

INDIGENOUS YOUNG WOMEN LEAD



Our Stories, Our Strengths, Our Truths

**EDITED BY THE NATIVE YOUTH
SEXUAL HEALTH NETWORK**



Table of Contents

About the project: Indigenous Young Women: Speaking Our Truths, Building Our Strengths.....	4
Introduction by The Native Youth Sexual Health Network.....	5
Introduction by Girls Action Foundation.....	7
Zine Contributors	
Amy Epp.....	8
Amy Nicholas.....	10
Audrey Armstrong.....	12
Binaeshee-Quae Couchie-Nabigon.....	15
Corrine Clyne.....	18
Danielle Michelle Morriseau.....	21
Elizabeth Zarpa.....	24
Eva Rose Tabobondung.....	26
Hannah Lazare.....	28
Hayley Moody.....	32
Jasmine Anderson.....	35
Josephine O'Brien.....	38
Katie Jo Rabbit.....	41
Katrina Graham.....	43
Killa Mitchell-Atencio.....	45
Koren Smoke.....	48
Kristen Bos.....	50
Kristy Normore.....	52
Megan Whyte.....	55
Mercedes Donald.....	57
Mikayla Cartwright.....	59
Monique Auger.....	62
Naomie Hanson-Akavak.....	66
Naomi Sayers.....	69
Natasha Jones.....	72
Patricia Jones.....	75
Shauna Ponask.....	77
Sita-Rani MacMillan.....	80
Stephanie Wood.....	83
Tanis Desjarlais.....	87
TJ Lightfoot.....	88
Carli Harris.....	91

About the project: Indigenous Young Women: Speaking Our Truths, Building Our Strengths

This publication is part of a larger collaborative project called Indigenous Young Women: Speaking Our Truths, Building Our Strengths.

A partnership between the Native Youth Sexual Health Network and Girls Action Foundation, this project focuses on Indigenous young women's leadership, empowerment, solidarity-building, and ending violence. The project is also lead by a national peer Advisory of ten Indigenous young women from all across Canada, and seeks to meet young women where they are at; emphasizing the reality that youth ideas matter and that youth are experts in their own right! Indigenous women's strength has always existed in Indigenous communities, and it continues to grow.



The project consists of a four-day national gathering of Indigenous young women, Elders, and mentors in November 2011, this publication, a guide for young women's organizing, Elder and peer mentorship, and ten community actions lead by Indigenous young women in different parts of Canada.

What we have learned about Indigenous women's leadership from YOUTH!

An Introduction by **The Native Youth Sexual Health Network**

For us at the Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN), this project started out with a challenge: get the word out to as many young Indigenous women across Canada as possible in less than 2 months to notify them about a creative essay contest. The question posed to these women; "What does Aboriginal women's leadership mean to you? What does it look like?" This came from our partnership with the Aboriginal Women's Leadership Circle as part of Women's Worlds 2011 – a global gathering of women hosted in Ottawa in July 2011. The Circle wanted to ensure the meaningful and vocal participation of Indigenous young women and give space and opportunity for this to happen, and approached us at NYSHN to facilitate this in ways that were by and for Indigenous youth.

We wanted to make sure that by the word "leadership" we didn't just mean "people in elected, political positions" or really anything that was only so-called "official" or in organizations or institutions. We asked people to think about what it means to them personally – in their lives, their communities, their nations, or wherever they are. We also wanted to make sure that it wasn't just the "written" word that was considered; we asked people to tell us their stories in art, photography, video, song, and a whole lot more!

It is also important for us that by "women" we are speaking to ALL the women in our communities – whether we are trans, Two Spirited, gender non-conforming – and that we have the right to identify OURSELVES.

The response we received was overwhelming. Over 100 submissions and counting! Clearly we couldn't let all of this brilliance sit in our mail boxes, so we asked all the women who submitted - do you want to be published? Again, it was an overwhelmingly positive response that these voices NEED to be heard on all levels.

So before anything else is said, we really want to honour and acknowledge ALL of the young people who submitted to the original creative essay contest. These essays were

personal, clearly came from the heart and it probably took a lot of courage to put thoughts to paper, and send it to someone you didn't know!

And after a thorough consent process and final shared editing - you have in your hands nothing short of a masterpiece.

At the Native Youth Sexual Health Network we know that community based leadership comes from culture, resistance to ongoing colonization and oppression, and through showing real support to ALL community members in many different ways. These strong Indigenous women absolutely give new meaning to this concept that often marginalizes, ignores and erases our experiences. They put Indigenous women back in the centre of it all - creation, family, community and our individual lives. It is clear to us that the young Indigenous women present here do not see leadership coming from only elections, band councils, or the government. They see it in themselves, their peers, their families, and so much more.

Through our work across North America and during this process we have come to understand that our expressions of ideas and emotions are so much more complex and beautiful than even English allows us to show. Films, photos, spoken word, poetry, painting and storytelling - all are here and create a connected picture of Indigenous women's leadership on this land. They speak about traditional roles before colonization began, how it continues and the creative ways we are finding to understand and implement those roles now - something we feel is absolutely central to addressing the challenges we face as Indigenous peoples.

For those who are worried about the next 7 generations - don't. Clearly, we are in good hands if these women continue to be leaders. Please read on to see what we mean!

Note about language and self-determination: Reducing stigma associated with the many life experiences that Indigenous young women face is important and very personal. For us, it's all about supporting people and communities in ways that make sense to them, including how people identify themselves and the decisions they make about their own bodies and spaces. We know that words have impact, and every day is about taking responsibility for both our words and actions. We encourage readers to think critically about the words we use and continue to redefine them to reduce stigma, build our strengths and speak our truths.

Sparks of leadership

An Introduction **by Girls Action Foundation**

As TJ Lightfoot says in her piece, “Indigenous women are in many positions of leadership that often go unrecognized.” The young women whose voices are gathered here are changing that. Her art and writing shine light on the fact that sparks of leadership exist, in many different forms, in all young women.

Girls Action Foundation is proud to help make this publication happen. We believe in the potential of girls and young women to be change agents. We also believe in the power of intergenerational exchange and mentorship. In many of the artworks, young women talk about women who influence them and what they have learned: “I have many strong women in my life who have taught me to ask why,” says Binaeshee-Quae Couchie-Nabigon.

We hope these words and artwork will keep you asking why. We hope that the negative images of Indigenous women that pervade Canadian society are transformed by the real images of young women making change and strength shared through the generations.

- *From the team at* **Girls Action Foundation**

Thank you to our funding partners. The project Indigenous Young Women: Speaking Our Truths, Building Our Strengths was made possible in part by Department of Justice Canada, Status of Women Canada, and the Catherine Donnelly Foundation.



By Amy Epp

I am a young 18-year old First Nations woman living in a small Saskatchewan town.

To me, leadership means development of my personal being. It means setting priorities and reaching my goals for the future. Before being a leader, one has to develop listening skills. Showing fair treatment to all people is very important to earn their trust; and you will feel good about yourself.

I have just been through a traumatic experience of losing my best friend to suicide. I am trying to deal with this pain. My faith and family members are my support.

My goal is to reach other young adults and help them through the difficult times and stresses of today. I want to encourage them to seek help.

I want to be a leader who is sensitive to others' needs. I want to be open to listening to new ideas as well as accepting new ways of doing things.

A sense of humour is vital to relieve tension. Humour energizes your followers as well as yourself. We should be able to laugh at our mistakes.

A humble leader tries to elevate everyone around you. One must communicate clearly and passionately, as passion is contagious.

I was always told "a balance in life is necessary to find happiness". As my diagram displays: "A CIRCLE OF BALANCE: we are surrounded by: The Sun our grandfather, the moon our Grandmother, the wind our father and the Earth our mother ... honesty, respect and kindness for all parts of life.

Women today have so much to offer. We can learn from our elders, from our teachers and family members. I would like to organize a young women's group in my area creating an occasion for everyone to speak about what they want to do in their lives. It's also an occasion to reach out to others and talk about their feelings. Communication is vital for survival. So many people want to be heard.

My **Kokum** is a strong and wise woman. She has always given me advice and love. She treats everyone fairly and I have a lot of respect for her. She has been a part of my upbringing. She never judges and everyone is welcome in her home. She is my role model and I am proud to have her in my life.

I want to be strong and act! Young woman need to connect and be leaders, so the world can be united as a family. Family is where "history begins".

My goal is to be a strong woman leader with **conviction, faith and wisdom**. I want to do this and I CAN!

By Amy Nicholas

I began really exploring art in High School. I loved the way images or ideas take form through all types of medium. I love the way colours blend and define each other. As an adult I enjoy painting as a way to relax from my busy days as an Early Childhood Educator and single mom. I usually paint for myself but would eventually like to have my artwork displayed in a gallery. I will have to stop giving it all away to family and friends first!

Most often I use oil or acrylic paint on canvas. I really have no special techniques. I will just see a photo or a moment in nature and have to paint it. I just go with the flow and let the picture emerge until it is the way I saw or envisioned it. I usually paint sunsets, sunrises and nature views. I am currently working on my skills with watercolour and experimenting with other scenes.

I painted this piece to show, that even though our ancestors were forced to leave their families and punished for speaking their language or practicing their culture, our culture is part of us and cannot be taken away. We will go against all odds and maintain our culture for our children to the best of our ability. We will honour the seven sacred teachings; love, respect, courage, honesty, humility, wisdom, and truth. Recently my family has connected with a long lost relative who is a great leader in the Aboriginal community, Mrs. Elsie Basque. Upon reading more about my distant cousin I learned about all the things



she accomplished! Such as, being the first Mik' maq women to receive her teaching certificate. I hope I can continue to find ways to learn the Mik' maq culture so I am able to teach my son and continue to pass it down through our generations and become a great Aboriginal woman as well.

What does Aboriginal Women's Leadership mean to me?

By Audrey Armstrong

It means that you are a strong and confident woman who has been through a tough life and survived to talk about it. A woman who can share that story with us so that we may learn and grow from her experiences. If you are successful and happy in what you do then I look up to you. Hardworking, honest and humble women are who I look up to. I honestly do not look up to people who have been born into privilege. To me I don't think that being born with a silver spoon in your mouth makes you a leader. A true leader is someone who is not afraid of being different, and not afraid to get down on the level of someone who is down and out. Being a true role model is someone who has had to work for everything that they have, and overcoming huge obstacles such as drugs, alcohol, street life etc. Being able to relate to young women and share the story of your life is what makes you a leader. That is what makes a person want to change. If you are able to share your story with young women who are in trouble is what makes you a leader. You never know whose life you may be changing just by sharing your story. Some girls are able to see that, 'hey, if you can do it, why can't I?' That's pretty much how I am able to succeed in my life right now. I have always looked up to strong women, not only Aboriginal but of all races. Any woman that was born into a hard life and have worked hard and are successful today are worthy of my admiration. I have always told myself, I will be someone; I will make something of myself. And someday I can share my story with young women. And I do. I work with youth and I tell them my story, I am not ashamed of what I have been through in life, I am a strong person and I have survived to talk about it. I have hit a few speed bumps along the road, but really, who hasn't? Above all I am proud of who I am.

I come from a background of having a single mother who has struggled with drugs and alcohol but has been sober for quite some time now and I am so proud of her. Noreen Velma Jimmy grew up in Turtle Lake, Saskatchewan and her life was not easy. She has had to work hard for everything she has gotten in life and she did her best to raise her 6 kids. I remember her going to school and working when I was a kid, and that is inspirational to me because as a single mother myself, that is exactly what I do.

And it is because she taught me to be independent and self-sufficient. She is a very loving grandmother who loves to have all the grandkids around to cook for them. She volunteers her time to cook on the reserve for social functions, funerals and whatnot. She loves to cook and she has put herself through school and has overcome the obstacles of life and she is now married and very happy. She is my #1 strong and beautiful Aboriginal woman.

One woman who has been around me almost my whole life is Kathy Cahill. She is a huge part of who I am today. She has helped me see that there is a better life out there for everyone, no matter your race or where you come from. She is the kindest, most caring person I have ever met. I met her when I was 5 years old and she has been a second mother figure for me throughout my life. She started out as my 'big sister' from the Big sisters and Big brothers program, but she is now family. She has always been there for every one of my accomplishments in life and she has always been there cheering me on from the sidelines in whatever I chose to do. She has had her own struggles in life and has overcome all of those as well and I look up to her for being a strong person and for always being there for me.

