

Ontario Native Women's Association

Strong Hands Stop Violence

POETRY BOOK

Poetry Night 2016





The
pen
is
mightier
than
the
sword

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

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 Al Hunter and Jana Rae Yerxa.

#orangetheworld

The [16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence](#) is an international campaign which takes place each year and runs from 25 November, *International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*, to 10 December, *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

On November 25, 2016, the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) hosted our first annual poetry night to give a voice to women, girls, survivors of violence, and allies. The evening included readings from both emerging and established poets, live musical performances, prizes, and a collective art project.

The ongoing art project is called *Strong Hands Stop Violence*. Participants of ONWA's poetry night dipped their hands in orange and blue paint and placed them on a canvas to signify standing together to eliminate violence against women and girls.



crazy making colonialism

by Jana Rae Yerxa

(first published: *The Root Zine- For Women of Colour by Women of Colour*)

Sometimes I feel like I'm dying
Not physically dying
Not suicidal, like I am going to hurt
myself dying
But dying nonetheless

I struggle here

In this place, stuck with YOU,
you make me feel crazy
The ultimate shape shifter with a
countless army
So demanding
Soul sucking
Exhausting

Carrying a burden of proof
Violence masked as questions
Violence masked as silence
So heavy

Moments getting the best of me
I become internally filled with
self-doubt
A constant replay of my interactions
with you

Lying to myself
Lying to survive

The colonial lies that we tell
ourselves
If only we have a positive attitude
An attitude of gratitude
An unending well of forgiveness
A multitude of thank yous
If we pray more and stop thinking so
much
All will be well

If only...

But if it isn't, the defect is with us,
with me
It's a constant tug of war
Stop being me - So others feel
comfortable with me
- Keep being me

So at least I can live in my own skin
The energy it takes to just be... ME

It's the spaces
Infested with the complacency
and comfort
That colonial mindsets breed
The isolation it breeds
For those who do not conform

I left here once
A last ditch effort
Most thought it was just part of an
educational journey
But it was so much more...
The stakes were high

I needed to know if I was off track...
if I was crazy
Turns out I'm NOT
There are many more like me
There were many before me
And there will be many after me

I'm back here now
Still refusing to stop being me

You see, I was not me for so long
I'm NOT willing to go back to the
state of un-me-ness

So I continue to speak
To ask questions
To try to connect in a way that brings
me to the surface
• Despite the hostility

My Anishinaabe womanhood
Misunderstood and attacked
Shamed and labelled
Called cruel and unkind
"Angry Indian Woman!"
"Angry Indian Woman!"

Chip,
Chip,
Chipping
Away at the essence of who I am
That is what it's like
A slow, ever-patient death

YOU point at me to surrender
All that my ancestors fought,
died and prayed for
MY FIRE WILL NOT BURN OUT
MY FIRE WILL NOT BURN OUT
MY FIRE WILL NOT BURN OUT
MY FIRE WILL NOT BURN OUT

It's the spaces
Infested with the complacency
and comfort
That colonial mindsets breed
The isolation it breeds
For those who do not conform

What is white?

by Trivena Andy

I used to want to be white

I lived with white families

I wanted to belong

Family pictures felt odd

I was the one brown girl surrounded by a white aura

School was no different

As a kid, I sat in class

Most times surrounded by white

Causing me to wonder

What Would I look like if I had that perfect bleach blond hair?

oh...how I longed for that hair

If I were white

Would I go perfect family vacations?

Would I be wearing those nice name brand clothes?

Would I live in a big house with my own bedroom?

Isn't that what white does?

Why couldn't I be that white kid?

I wanted to be seen as equal

I hated my brown skin

Because that is what white sees first

What if my ancestors were white?

Would "Canada" Today be any different for me?

Would the women I love be treated with respect?

Would alcohol consume my people?

At last, could long forgotten promises be fulfilled?

Whiteness....could you stop the hurt of my people?

I need to stop!

I get scared of being brown

White, what do you see?

"Am I just another Indian"

I wish I could drink my water bottle without the stares on the bus

I wish I could walk down the street and feel safe

I want to go shopping without feeling like I am being followed

Could I end up being a statistic?

