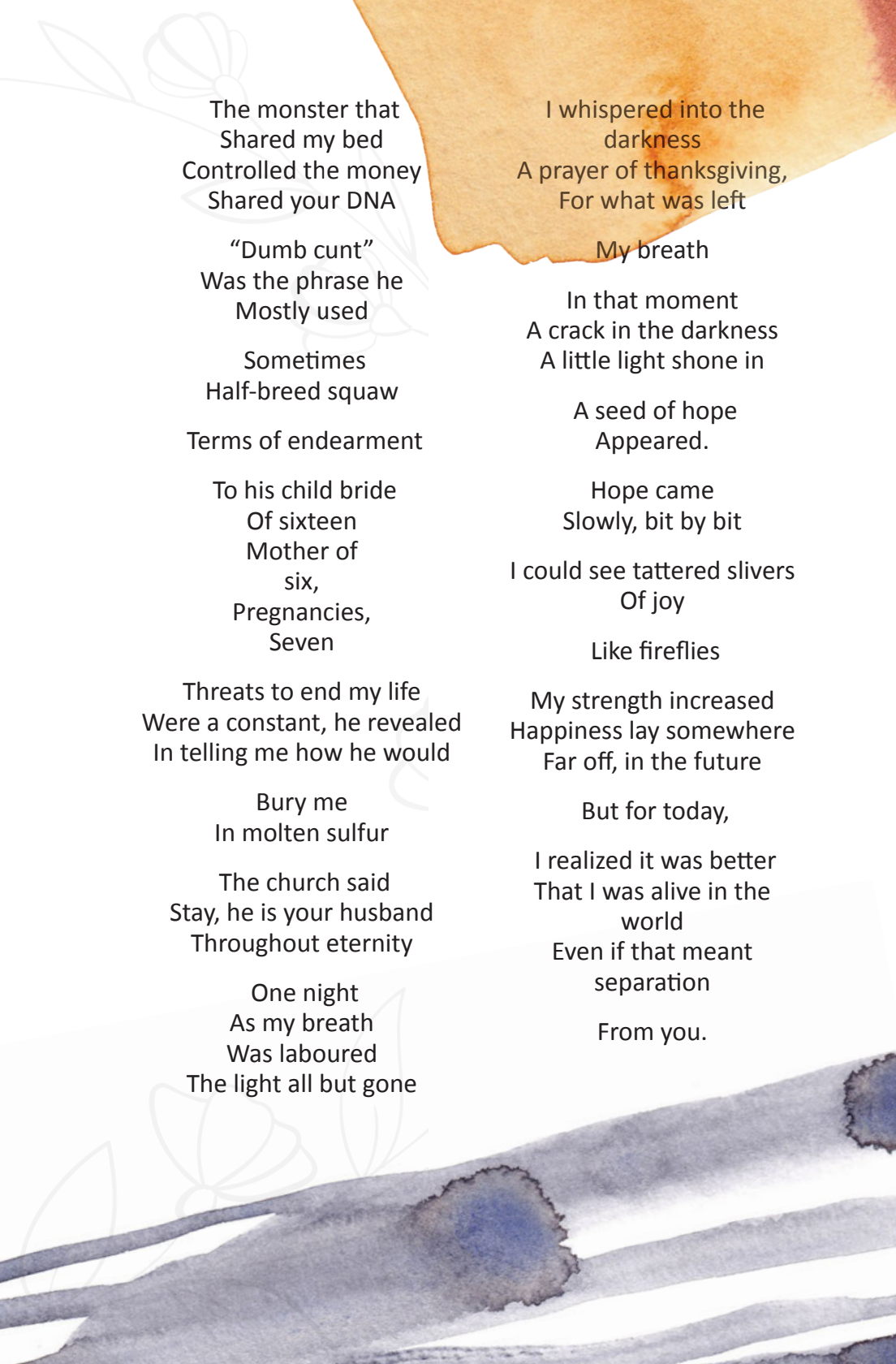
Rape is always an act
Of Violence

Drugged, yet
my
mind
Remembers

The enormity
Of pain.