Another woman whom I have only known for about 2 years now, is Sharon Acoose. She is so inspiring to me. I listened to her story on my orientation day here at the First Nations University of Canada and all I could think was, 'wow'. As I slowly got to know her, my admiration for her grew. She has overcome so many obstacles in life such as drugs, alcohol, street life and abuse, and look at her now, she is an assistant professor in Indian Social Work at the First Nations University of Canada, and she is working on her PhD as well. She is a wonderful grandmother who looks after her grandkids and she believes in sharing her story with youth so that they may (hopefully) get something out of her story. She presents at all kinds of conferences and she is not ashamed to share her story.

Another person whom I greatly admire is one of my best friends, Jessica Rae Atcheynum. She is my age, 29 and she has worked hard all of her life and has went through many of the same hardships as I did. As long as I have known her she has always worked and she has always been honest and humble. She is straightforward and will tell you like it is and

that's what I love about her. We became friends when we were 16 years old and I was pregnant. She is pretty much the only friend that stuck by my side all these years. And no matter how far apart we are or how long we go without seeing each other, we always pick up where we left off. She has always been there for me throughout my adolescent years and through an abusive relationship. She is an absolutely amazing friend. She adopted a baby boy and is a single mother and she does an amazing job and she works with youth as well. She is one of the main reasons I wanted to work with youth. She just made it look so fun, and it is. Our youth are our future and we need to nourish them and coach them into successful adults.

These 4 women have helped to shape me into the woman I am today and I love all four of them for being so inspirational and strong. These women are truly inspirational to me and are my strong female leaders. We need more women like this in our world to guide our youth so that they may succeed in life and be positive role models for the future generations. With this said, strong women will raise strong children, so that it will pass down through the generations and with that our people as a whole can rise up and be a strong people again.

By Binaeshee-Quae Couchie-Nabigon

The photo depicts something in nature that has been re-interpreted in our society to be ugly and scary, while challenging us to take a closer look. I think a leader is not someone who asks us to follow unquestionably as I have many strong women in my life who have taught me to ask why...

When I was a young girl, I was given the option of taking any elective I wanted. I had the choice of various cultural activities. I chose to learn about being a Native woman.

One of the elders in our community was our teacher. The first teaching given to us was that your period is your secret, no one else should know. The second was to never attend ceremony or the Pow-Wow during that time. The third was that if you cook for a man while on your period he might get sick. The fourth teaching was to never touch or walk over a man's belongings when you have your period because he might go blind.

I remember feeling confused, imagining having my period as a very toxic time with many dangers. I asked the question why. The teacher told me during that time you are very powerful. Being only seven or eight years old I imagined a witch with no control of her magical powers, and to be honest I was even more excited to become a woman.

When the day finally arrived, I quickly realized that instead of feeling empowered I was more powerless than ever. All of the restrictions and shunning made me feel ashamed.

A week before my community's Pow-Wow, I was sad to learn that I might not be able to dance. To my relief, I ended my period the day before and mentioned to my friend about how lucky I was. She told me that I was supposed to wait four days after my period before even touching my regalia, but I told her that I would continue to dance. Soon everyone knew and was giving me dirty looks, telling me

I had no right to be dancing and even going as far as blaming me for someone's sprained ankle.

I believe there is more value in taking the time to consider questions like this, than there is value in blind compliance. The leaders that I respect are people who ask and who let others ask.



Aboriginal Women's Leadership through my Eyes

By Corrine Clyne

In my opinion leadership is a strong word. It's a word that includes all the virtues. Aboriginal women's leadership is the power to look past the barriers, and taking a step out of your comfort zone. It believes in you, looks around, and sees what needs to be changed. It is the potential to make a difference, and what makes a difference. There are many wonderful people in this world, but to be a leader you need to learn to accept the things in life that cannot be changed. Aboriginal women's leadership is taking a stand against the statistics directed towards Aboriginal women. It is daring to be different. Leadership is staying with your beliefs, even though others criticize you for them. In my opinion, leadership is not taking abuse from a man, and it is saying no to something you don't want to do. As women, we are made with a great responsibility to bear and raise children in a harsh world. Aboriginal women are gifted with the role of leadership in everyday life. That role of leadership is motherhood. They lead their children and provide them with love, a love that can never be obtained from anyone else. They teach values to their children, and cry with their children. They strive to protect them, keep them safe, and strive to provide the best life possible.

Women in the 20th century have overcome so many barriers that were forcing them to be limited. They could not vote, or work in a formal job. However, that has now changed. Today, more and more Aboriginal women are pursuing a post-secondary education and working in non-traditional female fields such as engineering. There are many Aboriginal women who have overcome many obstacles of living on reservations. They follow their dreams and believe they can achieve them. Not only do they make a difference in their lives, but inspire other women to pursue their dreams. That is leadership for an Aboriginal woman. She can be the quiet one, but actions speak louder than words. Her actions for following her dreams despite the obstacles that tries to stop her. One woman who is a leader is Tina Keeper who is a Cree activist, former actor and former member of the House of Commons. Her actions inspire other Aboriginal women.

Growing up on a reservation, life was surrounded by the great green and traditional way

of living on a northern reserve. There are many women that have been a part of my life who portray leadership in many ways. My mother taught me many values that are carried on to this day. Values such as: as love, honesty, humility, modesty, patience, and courage. She taught me how to defy the odds, not worry about the harsh words that were shot at me most of my days, and learn to live with blessings of my life. A woman of faith and humbleness, she volunteered her time at local wakes, receptions, and even worked serving soup at my elementary school. Her food was amazing, and made with hard-working blessed hands. My mother's name was Nora. What amazes me to this day is that her bannock was named the best bannock in Norway House. My mother saw the beauty and importance in the small things such as thread, how it brings things together to create something better. How it fixes things with a needle to make it better. She was a woman full of laughter, full of grace. My mother accepted what she could afford, what was given to her, and her family; her two daughters with a disability, and her other two full of rebellion. She dedicated her life to making her son, a young man who would never live a normal life due to his disability, happy. She was a strong woman, and taught me well. On March 2005, my family was hit with the hard news of her passing, and our lives changed at that moment. She was my hero, my best friend, and a leader.

There are many other women in my life who have affected me in one way or another and show leadership. One woman who I look up to is one of the hardest working women I know. Being a beautiful mother to five children, she shows them to be strong. She went back to school, and received a medical certificate, despite all the obstacles she had to go through. Her name is Jerleen, and she is a leader for her children as well as her family. From her, I've learned to be strong even when others push you down, pursue the dreams of your heart. Being a strong mother is leadership. Another woman that has made a difference in my life is a woman named Linda. Linda has been a mother to me, and takes time to listen to my voice. She's been through so much in her life that has helped her become the woman she is today. She is full of compassion, grace, and laughter. I've learned to listen to others' voices compassionately, to be generous, and to count my blessings. She listens to a hurting heart, and helps to make it better. Compassion is leadership. My sister, who is older than me, has been through a lot in her life as well. She has not been the easiest woman in the world, but she is a hard worker. This year she went back to school for a medical certificate as well. I believe she is a leader in my family,

because she works hard and is often unaccredited for it. She has been pushed down for being different most of her childhood and yet, keeps living. Though others may not see it, she is a leader in my eyes. Accepting the things you cannot change is leadership. Tanis is another woman in my life. She went back to school while in her thirties, after raising her children. Now she is completing her Master's Degree, and has a grandchild whom she is so proud of. She is one of the most beautiful spirited women there is. She overcame obstacles, followed her dreams, and helps with Aboriginal women issues. Making a difference is leadership. One of my best friends stays true to herself as well, and is the most courageous woman I know. Her name is Aleena, she keeps her beliefs because she knows they are right. She does not allow others to interfere with them, and this shows courage. Courage is leadership.

So, leadership is more than just the general dictionary term. It is more than meets the eye, and in one way or another, all Aboriginal women are leaders. Whether a mother, a woman with a disability, or a woman who's been through much pain and hurt - she is a leader. Leadership is a diverse and virtuous word. It is a tough word. Leadership is being who you truly are, and fighting the barriers that get in the way. Leadership is learning from the mistakes in this walk of life.

By Danielle Michelle Morrisseau

You would think that in a class entitled Student Leadership they would teach all the recommended qualities of being a good leader. Such as being good looking, responsible, commendable, and having a strong sense of justice. Even if those are qualities that would make up a good leader, sometimes it goes far beyond what everyone expects a good leader should be. Now to answer what makes a strong Aboriginal Woman Leader, well to let you know - I wouldn't know the answer. I wouldn't know how to form sentences to perfectly describe that statement because when in my life have I ever undergone the task in which I needed to become a leader for everyone around me?

So what does Aboriginal Woman's Leadership mean to me? Well I'll start by saying what I want it to mean to me in the future. As far as I'm concerned, I want to be a leader; I want to be a role model. I'm the type of person or young lady who is forever willing to have anybody and everybody come to her with their problems and to best of my own ability try and help them out.

To me leadership can't just be subjective to just either men or women. In a way, someday I wish; the colour of skin, our religions, political beliefs, and sex didn't divide us in the role in which leadership should partake.

I want leadership to be more of a quiet role in which change is made. The people doing the grunt work of society to make it a better place. To realize that money shouldn't be an issue and that the poor, sick, and hungry need our help now more than ever.

Leadership to me is about change and progress, about contradictions that are made to better ourselves and eventually evolve our way of thinking. To realize that any leadership role or task in any situation is just as important as the big issues facing our culture today.

As far as Leadership in the Young Aboriginal role, I also believe it is about learning from our elders and using both old and new beliefs to make our culture better for future generations. As of now I realize our people are in trouble, and that help is needed out there to preserve our culture. I see that help is needed in all communities across Canada,

but even though I see the troubles that plague our people – I also see the positive. In my role of leadership and taking command, I feel that leaders should hold on to that positive light and bring it out for the world to see. I would love to bring all the good energy that still exists in all of us, and use it to inspire others to not only help each other out, but all different races that make up the multi-cultured land that is Canada.

Now for the hard part – what is leadership?

I know I've stated that I wouldn't know the definite answer to that question, but I do have an idea of what that answer may be. I foresee it as a heavy task but also a task that is completely warranted even if it may be a tough road to travel. As leaders though, or in my opinion great leaders will know, that sometimes it's not an easy road to have change take place.

Leadership to me is also about making the hard choice, because only people strong of heart are able to make those choices. It's about taking on the role of leadership whether it be at work, on a team, or in the community and taking responsibility for all your actions as well as the actions of other people.

We, in all of us, especially young Aboriginal women will always face trials and tribulations in our lives. I feel as though if we learn to take on those hard times together we can someday overcome them. We can work together to make the world better for ourselves and our culture. To be able to stand up high and strong with the values that we learn in our pain and realize that everything we learn from that pain was completely worth it.

As I previously stated, leadership to me is taking on a strong yet quiet role. To be the person who can pat everyone on the back (or in my case hug everyone) and say "good job" regardless of how each outcome has been laid out. To band together each member of a group and have them finish the task at hand, and inspire the people around you who will witness your amazing actions.

Leadership above all is about the different qualities that they do not teach – but rather the skills, hopes, and natural qualities that you learn on your own. It's about being there

for just about anybody. Knowing the right from the wrong, tackling all the hard tasks, and taking full responsibility for all your actions. Leadership is all about honesty and integrity. Educating others as well as yourself in the process. To inspire even the fewest of numbers, never leaving any friend or individual hanging out to dry, but most importantly making the tough decisions even if they are the unpopular opinion or the unfavourable choice.

I hope to one day feel as though leadership can be upheld not just by one individual looking over an entire group, but many individuals who will take responsibility and make their world and ours a better place. It is in the individual in whom change and progress can take place, it is also within the individual to decide whether or not taking the leadership role is important enough in today's society.