If I became white

How would I use my privilege?

How would I view my people?

Would I feel like I had the authority to judge?

Would I feel like I have power?

Sadly, society strives for that power

That whiteness holds

And we get tricked

But I am learning...

To embrace my brownness

To take pride

Not to feel ashamed

be a role model

....eventually I will love my brownness



COLOURS

by Juhlyza Baldelomar

(published in TDSB's Urban Voices 2016 edition)


most days I am grey
and somewhere in between
I am a thick blanket of clouds draped over a big city
and the ghost of erased pencil lead after so many mistakes
neither dark, nor light
I am the middle ground
i am grey

but some days I am yellow
bright and spontaneous
I am the sun warming the ground
and the taxicab weaving through familiar streets
with unfamiliar people
cautious steps lead to impulsive leaps
I am yellow

occasionally I am red
I am sharp and angry
I am cruel words and smashed glass
a stone cold wall surrounds my thoughts and
empathy is left shivering out in the rain
selfish and unforgiving
I am red

more often than I would like to admit
I am blue
trapped in my head and alone
I am worn denim and sleeping pills
a night sky filled with holes and
blue crayola crayons
I am sky blue, navy, indigo and royal

but above all I am grey
I am smoke from the boy who gave up
and the taste of ash that lingers long after
his cigarette has burned out
I am infinite and complicated
an oasis in a wasteland
I am the middle ground
I am constant
I am grey



Highway of Tears

by Sarah Brown-Dunkley (2015)

Following your footsteps
Down the highway of tears.
Watching them fade,
Slowly disappear.

What is your name?
Where are you from?
Who are your people?
What have you become?

A faceless name for some;
A nameless face for others.
A stat on the radio, notch on the belt,
According to some brothers.

But here I am
Looking down that road.
Hearing your story,
Watching it unfold

You are a daughter,
Mother, sister and friend.
A niece, a granddaughter,
And loved so much 'til the end

Snatched away before your time,
A future stolen away;
A beautiful young life,
Everyone wishing you could stay.

These are our women,
Our girls and our friends;
These are our future.
Let's start to make amends.

Too many gone;
Too many taken.
End the violence now,
Hearts keep on breakin'.

See all of the beauty
That once lived in their eyes.
Feel all of the pain,
That's left dying inside.

Not just in their family and friends,
But in a country and nation.
A world silencing the issues
Won't help with salvation

We will stand tall,
No longer hiding our face.
We will release all the pain
You left in our space.

Our women are strong,
Whether they are lost or found;
They are the foundation
That holds up our ground.

Stop looking down your nose,
Stop walking away.
Open your eyes
And help them to stay.

We are not here
To be stolen or broken;
We are not here
To be an Indian token.

I look at my girls
And put it in perspective;
Whether it's them or me
We are all subjective.

I will not follow your footsteps
Down the highway of tears.
I sadly watch you fade away,
But we will not disappear.



Dancers In The Distance

by Ardelle Sagutcheway

Shades of green tendrils streak across
Beyond the stars
Past the dust
There is dancing in the night sky
'that's all your choomish and kokums' my grandma tells me and
holds me closer
'don't whistle at them, they might reach down and grab you'
My feet are firmly planted but my spirit dances
The ancestors bust their moves across the sky
The truth? in my dreams, I join them
The truth? My long hair reaches for mother earth
'our hair connects us' they whisper
They keep me alive, well, honest, humble, strong
The fires consumed us all yet we remain peaceful
Woven into a braid-our long hair becomes strength
A form of active resistance-a piece of the ancestors never lost
A part of us never forgotten
There is a noozhis whose hair will never be braided again
A princess in a false kingdom with a fake crown
'sorry' is not enough anymore
they succeeded, the whispers faded
They did kill the indian in the indian child
Once upon a time and frozen forever
A young brown girl-aboriginal-native-indian-first nations-whatever
She whistles at the northern lights, pain leaking from her soul
The burden becomes too much for her to bear, too heavy
The princess stares at the night sky, enthralled
She longs to dance with the old people forever
'One last time' she tells no one

FOR MY SISTERS

by Edna King

*Dedicated to Missing and Murdered First Nations Women
October/November 2014*

Born of flesh and of fire, breathe of life, heartbeat of a Nation.
Beauty had surrounded you and your significance to mankind.
Born of innocence, sincerity and irony,
you managed to play a major role in the social order of time.