I could not
Scream
Nor wake

How could I tell
anyone
What I lived with?



The monster that
Shared my bed
Controlled the money
Shared your DNA

“Dumb cunt”
Was the phrase he
Mostly used

Sometimes
Half-breed squaw
Terms of endearment

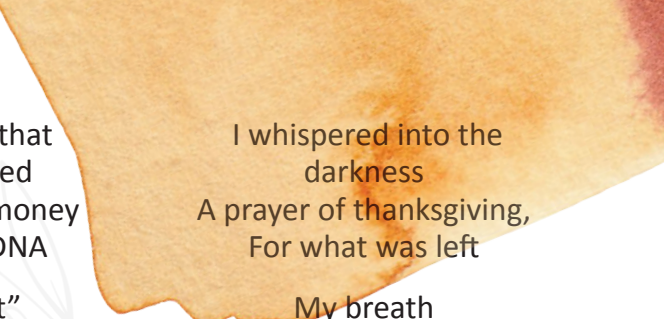
To his child bride
Of sixteen
Mother of
six,
Pregnancies,
Seven

Threats to end my life
Were a constant, he revealed
In telling me how he would

Bury me
In molten sulfur

The church said
Stay, he is your husband
Throughout eternity

One night
As my breath
Was laboured
The light all but gone



I whispered into the
darkness
A prayer of thanksgiving,
For what was left

My breath

In that moment
A crack in the darkness
A little light shone in

A seed of hope
Appeared.

Hope came
Slowly, bit by bit

I could see tattered slivers
Of joy

Like fireflies


My strength increased
Happiness lay somewhere
Far off, in the future

But for today,

I realized it was better
That I was alive in the
world

Even if that meant
separation

From you.



LOST AND FOUND

by Mercedes Poulin

Lured in, lost by deprived love

You learn to trust, love, and forget yourself

Soon it's too late, manipulated, and isolated from
friends and family

You tell yourself it'll be better next time

It only gets worse

Emotional becomes physical

Beaten until broken, I feel numb

Vulnerable, scared and alone

Until it's too late

laying there, with all his strength on top,
there's no fight left.

Convinced you see the light, run as fast as you
can because it's your last chance

You break free but remain lost.

Who am I anymore?

Breaking free, now it's time to set myself free.

They use the language "a victim"

I am a survivor.

UNTITLED

by Susie Q

Run, run faster
Jump, jump into bushes
Shh shh don't move breathe shallow into Mother Earth
Oh no here he comes
Raging like a fierce thunderstorm
Striking as fast as lightening
Duck, weave duck again
Oh Lord not fast enough
Falling like a giant tree snapped in half
Hitting the ground Hard
He stomps on me as if he's putting out a fire
Sshhh ssshhh don't make a sound just play possum
Nature at its finest
Play dead girl
Play dead
No sound no move, lie silent
As he frantically kicks at me seeing if I'm alive
No breathing allowed
Be still be silent
Mercy be with me
He's gone now...
Till next time











MY DEAR

by Trivena Andy

My dear,
I watched you grow
I'll always remember your firsts..
the first time you walked
your first word
your first time riding a bike
your first day of school

My dear,
I carried you into the world
I've held you as you fell asleep
I've cuddled you when you were sick
I've laid there and watching you sleep
Wondering what are you dreaming about

My dear,
I've ran my fingers through your hair
I still feel the softness
I still feel the weight wrapped around my fingers I've watched
it grow I've watched you grow

Now my dear
I must continue on

Not only for myself
But for you
My dreams for us,
will continue on for you
My hopes for us,
will continue on for us

But don't worry my dear
I may cry
because I'll never forget...
your laughter
your smile
your kindness
But most importantly your love

My dear,
My love for you will never die
My dear,
My strength will grow stronger for you
My dear,
My love,
My daanis,
My Autumn