As a young Aboriginal/Metis woman my values and standards are set high. I once heard a quote saying "The sky can't be limit especially if they learnt to put people on the moon" As far as that quote connecting to my idea of leadership and the qualities I have discussed, it means to me that any situation and task (no matter how big or small) can be tackled as long as I stand up for what I believe in as well as others while maintaining a cool head and the quiet role in which change can be made.

By Elizabeth Zarpa

When you have an understanding of how something could work more effectively, but don't practice what you understand, then what good is it to have that knowledge? A leader not only understands, but also practices what they know. They lead by example. They don't wait to see who will follow their guidance rather they lead their own lives with integrity. Not waiting on others for their external approval, but listening to their own intuition for guidance. Doing this does not mean that you are tied to a certain gender or ethnicity. Any willing person is capable of taking a leadership role. But the focus of this essay will be on what it means to be an Indigenous woman taking a leadership role in Canada.

Canada is one of the most multi-cultural countries in the world. Its two national languages are English and French, but behind those two languages lay hundreds more. The population speaks Inuktitut, Innu, Cree, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi, etc. People come from all directions of the world to live and prosper here. But to Aboriginal people this is our home, we were here first. We are Indigenous to this land. Yet, despite this reality it is difficult to find our voice amongst all the others who have integrated here. Other people find themselves in similar situations as we do. They want good education and good health care for their families. They desire the best for themselves as we do too. We all want and deserve access to good health care services, education and employment for our families, but it doesn't mean we will have it. Those who will access these government funded services are the ones who understand what we need and are vocal about it. It is the ones who have voice that have influence in shaping the world we are surrounded by.

In Canada the voices are coming from many different people, so it remains important that Aboriginal women whether First Nations, Inuit or Métis have a good understanding of where they come from. Their heritage, cultural customs and language are all important aspects of their Aboriginal identity. When they lose these parts of themselves then they begin to lose parts of who they are as Aboriginal people; then they begin to lose their voice. The role of a leader is to help revive and empower the cultural customs of our ancestors. Inuit women who have helped empower me are Jennie Williams, Tanya Mesher, Mary Simon, Dorthy Mesher and Janice Grey to name a few. Their love of being

Inuk has helped inspire me to become more familiar with that part of my identity.

There are many avenues that individuals can take to continue to learn about their Aboriginal culture. Inuit have access to affirmative action programs assigned in helping them get into universities/colleges and other organizations due to the hard work of politicians/government workers. Musicians such as Tumivut or Tanya Tagaq throat sing and record it, so the world can hear it. Others can learn how to speak Inuktitut through audiotapes like Rosetta Stone. The information and technology to learn are available. It remains up to the people whether or not they have the will to take time to learn.

I am part of that gap generation that wasn't taught Inuktitut. My mother could speak it and my grandmothers/grandfather could speak it, but I can't. I sometimes get angry knowing that I had no control over my childhood or what I was taught and now I realize it is up to me to learn Inuktitut. I have to take the initiative to learn. I am the generation that has to take initiative to learn about Inuit culture and language if it will continue to survive into the next generation. I understand that is a responsibility that I have the choice to take. The true test is whether or not I will take this understanding I have and use it in my everyday life. A leader would take it.



Wasuaksing First Nation Swing Bridge – June 2010 (photo)

this the sunshine is so bright, reflects off the water it feels unreal because of the beauty that surrounds.

Many women pass by, under, over, above this bridge on a daily basis to school, shopping, traveling, home visits, sight seeing, picking berries, fishing, (you can buy your fishing permits at the bridge), hunting, going to bingo, visiting their friends and many other reasons. They may be flying, walking, running, driving a snowmobile, motorcycle, (no ATVs, the sign says before you cross the bridge) they might be riding a bicycle, swimming, floating, or simply staying on either side of the bridge wondering what the other side is up to. (It is private property and you should be invited in or be with friends who live there) It is a swing bridge that used to be a train bridge; the tracks were taken out, and continue to swing for larger boats today. (Just so you know, if you're on the other side you're on the First Nation)

I admire the young generations that are coming up and passing over this bridge because they have a strong chance to make a difference in our world, a brighter future for them.

By Eva Rose Tabobondung

- Anishnabek Nation – 28 Years of Age

The photo to the left is a snap shot from last summer June 2010 as I was leaving Wasuaksing heading back to Toronto after my birthday at the family house. At that moment I was remembering that I was another year older, brighter, stronger. My mother was in the passenger seat in front of me and I behind her looking out the window as we crossed that bridge together one more time.

This photo is facing southwest and the sun is a few hours from setting on Georgian Bay, one of my many favorite places on earth. On days like

There is water under the bridge for them.

Singing, playing, laughter, reminds us that our hearts will always be young, women leaders can see greater possibilities in future.

Aboriginal women leadership means that we remember all of the people who came before us, the ones who gave everything that we have, the ones that have sustained us to the present date. Some of the greatest changes in history were made by women and most of those changes were done by birth and giving new life, that matters the most in our society because we are still here, alive and well, that wasn't always recognized in earlier days. Not to forget our men because without them we would also not be here, they put themselves ahead of us many times.

We have many women leaders it is not always easy to list them all but we can think the ones who are with us and ones who are not. Some of the most important leaders do not consider themselves leaders, they do the best that they can because that is what they know how to do. Women leaders are good listeners, don't always have to be heard and seen, and that itself is very refreshing, a good leader is one who can also follow.

Strong women surround me, from the young to the old, past, present, and future. They include my Grandmothers, my Mother, Aunties, Sisters, Cousins, Nieces, Friends, their mothers, and those who I haven't met yet.

They are strong because they are life givers and know how important it is to keep everyone safe. To me they are strong because women always have each other's back no matter what happens, our sisterhood remains through hard times.

Strong women taught me many things and I thank them everyday, even when they can't hear me, or when I can say it to their face.

I miss my grandmothers and my mother's strength everyday when they are not close, I love them everyday, and I love them very much.

False Images

By Hannah Lazare

They say there are people starving in Kandahar,
But there are First Nations people starving in Canada.
They tell me kids out in Africa are living in huts,
I know families on some Reservations who can't afford a door that shuts.
We send millions overseas to give third world countries financial aid,
But I just read a statistic that said there is an increase for First Nations peoples dying from AIDS.
I'm not trying to take away the severity of all the degradation,
But my own people are suffering so don't come to me asking for a donation.
If I'm going to give something I'll give it to my people,
We've been dying out for years and have never been treated as another nation's equal.

Clinton, Bush and Obama have all made many promises,
But Leonard Peltier's still in prison for the government's false charges.
Ever since Columbus has landed on this earth
We've been treated poorly even though we were here first.
Imperialism and Greed should be considered a vocation
For the mindless thoughts of others with their stereotypes and fake religions.
Just for once I'd like to be treated as if I were an equal,
And not seen as living as the stereotype created by inferior people.
If I act like a stereotypical "Indian" then I must have no shame,
But if I try to show that we are educated, intelligent and talented,
Then I must be tainted all the same.

They try to take away our culture and replace it with another,
Their ignorance is like a pillow and it's our way of life they are trying to smother.
In Colleges and Universities they have courses on musicians and their lyrics,
But even in the 21st century they are trying to figure out how to take away our spirit.
They give us all kinds of money to keep their foots in the door,
So we're dependent on the governments handouts, we're nothing but their "whores".

When we try to speak our minds we are labeled as militant,
They also say we are unintelligent, ignorant and troublemakers, but really we just don't
give a shit.
You never heard about women getting beaten or children being molested,
Those things just didn't happen much and if they did they were properly dealt with,
Now we've allowed the outside world to venture into our lives,
And lately it's not uncommon to hear in our community about a husband hitting his wife.

I'm tired of society giving us a real bad rep.
We do what we do to provide for our families outside of the government's help.
Because they can't control us like they used to do,
They fear that we will turn on them one day and do what they did to us too.
I wish they'd take their drugs and alcohol, put it all on a boat,
Send it back across the seas and let their side be doped.
We have enough problems in our communities outside of the addictions;
We're fighting every day against you, each other, and incurable sickness.
We're fighting stereotypes, jail, prison, the government and disease,
So I wish that just for once they would just let us be.

It's amazing when you think of how we were once called uncivilized,
Yet we provided sustenance for those Imperialists to survive.
They had to disrupt our lives and demoralize our world.
We didn't have a word for hate, racism, or deed,
Now we've been overtaken by words and actions of their greed.
Our children don't know their language or even about their culture,
And there are sickos in our communities that prey on them like vultures.

I guess my opinion could be seen as racist banter,
Or you could look deep inside and understand the anger.
I know so many people who are trying to get out of the stereotype that they've created,
But society is consumed by false images and so called actions of our hate.

A little bit about why I wrote "False Images"

I was walking through the quad at my university, having a discussion with a friend. Throughout our walk we noticed signs and fundraisers raising money for tragedies and misfortunes that had happened across the ocean in other countries. I remarked that we have our own misfortunes and tragedies right here in our own country, that it almost seemed contradictory to be financially assisting other countries when we should be helping our own first, right here in our own backyard.

It took me 3 months to write *False Images*, because it really made me think. My father is full native and my mother is a non-native, and I've always dealt with the negativity surrounding being raised in an Aboriginal community. The stereotypes we deal with, the negative comments and situations that come about due to others' "assumptions". I wanted to make a difference and show others who are trying very hard to get out of the "False Images" that others have created for us, that it is not impossible.

Being an Aboriginal Women's leader means doing whatever is necessary to show others that you can go far in life, regardless of the situation. The only barrier to success is you, and in my own personal life and career I follow that motto.

Being a leader means educating and guiding others, especially our youth, to make the right decisions and providing for them a positive role model to turn to when they need one.

When I hear someone tell me they can't, I tell them all I hear is they won't.

If I had listened to every person who told me to quit or stop pursuing my goals I wouldn't be where I am today.

I don't make a lot of money, but I make a difference every day, with my family and friends, my clients and colleagues, and with our youth, and to me that is worth its weight in gold. If I'm not a leader then I am surely working hard to become one!

My Aunt Liz. Beatrice Johnson. Cheyenne Lazore. The woman I see in the mirror each morning, myself. These are strong Aboriginal women.

These are family, friends, colleagues.

They are strong because they have dealt with trauma, adversity, and overcame it all.

They stand tall and proud and refuse to let others tear them down.

They are single mothers, housewives, students, and the main breadwinners for their families. They have overcome abuse from others, refused to let their goals and dreams be diminished, and pursued happiness regardless of the struggle.

These are all women I'd like to be like someday, and in my own way I am on that path.

They have taken what was given to them and made the most out of it.

They are the women that know that life is not easy because if it were, everybody would be doing it.

Where are your women?

By Hayley Moody

The speaker is Attakullakulla, a Cherokee Chief renowned for his shrewd and effective diplomacy. He has come to negotiate a treaty with the whites. Among his delegation are women 'as famous in war, as powerful in the council.' Implicit in the Chief's question, 'where are your women?' the Cherokee hear, 'where is your balance?' 'What is your intent?' They see the balance is absent and are wary of the white man's motives. They intuit the mentality of destruction.

I turn to my own time. I look to the Congress, the Joint Chief of Staff, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission... to the hierarchies of my church, my university, my city, my children's school. "Where are your women?" I ask.

These are the words of Cherokee/Appalachian woman, Marilou Awiakta.

When posed with the question 'what does Aboriginal women's leadership mean to me,' dozens of thoughts ran through my mind, but after days of contemplation, only one theme remained – echoed through the quote just read, I wonder, 'where are your women?'

In traditional Aboriginal societies, the woman is defined as nourisher, and the man, as protector – he had the role of the helper. She acted; he reacted. New European settlers observed this behaviour, observed the power of the woman, and were startled by the lack of male dominance.

Indigenous Nations were equally startled – how could these new people exclude fifty percent of their population when making decisions? How could these men disrespect the givers of life? How did this come to be?

The underlying question - where are your women?

As time has passed, European settlers have done everything in their power to diminish the role of women in Aboriginal societies – the Indian Act, Bill C-31, residential schools,

the 'sixties scoop,' along with many others.

Families were torn apart, human rights were abused, identities were stolen – but the spirit, the spirit could not be broken.

So, where are OUR women?