No one really knows why it happens,
Something dark lurked behind you, stalked you
or just snatched you from the streets.
The results are often devastating,
You fought, you prayed, you cried, and you called for help.
You were demoralized, victimized.

Mothers, fathers, aunties, uncles, sisters, brothers
cousins, neighbors and volunteers wanted to help you.
Someone searched for you, someone wanted to save you.
Someone cried for you, someone still cries for you.

And in the end you slipped away.

You may have felt alone
but sisters everywhere whisper your name.
Moccasins walked for you, vamped by loving hands.
Butterflies were flown for you, candles lit on cold and cool nights,
and songs were drummed and sang in your honour.

Your spirit was meant to be free
not captured, beaten down or left to die.
Your spirit has spoken to many
and we have heard.

We have heard.

Shadow Man

by Edna H. King

It never should have happened.
She hadn't really wanted to work,
not at that hour, so late into the
evening.

It never should have happened.
Not during her mourning period.
Her best friend was buried just
weeks earlier, but still he insisted
on visiting her through dreams
and visions.

Sometimes a girl has to work,
even at fourteen years of age,
to help provide for her family
and for herself. Money's scarce
in northern communities, you
know.

It never should have happened
Big sister had been late picking
her up. It was dark, and scary
that night, and those visions
just wouldn't go away.

It never should have happened.
Out of the darkness he came,
Shadow man, in his expensive
clothing,
his rich cologne and the bitter
scent of
alcohol on his breath.

It never should have happened.

Shadow man,
Dark shadow man,
Scary shadow man,
Dangerous shadow man.
Slapping, pinching, punching,
hurting, pushing, pulling.

Shadow man, please don't hurt,
Shadow man, please stop!
Shadow man, stop!
STOP!

It never should have happened.
That's what her rescuer had said.
That's what her mother had said.
That's what her sister had said.

It never should have happened,
Who would believe a fourteen
year old girl?
The bruises and cuts on her face
and on her body didn't lie.
Her emotional scars didn't lie.
Her nightmares didn't lie.
Her shattered innocence didn't
lie, either.

Who would believe a fourteen
year old girl?
Not the Police, not the
Social Worker, not the Judge.
Even the community's doctor had
failed her,
But money's scarce in northern
communities.

Despite her painful memories she
shone with a
strong spirit that probably kept
her from going insane.
A wise woman once said to me,
"Native women are strong
women,"
and she displayed that strength,
and resilience.

When I last saw her last someone
was taking her to the airport,
she carried the gifts her family
would treasure.
When I seen her last she smiled
bravely at me
clutching the tiny medicine bag
she wore around her neck.

She was going home, back to
school,
back to her part-time job,
because in northern communities
money's scarce.
Whatever you do, and wherever
you are, keep smiling.
It'll tell the world you're a
survivor and you're going to
be alright.

Again

by Kayla Hill

You tell me that it wont happen again
As you caress my face
Black and blue cheeks
Blood in my mouth is what taste

You tell me it wont happen again
Say harmful words and hurtful names
Putting me down
Making me the one to blame

You tell me it wont happen again
Spending all of our nickles and dimes
Satisfying your needs and ignoring our bills
Our heat is going to go out; Were running out of time

You tell me it wont happen again
Forcing your body against my will
Telling me to stop fighting
That you're doing it for pleasure, you're doing it for thrill