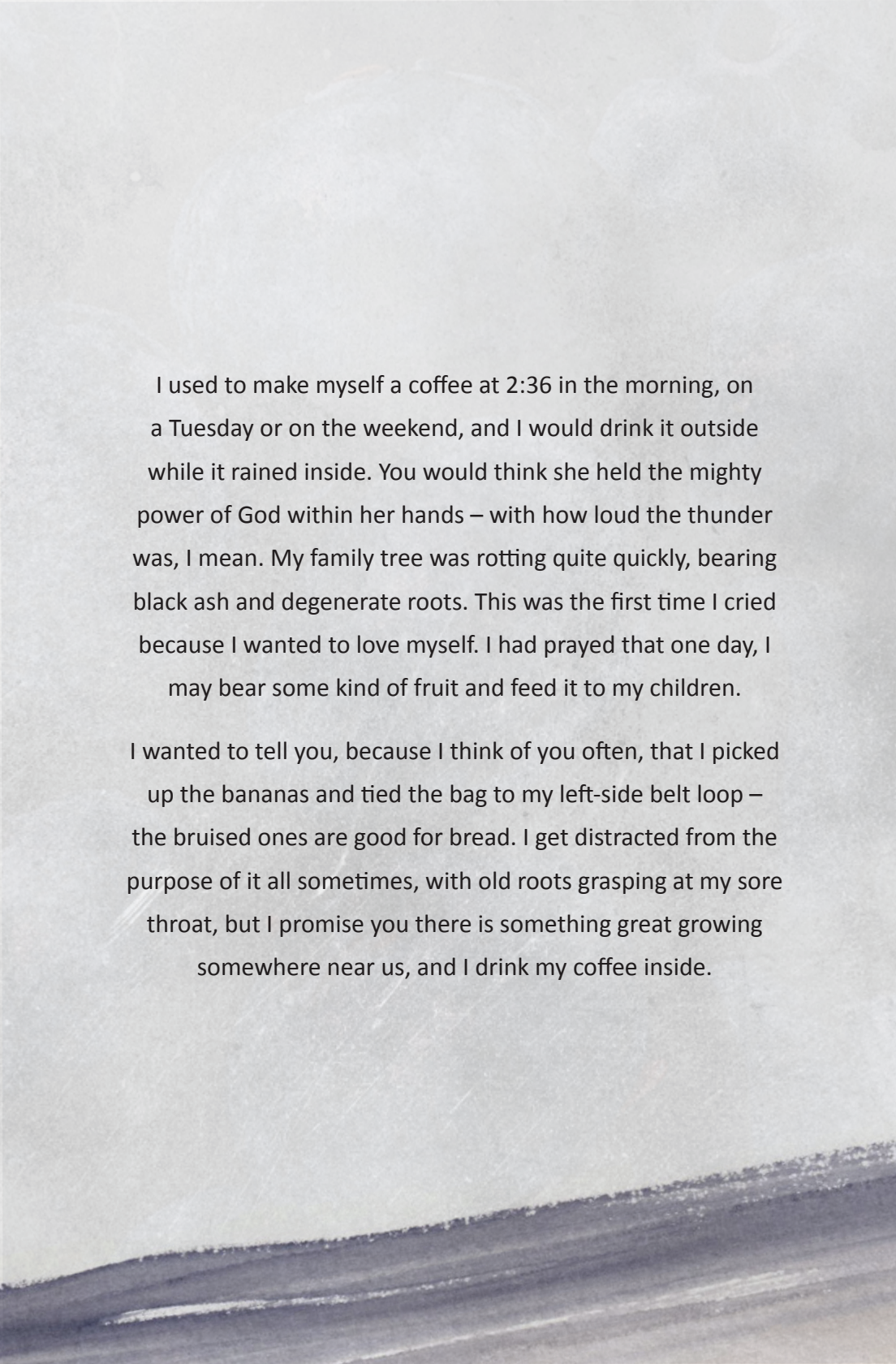
LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT BEARING FRUIT

by Samantha Convey

Description: This poem is about looking back on grief and trauma and the ways in which it can limit us, and the slow-burning healing process that can and will set us all free.