We are empowered, empowered to make change, to be leaders in this globalizing world. Our pain and our suffering makes us stronger, makes us who are. We reach out to our sisters who have lost the spirit, we rekindle the flame, restore the woman's place in society.

Aboriginal women across the country joining together to fight for a common goal, this is leadership.

It takes one person to start a revolution, but it takes many followers to make it successful. When we, as Aboriginal women, and all women in general, stand together, there is great potential for success. Joining as one, our voices are stronger when we speak together, and we have much to say.

Our Aboriginal sisters are in trouble – with high rates of alcohol and drug use, incarcerations, poverty, suicides, prostitution, family violence... these are the resulting effects of colonialism, this is how our sisters live.

Together, we can make answers; make solutions. Together, we can help other sisters of the world who are dealing with similar tragedies. Together, we are leadership and change.

Leadership, for me as an Aboriginal woman, is about togetherness.

If we didn't work together, great strides in Canadian history wouldn't have been made – look at the feminist movement – we now have the right to vote, the right to work where we want, the right of equality under the law, the right to marry whom we please and the right to refuse sex. While Canada still has room for improvement, the fact is, we still have success, which can be directly attributed to the fact of togetherness – fighting together for our rights as women.

We need to fight together now for the rights of Aboriginal women, who are slipping through the cracks – the spirit remains alive, but hurt and devastation from our history still exists.

Together, as women, we must confront the impacts of colonialism on Canada's Indigenous peoples and discover solutions to ensure their spirits live on.

Where are OUR women now? Aboriginal women have outstretched arms to their hurting sisters – so many initiatives have been created in all areas of life, specifically for Aboriginal women, created by Aboriginal women – economic programs, family counseling, birthing centers, traditional healing, and many more. We continue to work together to bring happiness and prosperity to our people once again.

This occurs through leadership.

Aboriginal women's leadership is about working together – all women working together – to create awareness and change in our globalized world. It's about learning from one another's stories and having the empowerment to change existing boundaries. It's about joining together, picking each other up and having the courage to do what our hearts tell us is right.

To be a true leader, you stand up for what you believe in.

I stand up for what I believe in.

I am a Métis woman and I believe in change. I am a Métis woman and I believe in leadership. I am a Métis woman, and I believe in the power of togetherness.

So, where are OUR women? Where are YOUR women? – Together, they are making change.



By Jasmine Orchid Anderson

A boriginal women's leadership is one of the most interesting topics for me, as an Aboriginal woman. I believe Aboriginal women can be one of the most powerful groups in the corporate world. Not to mention within the community. I have many thoughts, values and beliefs about Aboriginal women leaders. I feel strongly about this topic and I have been researching this topic for years. I want to elaborate on what I feel Aboriginal women as leaders

have to offer their communities, and what leadership takes within an individual.

"Leadership is about making more leaders; not about making more followers." "As Aboriginal people we need to empower the ones who have that special determination within them to be successful in life." "If one of us makes it we all make it." These are all phrases I have heard repeated from friends and family members, but do they actually believe what they are saying. Leadership is not just about being in power and having influence, but it is also about having integrity and humility. You as a leader must live by your values. If you tell people you are proud of them for their success and don't show up to their award ceremonies, fundraisers, or you are secretly jealous. Your actions and words are not matching up, and you do not live with integrity. You must live by your values, as a leader, you must be consistent, and balanced. Your values speak louder than your words as a leader, your words are without meaning unless you are consistent, and balanced in your personal life. You are a leader when those who you speak to pay attention and respect what you are saying; they will listen if you have the qualities of a leader. To be a leader you must live with integrity, balance and you are patient. Patience is one of my favorite qualities in leadership, leaders who listen and think before they speak, are more likely to have reason in their conviction. Aboriginal women must be some of

the most patient people I have ever known; we juggle careers, raising sons and daughters, hobbies, and personal time everyday, not to mention our partners. Multi tasking is a favorable quality in a leader.

It is important to have knowledge of today's society, and knowledge of our history. Learning First Nations heritage is different than just simply reading about it in the library, because much of our heritage has not been documented. A leader needs to be historically educated and as an Aboriginal leader you have to seek out and hear the stories from our elders. Learning your language and traditions is important for an Aboriginal leader, because with these teachings and lifestyle, comes a sense of identity. Another quality benefited from being educated, would be a sense of understanding important issues, such as the issues of our First Nations youth.

There are many distractions available to today's youth, but also a chain reaction of confusion and addiction stretching all of the way back to the days of assimilation and colonialization. As an Aboriginal leader, responsibility is apparent. Living a drug and alcohol free lifestyle and breaking that chain within your own family, is a good start. Excelling and demonstrating how great life can be without the weight of alcoholism, living by example is almost essential to make a good Aboriginal leader.

Some areas of responsibility I feel needs to be addressed would be a welcome to the new comers to Canada. I have done cross-cultural training with members from Kenya, Philippines, and Nepal with The Youth Work Experience Initiative in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The multicultural group had no idea of the history the First Nations people and some of the tragedies they endured. The group sadly only knew native stereotypes, and generalizations. When we asked them how they felt when approached from an Aboriginal street person, they said they were frightened, and they felt when here in Canada they needed to avoid the Aboriginal people. These misconceptions are very common. I decided to explain to them some of the effects of sending generations of First Nations children to residential schools. When you subject entire generations of children to assimilation through abuse, neglect, abduction, and cruelty, you can't expect these children to grow up knowing how to properly raise families, or deal with emotional scarring. Many if not all of these street people are results of such generational

misconduct. My fellow members of The Youth Work Experience Initiative, after hearing these stories had a whole new outlook about Aboriginal people and admiration for the survivors of residential schools. There is no representative or groups, welcoming new comers to our lands; this is a topic which I feel Aboriginal women leaders need to be addressing. In welcoming the new comers, we should be educating them about the truth of First Nations history, and the beauty of our culture. We need to prevent cross cultural ignorance and racism. This is only to educate and create understanding, not to point fingers or blame.



Aboriginal women have always been the decision makers within the community. Aboriginal leaders must contribute to the celebration of Aboriginal achievement. To offer your support to those who have chosen to excel is just as important as educating others of our heritage. Our people are moving forward and growing in numbers, we are a resilient nation of First Nations people, and we as Aboriginal women, are the life givers of this nation.

We all have gifts we were given from the creator; we need to use these gifts to benefit our fellow man. I use my talents as an artist to create beautiful pieces of art, controversial or not. In order to educate, and contribute.

As women we think from a unique point of view. We are more connected with other women, and the needs of others. As First Nations people we have more to overcome within ourselves and today's society. I believe more than anything, if anyone can be effective leaders in 2011 it would be this generation of Aboriginal women. We are multi-taskers, Mothers, Aunts, daughters, and the neck that turns this great nation. This country has many different areas which need to be addressed. I am confident Aboriginal women are the leaders of tomorrow, and we are only in the beginning stages of great change.

By Josephine O'Brien

As an Aboriginal woman who has gone through great difficulty in my own life, I can honestly say I have compassion. The first time I moved from my hometown community of Ross River I was six years old. This community had a population of 600 people, almost all were First Nations. I was used to driving down the road to go hunting and camping every weekend in the bush, eating moose meat and guts on the side of the road and all this I had in common with the majority of my classmates. This was normal to me. When we moved to the Yukon capital Whitehorse, a population of 25,000 people, I had no idea how much my life would change. I am a minority in this country of Canada, but now I could see it and feel it. Little did I know this feeling I struggled with my entire life, this feeling of being an outsider would one day lead me to have great compassion for my people. It led me to study more, to question more and to understand more on why I would feel like this when my culture and my tradition was so rich in stories of great leaders, compassionate communities, strong people and most of all strong women.

I believe leadership is a form of compassion. The strength it takes to put yourself into other people's shoes and to feel what they feel and to have that deep urge to want to help in any way you possibly can to make their life better is something special. As a First Nations woman in this day and age, there are hardships to being First Nations and there are hardships to being a woman. First of all, as a First Nations person, I am still struggling with healing from intergenerational impacts brought on by historical genocide of my people. Second of all as a woman, I struggle with feeling equal to a man. We all know in this world today there are still many forms of racism and sexism that come alive through media, politics and society. This is why, to me, Aboriginal women leaders are some of the strongest leaders in the world. They sometimes must stand alone in the hardest of times. These are the women I admire most in life because they have the same values I do: compassion for their family, their community and their world.

Leadership, to me, is the strong focus of your attention to the people that matter most to you. To me, the people that matter most are my family, not only my blood relations but also my community and the world community. There is a First Nations saying that it takes a whole community to raise a child. I have heard of this happening in stories about

the old days, and slowly our leaders are trying to bring this back, but we still struggle through these times with alcohol and drug abuse, neglect, racism and suicide in our Aboriginal communities. As a child growing up around this and being confused as to why my community was struggling, I realized we were a hurt people. It was not that we are weak it was that there was just so much historical pain suffered by my parents and their parents and so on. These days, when I see people standing up to drinking or drugs, they are being leaders. When I see people talking about their culture and taking pride and practicing their traditions and languages, they are being leaders. When I see people living and surviving off the land and treating the land with respect, they are being leaders. These are the people who I take great pride in. A leader, to me, is someone who keeps trying no matter how many walls they may have hit. Someone who believes in a value so much they are willing to work hard everyday trying to keep that value alive and true. A leader, to me, looks into the future and can see the world as better than how it might look today. A leader is willing to go on a lifelong journey to help build that future dream.

Aboriginal women these days are stronger then ever. I am lucky to have so many strong Aboriginal women around me. They have taught me that in the past, even though the men were regularly the leaders, it was the women that were the heart of the communities. Aboriginal women were and are greatly respected for their advice on the community. I believe as a First Nations woman that all Aboriginal women are natural born leaders. For Aboriginal women to be such strong leaders today, they must remember the past but also aim for a better future. Why are Aboriginal leaders stronger then ever before? Because they are the ones who saw their communities fall apart, and decided that they will not let go of a dream for a better tomorrow. Aboriginal women go through low self-esteem, abusive relationships and neglect to come out with a greater perspective on life. These are the women that care for everyone, who want to see a world where their children can grow up knowing their culture and traditions and being proud of who they are and where they come from.

The strongest Aboriginal woman I know would have to be my grandmother Dorothy Smith. She is my history teacher, my role model, the community's elder and someone who is always there for you. No matter who you are, if you were to ask for help, she would do whatever she can to try and help you. She has the biggest heart, and gives you

her undivided attention if you need to talk. She has a very active lifestyle. When she is not working to make her community stronger and better, she is practicing her culture on the land. She is my role model because she can do everything from shooting a moose and skinning it to bringing that value and important tradition to big executives who are trying to mine the land. She fights for her people on a daily basis in a boardroom by stressing the importance of our tradition and the land we use to keep our culture alive, by keeping that lifestyle going and teaching the future generations of leaders. I admire her the most because she is teaching me this same way of life.

This is a world full of people being proactive and fighting to keep their values alive, values such as our history and our cultures. Aboriginal women leaders are crucial in this fight because they hold the knowledge and compassion to build the dream of a diverse yet equal world for tomorrow.

By Katie Jo Rabbit

It all started when I was three years old, it was 1983 we lived in a two bedroom town house, and we didn't have a television, or the cable was cut off. At the time I didn't think anything of it, because my mum and grandma protected me from the hardships of reality that we faced. Sometimes now, when I think back, we were quite poor, but because of these women in my life, I was able to see past the materialism and enjoy my childhood.

My mom, who is affectionately known by her Blackfoot name; "Innitsii" introduced me to the Pee Wee Herman word game, "word of the day". She would give me a word, and if I used it properly in a sentence we would scream. To test her I would use the words only in public. Because my mother was never too shy to scream while at the grocery store, I began my love of words.

When we moved back to the reserve my grandma would also influence my love of stories, words and all things creative. She would tell me all about the days of our lives, and would sew while I read aloud from the National Inquirer. When I would ask her if the stories in it were true, she would look up from her antique push foot-pedal sewing machine with a reply "What do you think?"