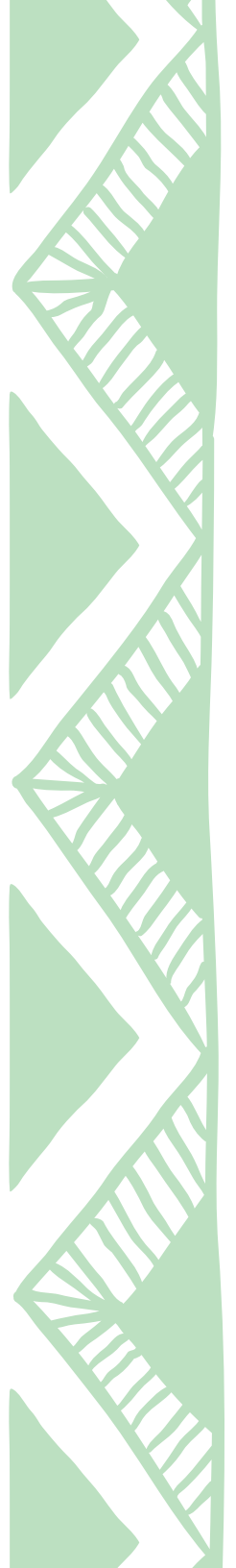
I tell you it wont happen again
The pain that you put me through
That I am shedding this life
And beginning a new

That I will no longer live in fear
I will no longer hide
I will speak my truth
This I have come to decide

I choose to end this path
This cycle of violence
So that another woman
Wont have to suffer in silence

That she will know that this is wrong
It is not okay
That theres light at the end of the tunnel
She doesn't have to stay

There is help
Freedom and life
Should she choose
To stop the pain tonight.



Living After

by Naomi Abotossaway (2016)

I can go on, I am a survivor that is me,
Time will help to fix my heart, ultimately it will mend,
My journey on this day begins anew, you will see,
For I am strong, this I am told, beginning of the end.

I am moving forward in life and you cannot be in it,
I have begun working at removing you forever more,
It will take time, this I do know, much longer than a minute,
I vowed I would do this when I finally closed that door.

I will go on living after as I move forward and keep busy each day,
Looking forward to a brand beginning, life before me to unfold,
In this world, now my safe harbour, you cannot have your way,
I am now in control, as I learn to become more bold.

No more scenes of abuse, unkind words will I ever hear from you,
Go away from my world; I am working at caring no longer,
Time is reaching out to me, gladly accept in all that I do,
My withdrawal from your world is making me stronger.

You Learned to Hurt Me

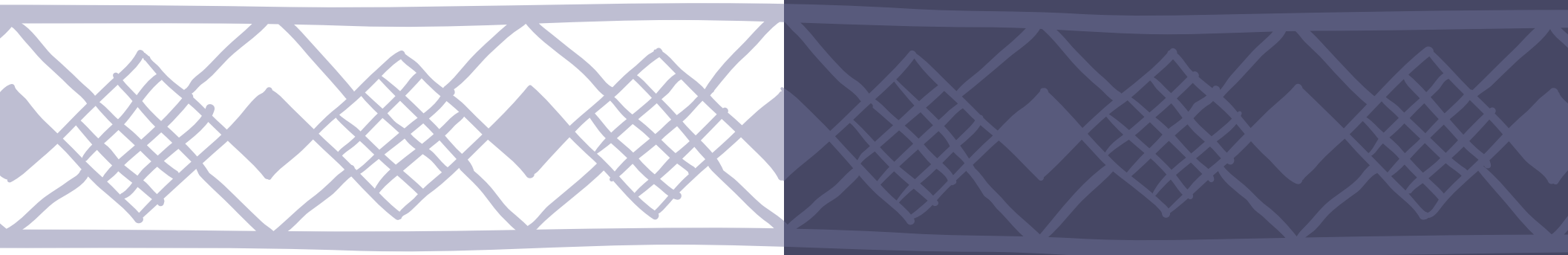
by Naomi Abotossaway (2016)

It is not right to play with someone's heart,
To give another hope that a future might be,
Promising beginnings right from the start,
Because in the end, one broken heart to see.

Having no doubt as the world continues to spin,
Turning a person's love which might have been,
That you can learn and really not win,
Letting others know, for the truth will be seen.

You took my heart and gave promises from you,
Then in a blink of an eye hurt me so bad,
That dreams I thought would come true,
Would never come to be seen or had.

Let us say Goodbye and we will not bother,
To remember you learned to hurt me,
Knowing we will find a new love, another,
To hold one's heart and true love to be.