I dropped a mesh bag of bananas on my way home from the grocery store on Sunday, almost without notice, and nearly ran them down with my bike. I try to multitask, but I'm not so good at carrying things on my own two feet and now I'm on a bike. Why would I be able to do those two things in unison? I was distracted by the rain because I've heard it smells quite differently in Arizona than anywhere else. It's because of the creosote plants, my Uncle told me last spring.

I don't live in Arizona, I just think that it's a nice fact to think about; that the rain there smells different than anywhere else. Whenever it rains here, I picture the ways it once stained my jeans darker; deep blackberry. The rain here sometimes smells like wet denim, and it can be uncomfortable to wear but I still find myself quietly stumbling out and into the road with arms wide open – if I could just find myself there, sat on the same lawn chair, I could tell her it's okay.



I used to make myself a coffee at 2:36 in the morning, on a Tuesday or on the weekend, and I would drink it outside while it rained inside. You would think she held the mighty power of God within her hands – with how loud the thunder was, I mean. My family tree was rotting quite quickly, bearing black ash and degenerate roots. This was the first time I cried because I wanted to love myself. I had prayed that one day, I may bear some kind of fruit and feed it to my children.

I wanted to tell you, because I think of you often, that I picked up the bananas and tied the bag to my left-side belt loop – the bruised ones are good for bread. I get distracted from the purpose of it all sometimes, with old roots grasping at my sore throat, but I promise you there is something great growing somewhere near us, and I drink my coffee inside.

MOM

Anonymous

Mom, I wish I heard you!

Say,

I

Love

You!

The Suffering and pain you had!

Must have been unmanageable.

But, you survived all the hardships life threw at you.

I know now that I was loved by you.

Rest in Peace mother.

I Love You!

PARENT'S

Anonymous

Residential School's

Destroyed our way of life.

The suffering of culture that was beaten out of
you as well being starved.

Dad and mom you did your best and overcame a
lot of

Your traumas.

That shows how strong our people are.

I remember going from place to place living in
tents then to a house or home.

I wish you could meet your grandson.

Dad, Mom

Thank You!









WORDS

By Mary Ann Sackabuckshkum

Words Words Words
Cutting, stabbing, crushing
Deeper and deeper until
I can't breathe
Down down deeper deeper
I am overtaken by the hurricane of their pain
Whirling swirling all around me
Overtaken by Words.

**Shut up
Fuck off**

It's none of your business where I go.

Words of anger
Careless words
Knives into my heart
A sword through my soul
Careless words.

**Shut up.
Fuck off.**

I carry the burden long after their sound is gone in the air
I carry them like a mountain
Until
I cannot breathe
Until the dam finally breaks, and
I cannot stop weeping.

But you know this.
I have told you.
You have seen this
And
You have felt the knife of other words
Through your own soul.
I have seen their scars in your eyes
The windows of your soul.

**Shut up.
Fuck off.**

These words cannot be spoken again.

For they will
surely
One day
Finally
Destroy my soul
Until
I cannot
breathe
Until
I must let go
and
swim
to safety.

**Fuck off.
It's none of your business where I go.**

Don't you know
If we are One
Then how can I feel Whole
When Half is lost to anger and rejection.