I can still see her sitting there, in the dining room, can picture her smile, like a crack in the soft folds of her aged skin. Her face like the bark of a tree, beaming whenever I would play the cello, or recite a poem, lending me her costume jewellery and reminding me ladies only ever chewed half a piece of Freedent gum to be polite. She was the only woman I knew who could fry an egg in the time it took the bus to drive down the road; the only woman I knew who could make life buoy soap smell good.

At the time I didn't realize how strong and important these women were in my life, it never occurred to me that having my mother drop me off alone at basketball camps would instill in me a sense of independence. That her refusal to buy me brand name clothes would give me the motivation to get a job at the age of 14. I also thought reading from the National Inquirer was a waste of time, because we all knew bat boy was really from Mexico and not living in a cave in Kansas, but it would help me become a critical thinker.

If they hadn't protected me, both my mom and grandma, and shown me another world, allowed me to be who I was. I would have never been able to play basketball in Hawaii, or play in the Indigenous Games. I would have never been able to live independently, and leave the reserve to study journalism. I would have never been able to fail and still feel like I accomplished something. I would have never been able to deal with molestation and forgive the perpetrator; I would have succumbed to drug addictions.

Witnessing the strength of my mother: who dealt with judgments for having a child at an early age, who endured through abusive relationships, and still finished her university degree and witnessing the strength of my grandmother: who survived residential school, who was always thankful, and believed in being a poised lady at all times; provided me a sense of strength to become my own woman.

Because they believed in me, and made me realize at an older age, that there were some horrible things they had lived through, and persevered, I knew that deep down inside I could do the same.

Because they were strong, proud Blackfoot women, women who could rodeo, women who could raise six children with less than a grade six education, women who could rise above the stereotypes, and become a CEO of a management Corporation. Women who could take care of her children's children when times got too hard for them, women who could not only provide guidance, support and leadership, but women who could make you behave with a look in their eye. I knew that I would get through.

Just recently I was shown a black and white photograph of my great grandmother, her Blackfoot name was Tsii'kiinaa'kii, in the picture ladies dressed in proper suits and high heels stand in the background. They are watching from a distance; my great grandmother is walking down the street in her moccasins. With a scarf wrapped around her head in true Blackfoot granny style, she carries a piece of paper that looks to be a diploma. I am not sure what she carries; I like to think that it is her diploma. That she is smiling because she knows, that not only will her daughter, but her daughter's daughter, and her daughter's daughter will be able to do the same. Walk in the world we live today, with moccasins, and the pride in knowing that she is a successful, proud, fourth generation First Nations Woman.

To Heal...
To sit and for the mind to be calm is healing
To walk and smell the grass, the air, the flowers in bloom is healing
To witness the natural cycle of nature from the leaves falling, to the ice breaking, to the trees swaying
...That is healing
We come from nature, and therefore nature is us
We are one in its entirety
To dance inwardly, to allow your spirit to feel and share,
...That is healing
To do nothing but listen
...That is healing
To be completely non-influential to others
...That is healing
The sooner we look inside to unveil the truth, the sooner we will heal
The more we are aware, the more we will feel
The more we feel the more we will heal
To heal is to be simple, to flow and to feel full
To heal is not to be a professional, but to be a human being
To be a professional only brings power, a power which is powerless over oneself
To be a professional brings money, which corrupts humanity into believing only then can we live
The truth is, to live is to feel, to breath, to smell, to touch and to see

-Niimi Manitou Kwe-
-Humanity-

By Katrina Graham - NiiMii Manitou Kwe -

I am an Aboriginal woman from Ontario with my mother's family originating in Moose Factory First Nation in Northern Ontario. My story is not unlike many others, of being displaced due to intergenerational burden of residential school. My grandmother and uncle experienced the effects of the schools, and so have I, not even knowing them as I grew older, into adulthood. The deep burden followed my spirit into this world, and has affected myself and my family by means of mental illness, and a general "dis-ease". The academic

development in the helping profession to become a nurse has brought me to this place of wholistic healing for myself and others and with writing this piece on what healing is.

Healing cannot be taught by others, but learnt within ourselves. The guidance of the medicine wheel and the teachings are the basis of what I plan to integrate into practice, within the healing world. Without the balance of the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual we cannot begin to heal, or establish a sense of balance. The poetic piece also represents what a woman or creator is. The woman is the creator, and therefore we are all the creators. We carry the incredible gift of giving and creating life. The womb is symbolized and cherished within our native culture, to give thanks for the world in which we live; therefore, we are all praying and giving back to ourselves. Ourselves, as women and as creators are in a unique position of being recognized as beautiful beings, within our culture as other cultures may not be so aware of the beauty in which we hold. This is not to be confused with egoism, as we are no better of different than our fellow beings, but just carry the special gift of giving life.

The poem is a reflection of how we may be able to start healing, looking inwardly, opposed to the complexity of outward healing. The healing of our women is important to the overall healing of our people, as we are the creators, being able to bring that awareness forward to our people. The help us remember that we are responsible for nothing but taking care of our inward growth, to be the strong leaders of today that we are.

Aboriginal women as leaders seems natural, as we traditionally lead our communities, by providing life to our children, nurturing families through story, through laughter, through wisdom and knowledge. The leadership of Aboriginal women is so important to carry on through sharing the feeling, the feeling of love and connectedness to our mother earth. To take that foundation of our teachings and teach others the importance of preserving our native traditions and lands will inspire our young people to do the same and carry on the beauty of women everywhere in this world.

By Killa Mitchell-Atencio

- Age: 21 Years

The definition of leadership can vary among people. Some say it is a hierarchal position that one gains through elections or leveling up while others may say it's about power, money and status. However, my belief is that being a leader is not an inherent skill or something that you are born with. It is through acquired experiences, education desire, cultural values, willpower, self-awareness and determination to do something about a certain situation that a leader emerges.

Leadership in an Aboriginal woman comprises of all this gained understanding and awareness that I mentioned above, but also requires a woman to be passionate and inspiring. Good leaders, regardless of their gender, inspire others by being, knowing and doing. Although for Aboriginal women this being, knowing and doing is often the aftermath of living life in a gendered world.

Alas, Aboriginal women have long been the victim of colonialism and neo-colonialism in its various forms such as racism, sexism and high levels of domestic violence. When faced with the realities, women for generations have been tied down and suppressed by others' limiting beliefs and expectations of them, as well as societal and religious constraints that have left many women unable to see their true power, beauty and potential. Women are also a majority when confronted with the issue of poverty, joblessness, and violence.

This is what Aboriginal women continue to face today and it is also a barrier for the emergence of women leaders. This situation at the same time has hardened the steel power of some strong women leaders in different Nations across Canada that put them in front of battles for women's rights, even facing Canadian male leaders, First Nations leaders and their own communities' establishments. There are many strong examples of women who have helped to advance our rights as women, First Nations and as humans.

These Aboriginal women carry on and persevere with an "I'll show you" attitude that never leaves them giving up or stepping down, and that is what makes them a leader. They have not simply accepted their present circumstances, situations and erosion of

their rights, but women with formal education or not have fought to bring a better future to generations of not only women, but men also because as mothers, they fight for their children regardless of the gender. A woman does not see the world through gendered eyes. This fight has been long, tempestuous, and grueling, but it has yielded results and none of this would have come about without their strength and courage. Aboriginal women leaders have an honest understanding of who they are, where they come from, what they know and what they are capable of. It is this knowledge that they carry with them and pass on to others by demonstrating a leadership role in their communities speaking about what they know, what they've learned and what can be done to ensure a better future. They are the ones in front of resistance, the ones who are the last in embracing assimilation; they are the keepers and transmitters of language, cultures and values. Good leaders work continually searching for new understandings and skills that they can take back to their communities, to provide the younger generations with an aspiration of who to become.

A woman, who, to me, has not only demonstrated, but exudes strength, dignity, determination, empowerment and vision as an Aboriginal leader is Buffy Sainte Marie. Her strength as an Aboriginal woman is illustrated in her talent of music and art, the causes she is passionate about, and educates many about, as well as in the way she carries herself with confidence. She is not afraid to speak truths about Aboriginal issues and defending Indigenous rights, not only from North America but for other Nations in the Americas as well. She does not back down or shy away from speaking out when she sees injustice, as she did as a young woman in a period where women and Aboriginal rights were not at the front of the political discourse. She, along with other leaders were the ones paving the roads for us to continue this journey on. Having had the chance to meet her in person was an honour. I offered her the sacred gift of a condor feather (which to my Incan background, is the equivalent of an eagle feather), which in a way represents the fulfillment of the prophecy of the encounter of the eagle and the condor bridging the knowledge of Northern and Southern Indigenous cultures. As a true Aboriginal leader, I know she is capable of rejuvenating her culture through music, art and activism and inspiring many women, in the last 40 years, the same way she had inspired me when I learnt about her music, her life and when I had the chance to meet her and shake her hand.

Her music, passion and strength resonate through me so much so that her lyrics from her song "Starwalker" were my inspiration to get the words "Aim Straight" and "Stand Tall" tattooed in the inside of each of my wrists, directly across from the scars I bear from having intravenous therapy as a newborn fighting for my life. Since my first days on this great earth, I have been determined to survive, and now with those words on my body forever, it is a reminder of my everyday appreciation of the life I have and the future I strive to obtain. Those four words can mean anything to anyone, but when I hear Buffy sing those lyrics, it sends strength and courage through my veins.

Aim straight to me means have a goal and go for it. Don't let anyone or anything get in the way of your goals, passions or dreams and don't ever give up on what you want in life, because everyone deserves the highest attainable future they can make for themselves. Stand tall to me means be proud of who you are and where you come from and hold your head high. It's everything you've done, all the experiences you've had whether good or bad, that make you who you are and you should not be ashamed of the life you come from. Even when I go through tough times in my life, these words will remind me of the kind of woman I want to be; a leader who inspires people and change in the world to better the situation of our people, these are lessons that are shaping my character as the leader I want to be.

Buffy Sainte Marie, a true Aboriginal leader to me, encompasses all of these attributes, understandings and awareness that make it possible for survival and growth of the Aboriginal women's community. I am an Aboriginal woman, and I believe that I am learning to be a leader. My hope is to inspire others by sticking to what I love, thinking big and noble, staying positive, and by being, knowing and doing what I believe in. Doing that in every step of my journey in life is instilling in me the determination of other Aboriginal women leaders, like Buffy, Mary Two-Axe and the strong women in my community who continue to defend our rights.



“Jingle Dress Dancer” 2009

Acrylic and India ink on pre-stretched 6”x 36” canvas.

I am a young Aboriginal artist born and raised in the Southern Ontario reserve of Alderville First Nation. Being status First Nation half Ojibway, I’m lucky to have been taught the few teachings and language I do know. So, I am always interested in attending community events and traditional activities.

I enjoy expressing artistic views and discussing different artwork forms as well. Being able to share opinions and experiences openly with anyone, to me is very freeing.

Leadership

By Koren Smoke - Artist Statement

Leadership is a management skill. To be a leader is to have the ability to inspire a group of people toward a common goal. As endless as the task may sometimes seem, I’ll always be encouraging the people around me to help make this world a better place. My art piece ‘Jingle Dress Dancer’ I feel expresses my opinion on some of these topics. Trying to grab the viewers’ attention into the painting with the short story I wrote during a storm, and compelling them to put themselves in the experience of seeing someone else’s opinion. Creating a strong emphasis on the Jingle Dress Dancer’s empowering embrace with lightning appearing to hit her feathers, which she’s holding high giving thanks to the creator, I tried to influence the audience to consider her tenacity. I wrote the short story sitting outside during a stormy /sunny day and the words just came to me, I was writing it as the storm was happening right in front of me. Here’s how it goes;

The storm is now growing in strength. The rain a sound of medicinal cleansing. I can now hear rhythmic jingles. I close my eyes and focus on the sounds.

The thunder roars with the beat of the jingles. Now, a combination of beautiful music by

nature. The rain continues to beat on mother earth. The cleansing. The thunder carries
with the rain.

Such a powerful happening. Sweet sounds of jingles collaborate with this song of nature.

My eyes still shut... A crack of thunder and lightning divide the sky in two. My heart's
now racing with joy. I become one with the rain. I can hear the jingles getting closer, now
with the sound of thunder all around me.