The Stolen Feminine

by Nikki Auten *(July 5, 2015)*

The stolen feminine
Generations
of women
lost upon years of enslavement.
The sacred womb
Mothers love
Protection
from the devastation,
damnation,
domination
of man.
Fear
instilled in the heart
of her,
mother, daughter, sister
hear me now
aunties and grandmothers
cry your tears
scream your pain
mourn
your stolen feminine.

The stolen feminine
erased
from the stories
written for glory
of the dominant man.
Controlling
the future of her
mindless,
defenseless,
careless,
needing man
to protect her
as she fights
each day
to survive within
the grim
situation she lives
with him
holding on for dear life
to what little he's left
of her
stolen feminine.

The stolen feminine,
regaining power;
no longer blaming;
reclaiming power!
Finding
the truth within,
voice to speak.
Connecting
Body, mind and spirit.
Manifesting
the sacred space,
emotion,
putting life into motion.
Rewriting history
as she raises up
the next generation.
Forgiveness,
ready to fight.
Power of love,
words her weapon,
gun at the ready.
Commanding
respect,
standing
together with the one
who stole
her sacred feminine.

White Ribbon

by Bob Manson,

Mankind Warrior and a proud White Ribbon Wearer

*To you who have been abused and hurt at the hands of men
To all who wish it would never happen again*

*I **see** the results of what men have done
And I know this should never happen to no one*

*I **hear** your cries and even your silent voice
Because I know you never had a choice*

*I **feel** the Breaking hearts of sisters and mothers
But also from - sons - fathers - and brothers*

*For Such abuse hurts every single man too
For all men must live with what fallen men do*

*We all know that a man has never the right
To hurt and abuse women any day or night*

*For my the fallen brothers whom I criticize
And on behalf of all men I want to apologize*

*And please hear my pledge I say here tonight
To never hurt women and see my **Ribbon of White***

*For I stand today in solidarity with men and women all
And pledge to help hurt sisters and brothers who fall*

*I hope my brothers will wear a **White Ribbon** for all to see
And they become the warriors that we all want them to be*

Below is the actual pledge from the White Ribbon Campaign:

I pledge never to commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women.

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





Services That Support Ending Violence Against Women in Thunder Bay

Anishnawbe Mushkiki

www.mushkiki.com

Email: info@mushkiki.com

101 N. Syndicate Avenue,
Suite 2B · Thunder Bay, ON
P7C 3V4

Phone: 807-623-0383

Beendigen Inc.

www.beendigen.com

100 Anemki Drive, Suite 103
Fort William First Nation,
ON P7J 1J4

Phone: 807-622-1121

Fax: 807-622-2240

Crisis Line:

Toll Free: 1-888-200-9997

Phone: 807-346-4357

Faye Peterson Transition House - Thunder Bay

www.fayepeterson.org

Email: faye@fayepeterson.org

PO Box 10172

Thunder Bay, ON

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Toll-Free: 1-800-465-6971

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Shelter House - Thunder Bay

www.shelterhouse.on.ca

420 George St.

Thunder Bay, ON P7E 5Y8

Tel: 807-623-8182

Fax: 807-622-6328

Street Outreach Services
(SOS): 620-SOST(7678)

Talk4Healing

www.talk4healing.com

Toll Free: 1-855-554-HEAL

Thunder Bay and Area Victims Services

www.tbayvictimservices.com

Email: vcars@tbaytel.net

1200 Balmoral Street,

Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5Z5

Tel: 807-684 1051

Criss Line: 807-684 1051

Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre

www.tbifc.ca

Email: info@tbifc.ca

401 N. Cumberland Street,
Thunder Bay, Ontario
P7A 4P7

Phone: 807-345-5840

Fax: 807-344-8945

Thunder Bay Sexual Assault Centre


www.tbsasa.org

Email: info@tbsasa.org

385 Mooney St.

Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5L5

Tel: (807) 345-0894



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

Poetry Night

November 25, 2016

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

#orangetheworld
#OrangeDay
#evaw
#unwomen
#onwa



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