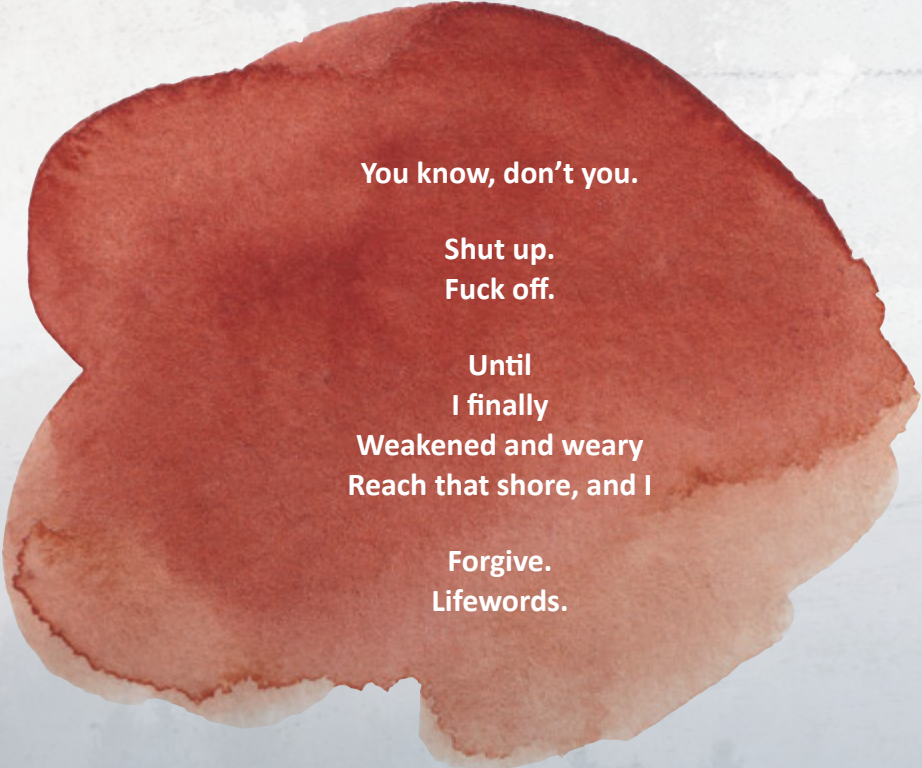
Words- slayers of my soul
They hang in the air long after You cease to hear them.

Once again I battle
I fight through the pain and tears
To find again
The words of Life.
Builders, healers, lifegivers.

Words; 'I respect you.'
Words; 'I honour you.'
Words; 'Love you.'
Forgive.

Once again I battle towards life
But what is the cost?
Another scar on my soul
How many can I endure
Until
I can no longer carry that mountain anymore.

We walk in the sunlight festival
I battle the scars newly made on my soul
Until
You reach for my hand.



You know, don't you.

Shut up.
Fuck off.

Until
I finally
Weakened and weary
Reach that shore, and I

Forgive.
Lifewords.

WORDS





GRANDMOTHERS' SONG

By Mary Ann Sackabuckshkum

[Grandmother;]

Can you hear my voice whispering from the stars
Can you feel my heart my child
Do you know I see ?
My child hear my stories
Feel my heart of love
We see you now and always
We walked along with you
Since the first of Song Time
We have known your Name.

[Granddaughter;]

How can I do this- walk this path of pain?
How do I find the strength- will this ever end
Trail of tears and heartache
Me- so long alone
How can I go onward when all my strength is gone?

Do you hear my whisper, Child?
Do you see my face
My sparkling eyes of love, Child
Gazing on your face.
You are not alone Child,
Never have been.
We have walked All with you
Never left your side.

[All Grandmothers;]

From the side of the Spirit
We have seen your spark
Known your Name and loved you
All your days till now
Can you hear our stories
Feel our hearts of love.

Feel how Spirit strengthens you
KNOW that LIFE within
Lean upon the Spirit
Creator breathes you LIFE
We know you've heard The Song Time
HEAR the songs of LIFE.

A crowd of witness gathers, a Circle strong of LIFE
Blanketcovering warms me, strengthening my Will
I stand alone- but crowded- by Spirits gone before
We rise together strengthened
I take a step for more
LIFE flows strong around me, through me and beyond
Together we move onward, forward
Led by Ones gone before
Since the First Ones' singing, since the birth of Time.
One day I will join Them along the starry line
Today I stand up strengthened, Their Song upon my tongue.

A compilation of five year's of poems from the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA)'s

Strong Hands Stop Violence Poetry Night

2015 – 2021

To raise awareness of violence against women in support of the United Nation International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women



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