I am the rain,

I am the thunder.

Opening my eyes, the storm is thick and the sun shines through peeking at her.

She is right there in front of me. One more crack of thunder. She is here, the Jingle Dress
Dancer.

Blossoming Leadership

By Kristen Bos

Ever since I was a little girl, I became fairly accustomed to the faces of the people I met cocking their eyebrows in confusion as their bewildered eyes searched my face trying to place the origin of my features. It was as if the answer to their question would somehow tell them about the kind of person I may be. I listened to them intently as they assigned my eyes to Asia, my lips to Europe and the tousled curls atop my little head to somewhere that must have been humid. No one ever guessed that the bow of my lip or the edge of my jaw could be from right here in Canada.

My adoption was planned even before I was born and the mystery of my who my parents are has always, and probably will always, remain. The truth is that I have no desire to find them but I imagine that if I were to encounter them that my question would be, “Where were you from?” Even though I’ve never minded being a chameleon or having the intrigue of mystery on my side, I have always wondered what place in history was carved out for me specifically. This desire only grew as I entered university to study Archaeology: the search for meaning and origins. But my growing restlessness in regards to my own beginnings were short-lived because just two short years ago I found out that my birth mother was Métis. Even though I’m newly Métis, it was not something I had to become accustomed to. I immediately felt the weight of the great history and the similarity that lay in the faces of the people I met when I stepped into the First Nations House at University of Toronto. By simply being a young woman whose eyes are more brown than blue and whose hair is more like that of the inky night sky than of rays of sunshine, I not only see the need for more specialized Aboriginal women leadership, but also for all women who might feel the pressures from the world’s ideals or feel the stigma that stems from being different.

Two words intertwine in my mind when I think about my own path to leadership: choice and sexuality. Sexuality is such a funny thing because some days I feel like I’ve got too much of it and on others, too little and the very same thing can be said for choice! The best thing I ever did was find the freedom not only in the word no, but also, yes. Every

young woman should be the master of her own ship, the guide down her own yellow-brick road, and the ruler of her own body. I believe that this, the leadership of oneself, is the most precious because it is often the most difficult to cultivate. In comparison, the ability to sway the minds of the general public as an elected official is easy; all you need to be is well-versed in the art of rhetoric with a gleaming toothy smile. But to lead oneself away from the societal norms that stifle more than they normalize causes many to fall right back in line and follow. So, as young women, we must remember that:

Leadership is a calm voice that is ripe with self-assuredness; it is never boastful or cocky and it is always willing to ask for help.

Leadership is a set of starry-eyes because it's impossible to be too optimistic.

Leadership is a pair of strong hands that never let go of the potential you will always possess.

Leadership is a quick pace away from those who will try to lead you down the wrong path.

Leadership is standing up for yourself and the things that you love and never being afraid to fall because remember, if you fall, those strong hands will pick you right back up again.

Quite simply, leadership is the love child of knowing who you are and being proud of who you are. Our faces are all different but their origins shouldn't separate us because as young women we've all tasted defeat and had tears stream down our beat-red cheeks; we need to remember that those tears flowed away freely and were left behind. But the memories of all the smiles and laughter lay etched just beneath our skin and we need to promise ourselves that when the day comes and the lines of our lives shine through our skin that we won't try to cover them up. We need to remember that as women we disappear in reverse when we start to strip away our own beauty and try to reflect the **supposed** ideal of femininity that is ever-beckoning for us to come hither. The ideal requires us to pluck and blush the unwanted away - that ideal isn't real. But the flesh of our faces, the sound of our voices and the steps that our feet can take will surely lead us away from what we're supposed to make of ourselves and lead us down the path we **want** to take for ourselves - if we find the courage to just let them. Thus, to me, leadership is finding the root of who you are and letting it blossom and grow into something remarkable.

By Kristy Normore

The term “leadership” can have quite a vast meaning; portraying a different implication for different people. It is important to know what leadership means to you, and convey that meaning in your own work. I like the way Ralph Waldo Emerson quoted leadership; “Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail”.

Being a good and effective leader is not about following the path before you. It is about going where you need to go, to get what you intend to reach. It is the capability to motivate and inspire people to reach for a common goal. Sometimes all we need is some drive to give us the push in the right direction. This drive can help us reach things we never thought to be possible. This drive can come from an effective leader. Some wonder whether true leaders are born or made. I believe this question to be irrelevant. The significance in being a true leader is concentration on developing the qualities necessary for being a successful leader.

I was born into this world as an Inuit-Metis descendent of Labrador. My Aboriginality is a very important component of my culture. I am proud of who I am, and I hope to help others find this pride and embrace it as well. Recently, I took on the position of youth representative for the youth of my area for the NunatuKavut Community Council. I am delighted and grateful to sit on the board, and be the voice for the youth in my area. Being a part of this has helped me develop and apply leadership skills and qualities. From this position, I have also gone on to be the provincial representative for the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples National Youth Council. Collectively, the provincial youth representatives from all across Canada work together toward a mission to “engage, inspire, motivate, and empower Aboriginal youth to participate and be actively involved in decisions that shape their lives, families, communities and nation; and to promote healthy lifestyles by incorporating our traditions, cultures, spirituality, and language”. We are helping to lead Aboriginal youth to a positive future.

Aboriginal women throughout time have been without a voice; their thoughts went unwanted and unheard in society. Aboriginal women were not only silenced, but also

victims of racism, sexism, and violence. In their Aboriginal families they had respect as the “givers of life”, and they contributed to the family. However, in society they were degraded and abused. According to a Canadian government statistic, Indigenous women are five times more likely than other women of the corresponding age to die as the result of violence.

The need for Aboriginal women’s leadership is very important, to assist in healing from the vilification experienced over many years. Aboriginal women need to have their rightful place as equals, not only as an Aboriginal person, but as an Aboriginal female. As Aboriginal women, we need to generate positive changes in the future of women’s leadership.

There are many vibrant, motivated, successful Aboriginal women today, striving for what they deserve. Today, Aboriginal women are receiving education and obtaining careers in which they play vital roles not only in their own communities, but throughout mainstream society. We are stepping up, and letting our voices be heard. There are many influential Aboriginal women out there, both past and present, who have, and are, impacting Aboriginal females like myself to keep pushing forward.

Some of the legendary Aboriginal women that I have heard about have done some great things for themselves, for Aboriginal people, and for Canada.

- Jean Cuthand Goodwill, a member of the Cree First Nations, was a nurse, who went on to help establish the ‘Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada’.
- The Honourable Nellie J. Cournoyea, an Inupiak woman, became the first Aboriginal woman government leader in Canada. She was elected to the Northwest Territories legislature in 1979.
- Jeannette Vivian Lavall, an Ojibway woman, challenged the inequalities to the Indian Act. She fought to get changes made in relation to women losing their status when “marrying out”, while men do not lose theirs, but gain it for their wives and children. In 1985, the Bill was amended.

There are many more Aboriginal women who are role models for other Aboriginal women. We are growing up to be doctors, lawyers, members of government, etc. By seeing these women in powerful careers, it teaches me that it is okay to be afraid, but nothing should stand in the way of reaching dreams.

As the saying goes, “keep doing what you’re doing, and you’ll keep getting what you’re getting”. If Aboriginal women stay silent, our voices will never be heard. However, if we stand up and speak out, we can do what we need, and be who we want to be. As Aboriginal women of today, we need to pave the future for the next in line. *“Everybody has something worthwhile to say, no matter what people tell them”* Janet Smylie, B.A., M.D. (Metis, Ontario).

Sky Woman; A Symbol, an Inspiration, a Spirit

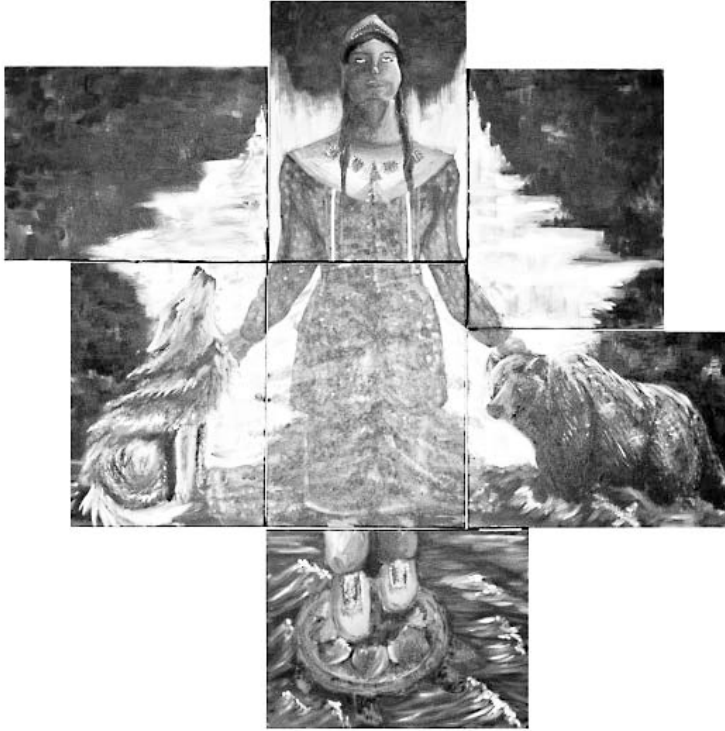
By: Megan Whyte - Age 21

As an Aboriginal artist and art educator, I strive to express and communicate the identity issues native people face in terms of balancing First Nations communities with the mainstream Canadian societies. The artworks I create are thus presented as teaching tools for both native and non-native people to learn about the importance of culture, the relevance of spirituality, and consequences of colonialism on native identities.

In terms of the 21st century context of Aboriginal issues, I believe that leadership is an important asset to our growth as a people. Leadership, for me, is about educating our communities about the opportunities we face in a post-colonial world rather than focusing on the troubles we have faced in the past; it is about helping to open the eyes of those who refuse to look and motivating our people to take responsibility for our futures.

I believe that to be a leader, one must possess social aptitude, initiative, innovation and desire for social change. I look to people like my mother who believe in fighting to change our future of drugs and alcohol through traditional ways, and to youth who see and believe in this change itself—after all, today's youth are tomorrow's leaders. These people not only have the strength to lead and represent the community voice, but also work to collaborate and share ideas with fellow leaders. For me, what truly separates a strong leader from any other leader is not the mindset or ability to act and adapt effectively; it is the heart to inspire others to embark upon the journey towards a brighter future.

My seven-piece painting, entitled Sky Woman, is about the leadership and strength Aboriginal women possess in both a historical context and today's society. Standing proud in her traditional attire, the essence of Sky Woman fearlessly pulls together the Iroquoian clans to discuss the possibility for change. Although she was originally outcast from her community, she holds her head high and bears her heart loud for the creation of a new world—our world. I believe that within every Aboriginal Woman swirls the energy and Spirit of Sky Woman; the spirit and energy that will guide us into the future of the First Nations.



By Mercedes Donald

A boriginal women in general are very magnificent people, very strong and softhearted. Growing up I have had the greatest leadership I have ever seen, women who fight for what they believe in, who fight for their culture, women who have made a difference in this world.

I believe Aboriginal women's leadership is when you love your culture, when no matter what someone says about it that love never dies, that you are proud and share your knowledge with anyone and everyone. My family has taught the young women in our family that being an Aboriginal woman is very powerful, and should be shown with pride. As an Aboriginal woman there are obstacles to overcome, and fears to face, and I believe that an Aboriginal leader takes on those challenges and defeats them. An Aboriginal woman leader is a very good listener and very forgiving. Being a leader is not about winning first prize or knowing everything. I believe it's someone who helps others, who is open minded in helping other people to learn new and different ways of life. I also believe a leader is someone who doesn't care what other people say about them. I believe Aboriginal women leaders take the time to learn from others, to experience another life. An Aboriginal woman takes care of her family, teaches them what has been taught to her from generations before, so her children can pass on those leadership skills and help the knowledge of their culture grow.

The women in my family have very much influenced me in my life; they have taught me to love myself, and never give up on my culture. I believe that every woman in my family is a very strong leader. I am very thankful to have them in my life, standing by me through every choice I make, and helping me succeed in that choice. I come from a Nuu-Chau-Nulth background; our ancestors are from the west coast in British Columbia. I believe these women are strong Aboriginal women because each one has overcome the stereotypes and have decided to help others rather than themselves. My grandmother, Charlotte Rampanen, has been a social worker for eight years, and has helped many Aboriginal children. My mother, Tamara Fritzsche, was also a social worker for three years, but is now the health coordinator of the Nuu-Chau-Nulth Health Council. She is the woman who makes the decisions for making Aboriginal health care better, and she

fights for that every single day. These two women are not the only women I believe are leaders, because in my culture many grandmothers have taught me so much. I have a very large family and as I was growing up they taught me the way of our culture, about traditional foods and dances. Learning songs in our language feels very overwhelming, especially the song my family sings called “The Women’s Warrior Song”. It is the most powerful song I have ever learned! Knowing these songs and dances makes me feel empowered because I think about how there have been women years before me, dancing or singing the same songs and dances. The women in my family are very extraordinary people, and will always love their culture and love themselves. These women have taught me how to hold my head up high and to be in love with being a Nuu-Chau-Nulth woman, just like they were taught by their mothers and grandmothers before them.

I have never been ashamed of being an Aboriginal woman, thanks to the women that have been in my life. I have and will always hold my head up and be proud of who I am. The women in my life have taught me to stand up for what I believe in, to love who I am, and to not let other people decide what my culture is other than myself. I feel very strongly that the women are the leaders of all our families; they are the ones that teach the young women our traditional practices and how to keep them living strong; to love being an Aboriginal woman. Aboriginal women, I believe, are the goddesses on earth; we have inner and outer beauty, which can never be taken away from us. I take much pride in being a strong, powerful Aboriginal woman, and no one can take that away from me! I want to be able to pass the teachings I have been taught by my mother to my daughter, and to others, that being an Aboriginal woman is the most powerful feeling you will ever have. Show pride in it and hold your head up high, because I believe every Aboriginal woman in the world, no matter where they are from, are beautiful and can do anything. The teachings of the women in my life have taught me to help others and to show others our culture every single day. This has inspired me to be a leader for my culture, and to teach other Aboriginal women to be proud of who they are. I will be graduating from high school this year and am planning on taking a course to become an Addictions Counselor. It makes me feel proud to know that I will be taking the first step of carrying on the tradition of helping others. I only hope that one day I can inspire women the way that the women in my life have inspired me.

By Mikayla Cartwright

Even the tallest trees, that graze the clouds and tower above us, commenced their long journeys as mere seeds. Were it not for the roots that keep those givers of life firmly planted in the Earth, we would lose the most graceful of nature's gifts. The same can be said of humans, as we go about our daily lives. Where we come from, where we began, is responsible for who we are. And we all came from a woman. As a young Aboriginal person, I take exceptional pride in my heritage and what it has provided me with to succeed in life. I believe profoundly in the power that we possess, and as such I feel that it is important to pass this on to younger generations, through as many mediums as possible- be it through literature, music, film or any other artistic or academic channel. We need to restore meaning and purpose to those who have been made to feel as though they have none, and that has to begin at the root.

Since time immemorial, women have been highly respected in Native cultures; not only for their obvious positions in the grand scheme as those who provide life, but also for so many other gifts that we give to those that surround us. It is a shame that since colonization, a few of these gifts have been ignored. This leaves contemporary Aboriginal women questioning their worth, wondering whether or not they have anything to offer the people around them. No woman, Native or otherwise, should be made to feel as though they have no place in the world. We have the power to reverse this, as we have so much inherent in our female nature that is useful and beneficial to our families and communities. In Haudenosaunee culture, women were consulted before any decisions were made that were to affect the community. The matriarchal-matrilocal society was based on the concept of providing for the members of the family, and therefore knowledge of the longhouse, agriculture, medicines etc was passed down by the women. This resonates throughout many cultures, but unfortunately there was a time when this was forgotten. As a result pride is no longer something you own and it has to be learned. I believe that young women need to be taught as soon as they have the ability to ingest knowledge that they have much to offer the world. It is perhaps important to consider the realities that many women face in Aboriginal communities: statistically speaking, many become mothers at a young age – and while there is nothing negative about motherhood, these girls go by the wayside. They become just that, statistics.

Often, parenthood has a different meaning, as we are products of our environments. These environments are not always “nuclear”, as history has drastically altered the way successive generations interpret the word “family”. Phenomena such as the “60s Scoop” and the implementation of the Residential School system have had a profound effect on the way Native peoples in Canada following the 1970s have subsisted. Many children were forcibly removed from their homes at crucial times of their lives, which resulted in a “lost” generation: catapulted into parenthood with no real means to provide proper parental support for their own children, having suffered unspeakable injustices in place of the nurturing and knowledge they would’ve received had they been able to stay within their communities. This has had a domino effect on Aboriginal society as a whole. We cannot change history, but we do not have to continue to be victims.

The model of “leadership” has many incarnations. A leader can be a council member, a mother of 6 who teaches her children how to speak their language, or a social worker who represents her people by understanding the strength required to succeed after going through the hardships that so many yet so few have dealt with in their lives. I was raised in a transparent environment, constantly aware of what my mother had gone through to be with us and take care of us. She grew up in Labrador, and was the oldest of 15 children. Her mother had been sent to a Residential school as a child, and as a result the family dynamic was skewed. Inuktitut was not spoken in the home. Motherhood was open to interpretation. On top of an already tumultuous situation, the land around the family was being flooded and irrigated by “development”, which brought an abrupt end to traditional aspects of life such as berry picking, fishing and hunting. The communities suffered, and as such, so did the children. But it is not for the sake of pity or remorse that I mention this, it is to take a moment to observe the incredible feats of human strength that I have witnessed from my mother in my short 22 years. From that situation, one of two things could’ve happened: instead of overcoming the trials of a fragmented childhood, the situation could have remained stagnant- left to be repeated throughout future generations with not even the faintest glimmer of hope for improvement. My mother chose the opposite path out of harm, despite what it took to achieve happiness and bliss for her children, away from the sadness and parental disconnect that she had been raised with. From the dirt grew a beautiful, strong tree- but it never would’ve grown were it not for that dirt. We are all meant for greater things than we feel that

we are, sometimes it just takes a big heap of dirt for us to recognize our potential to be great trees. And my mother has taught me this, by taking life into her own hands and not falling victim to her environment. Having dropped out of school to raise the rest of her younger siblings, she never graduated from high school. That however, never stopped her from graduating with a bachelor's degree in Aboriginal social work from McGill University. It never stopped her from raising my brother and me in the most loving, beneficial environment that we could have ever asked for. And it certainly never stopped her from having a family that, even though her experiences left her without stable groundwork from which to build upon, she can be proud of and be certain that she has created something better than that what she had. This, she tells me, was always her goal- to give us what she never had. Instead of succumbing, she succeeded. Not only has she made our family life one of the record books, she has enriched so many people around her by learning from her experience and growing from it. This is what makes her a leader. She is my leader, but she is also a role model for so many other women in this world, let alone the Aboriginal world. It is my goal to pass this onto younger generations of women, so that perhaps they too can transform the sadness and hardships in their lives into a reason to be proud of themselves, because at the end of the day, we can do anything that we put our hearts and minds into. We have so much to give.

Exemplifying the Power of Leadership among Indigenous Women: Sophie Thomas, an Extraordinary Woman

By Monique Auger

Indigenous knowledge is a subset of traditional knowledge in that it is the beliefs, values, spiritual practices, and knowledge of Indigenous peoples. Having evolved over time, this knowledge has been tested, developed, collectively accumulated and transmitted over many generations. Today, with an increasing interest in Indigenous knowledge systems among the Western academic community, we are seeing an upsurge in the number of collaborative attempts in blending Western science and Indigenous knowledge. While these initiatives are theoretically positive, many of these efforts have failed to benefit the Aboriginal community involved with the projects. Largely a result of colonization and the associated unjust power relations between Indigenous community members and non-Indigenous academics, strong Indigenous leaders are needed to create positive change within the research community. When executed in a culturally appropriate and respectful way, these collaborative projects can aid in the preservation of Indigenous epistemologies and may lead to the translation of knowledge into community visions, actions and goals. A carrier Elder of the Saik'uz Nation is a flawless example of such a leader; Sophie Thomas was a remarkable Indigenous woman and esteemed role model who worked to preserve her traditional knowledge as a way of protecting the land and all things connected to the land.

Sophie was able to become an extraordinary healer, teacher, and leader, despite the numerous challenges she was forced to face. Although she was orphaned as an infant and later forced to face the atrocities of the residential school system, Thomas led a focused and goal-oriented life from a young age. She was raised by her grandmother who “taught her herbal remedies that [were] hundreds of years old”. Later in her life, Sophie assisted in the creation of the Stoney Creek Housemakers Association and has played a valued role in the Child Welfare Committee for over three decades (Young and Hawley, 4). She also “served as Chief [in Stoney Creek] during 1969 to 1971, only a few years after the Indian Act was amended to grant women the right to hold office” (Young and Hawley, 4). Recently, Sophie’s achievements have been acknowledged in a number of ways. She

was awarded 1993 Woman of the Year by the Carrier Sekani Tribal Council and she is the subject of Terry Jacks' film titled The Warmth of Love – the Four Seasons of Sophie Thomas (2000), a documentary that was filmed at Stoney Creek on the Nechako River (Hume 2000). The Nechako River has been faced with many environmental challenges, including industrial dams and pollution, which is one of the key points that Thomas addresses in her film. It is wonderful that Sophie Thomas is admired for her accomplishments, as she was a remarkable woman in a number of ways.

Family was a very important aspect of Sophie's life and her ideals have made her an exceptional mother. She believed that "family is a place where goodness and strength can begin... the older a person becomes, the larger his or her family becomes, in that his or her duties as an elder will increase to include teaching and setting a role model for the community". Having shared a philosophy that every child is unique and special, Sophie and her husband treated all children with respect and unconditional love. These beliefs are mirrored by her role as a foster mother during the 1930s and 40s, when she cared for seven children in addition to her twelve biological children (Young and Hawley 4). Sophie Thomas had clear values regarding family, which illustrate that she has a sensitive and compassionate disposition towards her loved ones and her community. These qualities also attribute to her skills as a powerful healer.

With the aforementioned characteristics, as well as an extensive knowledge of medicinal plant use, Sophie Thomas was a leading healer for many people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals. While Ritch-Krc et al. note that "there are very few Carrier elders in north central British Columbia who are knowledgeable about traditional medicines" (1996). Sophie had a far-reaching comprehension of herbal medicines, which she uses to save lives (Tarling 2000). Young and Hawley note "Sophie's knowledge of medicinal plants and medicines is part of a vast traditional knowledge about the environment and its people, gathered over lifetimes... and enhanced by Sophie's own life experiences" (2). While this knowledge is customarily meant to remain within a family, Sophie has modified these views by sharing it with others.

In addition to being an esteemed healer, Sophie Thomas was an exceptional teacher and respected role model. She was heavily involved with passing her knowledge on to

her children and grandchildren. Although this information is traditionally kept within a family, Sophie shared her knowledge of traditional medicines through teaching at various colleges and universities, including the University of Northern British Columbia and the College of New Caledonia in Prince George, BC, as well as the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, BC (Young and Hawley 4). She also “traveled throughout the Carrier region to share her knowledge concerning traditional medicines with other groups... and to conferences where she and other elders... have shared their knowledge about Carrier culture with other interested people, both Native and non-Native...” (Ritch-Krc et al. 1996). Sophie Thomas also worked with Jane Young and Andrew Hawley, two professors at the University of Northern British Columbia, to record her knowledge of traditional Aboriginal medicines and the associated plants in a book, *The Plants and Medicines of Sophie Thomas*. This was to ensure that “the knowledge she has gained over decades of working closely with the Earth [would not] be lost...” (Young and Hawley 1). Through all of these accomplishments, Sophie Thomas demonstrated her tremendous devotion to passing on her knowledge, and through similar means she had also proven herself to be an extraordinary environmental ambassador.

Sophie Thomas led a long fulfilled life in which she has achieved great successes. On top of being a great mother and grandmother, teacher and spokesperson, Sophie continually demonstrated her qualities as an “incredibly gifted healer who has touched many lives with her knowledge and kindness” (Tarling 2000). While she believed that “if we take care of the land, it will take care of us”, she had a fear that a damaged environment will produce contaminated medicines that may harm the people she tries to heal (Young and Hawley 5). Through her practices, lectures, and conference talks, Sophie hoped to increase a respect for the Earth within her audience for the natural world. With a profound knowledge of Traditional knowledge systems, medicines, and healing practices (Hume 2000), Thomas always collected plants with a sense of environmental conservation. There is a great importance in recognizing the role of Indigenous knowledge in the protection of the land and the environment; with knowledge we can protect, preserve, and respect the land in the face of many environmental challenges.

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By Naiomie Hanson-Akavak

My name is Naiomie Hanson-Akavak; I am a 24 year old Inuk from Iqaluit Nunavut. I have mild cerebral palsy. I have lived most of my life in Iqaluit, Nunavut. I graduated from Inuksuk High School in 2004. After I graduated I knew I wanted to continue with my learning, so I applied for Nunavut Sivuniksavut. Luckily for me the application was done all online, and they accepted my application. I left home at the age of 18, ready to conquer the world, and challenge myself to something I knew so little about. The big city of Ottawa!! How could I leave something I was so comfortable with?

It was sad to leave my home community where everyone knew what I had, and what my challenges were. I moved to Ottawa knowing I would probably have to try to tell people what is wrong with me. I was up for that challenge and knew no one was just going to just give me a certificate I had to earn it. I studied one year at Nunavut Sivuniksavut and then another year with Algonquin College studying pre-technology.

Having and living with a physical disability all my life has not been easy, but I won't let my disability stop me from living. I know how to succeed and what I need to do to achieve my dreams. Growing up 'different' was quite challenging for me because some people did not believe in me, some didn't even think I'd be able to walk or function like a "normal person".

It seemed like I was always trying to prove something to someone and that is just how society is today. I know that verbal communication is a very important process to understand one another; however I wasn't given that opportunity. All my communication skills never developed properly because of my disability.

Normal people can talk a mile a minute, but my one sentence sometimes has to be repeated 3 or 4 times over and over again just for people to understand what I am trying to say. I know it gets frustrating for them and they probably feel so guilty for not understanding me the first time, but I totally understand. I know it's hard to understand what I'm trying to say. But I have no other options. That is just how I communicate.

I believe in myself, and more importantly my family and friends believe in me. They helped me stay on the right path. It could have been so easy for me to give up but I didn't. I suffer with struggles every day, but that is just how I was born. God made me like this for a reason.

He knew I could do so many things with just one functioning hand, and no voice. I was born like this to prove to myself and everyone around me that I can do it. Some say I am going to be a leader one day, and many say I am already a role model. Many say that I have touched lives of lots of people, because of how strong and committed I am to keep going.

I know I will make it far in life, this is just the beginning, I have lots of things to do and many things to experience and explore. I will do it through dedication and commitment on my part and belief and patience on everyone else's. I know I can't do it alone, that is why we live in communities, and it takes a community to believe in everything we do for each other.

We don't live in isolation even though we are so far away from the rest of the world; we help and support each other no matter how bad things are for one another.

A true Aboriginal leader is someone who recognizes the strengths in people no matter what their physical appearance or ability is, someone who can take a stand to improve the lives of those living in an Aboriginal community. An Aboriginal leader is someone who believes in our people, land, culture and our Territory. An Aboriginal leader is someone who can accept that there will be tough times ahead and that these tough times do not last, only tough people do.

An Aboriginal leader should be someone who is proud of who she is and where she comes from. She should be someone who can make a positive difference, no matter how big or small this difference is: it's still something positive! The Aboriginal leader is someone who is connected to her community and to her roots, she should be someone who never speaks ill of people, but more importantly she should be someone who helps honour everyone equally.

An Aboriginal Leader should also be someone strong enough to ask for help when they need it, because one time or another everyone asks for help, no matter how successful or powerful you are, everyone needs help from time to time, and I just don't want to see anyone give up, just like me.

Lead-HER-ship

By Naomi Sayers

Leadership to me is something that women have been doing for ages. I take this word and I break it down into three parts. These three parts make up the word “leadership”, or lead-HER-ship. In essence, leadership is not just a quality; rather it is a role that all women undertake. When looked at from this angle, leadership is rather essential to life because women have been doing this for ages; that is, they have been leading HER ship.

The first part of this word refers to an action, namely, to lead. To lead means to guide a group of people or your own physical self in the right direction; it is to learn how to use the resources and the environment around you. To lead, then is not only to better your own life, but also to better the lives of others. This part of the word leadership is rather easy to notice.

The second part of this word may not be evident, but it is implied by the parts or the sounds that make up this part of the word. This part of the word speaks specifically to women, or in other words, speaks directly to HER: lead-HER-ship. Women are the carriers of life. Even though this part of the word is not as easy to notice, I believe that it is there and that it speaks directly to women.

The third part of the word can be understood in a metaphorical sense. Even though the third part of the word is “ship,” it does not literally mean ship. That is to say, women are not captains or leaders of a ship or a boat. Rather women are leaders in their own lives and the lives of others. Women provide the harmonistic balance and the gentle care that is necessary for life in this world. They provide this balance and care for themselves and for their own community. Individually, they provide a balance for their own selves by maintaining a healthy mind, body and soul so that as carriers of life, they can help raise healthy babies and ultimately healthy families. At a community level, women, specifically Aboriginal women, are central to a community’s existence. Without the lead-HER-ship of Aboriginal women, communities might not be as balanced. Thus, the third and final part of this word--lead-HER-ship--metaphorically means guiding one’s own ship. In other

words, their own life, community, and family, on a well balanced and cared for journey to a destination that is safe.

When I look at leadership from this angle, lead-HER-ship, I begin to see that Aboriginal women's leadership is important because it is the woman that helps guide her family and community to a safe destination by providing a harmonistic balance and gentle care to herself, her family and her community. Additionally, it can be seen that from this perspective, Aboriginal women have been providing leadership for years. They have been raising their families in a healthy manner, and helping to provide for a healthy community. Without Aboriginal women's leadership, it would be hard for a community to be maintained. It is with an Aboriginal woman's harmonistic balance and gentle care in maintaining her own self to raise a healthy family, which in turns makes for a healthy community that Aboriginal people thrive in. Therefore, Aboriginal women's leadership is essential to a healthy community, a healthy family, and a healthy self.

Unfortunately, Aboriginal women's leadership and their roles have been undermined because of the effects of colonialism. These effects of colonialism happen in a historical context. In Canada, the arrival of European settlers and their effects of enforcing their patriarchal views have displaced Aboriginal women out of their important roles as mothers, wives and women in their own community. This displacement happened when the Canadian government forcefully obtained Aboriginal children, placed them in residential schools away from their parents because they considered Aboriginal parents to be ineffective. Also, the Christian Church's insistence on enforcing patriarchal views onto Aboriginal communities has displaced Aboriginal women as wives because of this removal of their children. Aboriginal women were not considered the strong, central figures that Aboriginal people and their culture considered their women to be.

Aboriginal women have been removed from their roles as strong women in their community with the creation of the Indian Act. The Act has undermined Aboriginal women when it removed their status once they married a non-Aboriginal person. Only recently did Bill C-31 come into effect, wherein the bill provided the guidelines for reinstating an Aboriginal woman's identity that was lost once she married a non-Aboriginal man. Also, the Indian Act did not protect an Aboriginal woman's right to her own matrimonial property. Organizations and First Nations are realizing this lack of

protection when it comes to the matrimonial home and some have remedied for their own situations. Briefly speaking because of the complexity of these issues, this is how the effects of colonialism have removed Aboriginal women from their roles as mothers, wives, and women in their own community. This is why Aboriginal women's leadership is important. It allows for Aboriginal women to regain their identity and their roles as mothers, wives, and women in their own communities.

Two Aboriginal women that I look to for inspiration are Pauline Johnson and Lee Maracle. Johnson is known for writing about "Indian Life" and Maracle has written about life as a member of an oppressed minority. Both women have also written creative pieces, like poetry. Today, I write poetry and write an online blog where I write about my experiences as an Aboriginal female living in present-day Canadian Society. I write about my struggles, my experiences, and I also write creative pieces like poetry and short stories. These women have written about what life was like for them during their time, and today I write about what life is like for me. My goal one day is to write a children's book that tells Aboriginal history from a younger generation's perspective. I want to showcase my artwork in this book, and my interpretation of Residential schools and how that era has affected me and my friends. I also plan to include Residential school survivors' and their children's perspectives when writing this book. These women inspire me because of their ability to use writing and education to their advantage—an institution that was once created to remove Aboriginal women from their roles, as mothers, wives, and women in their own communities.

In conclusion, leadership to me is not just a quality; rather it is a role that women undertake. Leadership is rather essential to life because women have been doing this for ages, leading HER ship. Specifically, Aboriginal women's leadership is important because it helps Aboriginal women to regain their identity and roles as mothers, wives and women in their own community, which was once undermined through the effects of colonialism. Without Aboriginal women, there would be no carriers of life, no family, and no community. If it were not for Aboriginal women, Aboriginal people would not exist. This is what Aboriginal women lead-HER-ship is to me.

By Natasha Jones

Having Aboriginal women who show leadership plays an important part in the survival and conservation of all Indigenous peoples and their cultures. I was once told that a woman in the Mi'kmaq society is a powerful force and that she is the main agent of our culture. I believe this is true and that without Aboriginal women's leadership, our culture, language and values would not have survived. I also believe that Aboriginal women's leadership should never be taken for granted and that it should be respected to the highest degree.

I think that leadership within all aspects of life is extremely important. Having leadership within your family, work and community can make a world of difference in your life. An individual who demonstrates leadership may not necessarily show it by being an elected official or by leading groups and communities. I believe that leadership can be shown in many diverse ways and this includes Aboriginal women's leadership. For me, Aboriginal women's leadership means having strong women that I can look to for guidance, role modeling and hope. Aboriginal women show leadership by giving children a strong figure that they can look to for direction in their lives. But their leadership is not limited to the home. I also believe that their leadership in the past and the present has contributed to how Aboriginal people are viewed today. Aboriginal people have been viewed negatively in the past. Many movies have contributed to such portrayals, but Aboriginal women have helped to change negative perceptions. They have shown that Aboriginal people have a rich culture and history that should be shared through education and the arts. I also see leadership in the women who fight for the conservation of their culture. Many Aboriginal women have shown leadership by reviving their culture through the start of programs and groups. I think that if Aboriginal people have women's leadership then they have a solid hope for reviving their culture and ensuring its survival. Although some contributions have started out small they have quickly grown and expanded into something great. To me leadership is a strong force and it can be seen in all aspects of Aboriginal women's lives.

During my writing process I talked with Aboriginal women from Sple'tk First Nation and attended a drumming practice with the Exploits Native Women's Drummers and

Singers. It was an enlightening experience and one that will not be forgotten. I was able to talk with the vice-president of NAWN, Newfoundland Aboriginal Women's Network. From our conversation I gained insight into how NAWN began and what Sple'tk First Nation women have accomplished since the band was formed in 1988. The leadership that women from the Sple'tk First Nation have shown is truly amazing and inspiring. They have started both a drumming group and a women's group, the Exploits Native Women's Association. Both groups have played a key role in reviving the culture and traditions, which were lost to us over time. By attending the drumming practice I was exposed to a new experience and I took part in drumming a song to honour mother earth. I saw first hand how Aboriginal women's leadership has impacted Sple'tk First Nation, and it inspired me to show leadership within my own life. Leadership is diverse and the path I take with leadership may not be the path someone else would choose. By writing this essay I feel as though I'm starting a journey to take leadership within my life and I am deeply appreciative that I had this experienced.

I am surrounded by both older and younger Aboriginal women than myself who show strength in their lives. My younger sister Amanda is what I would call a fighter. She was a child who had more broken and fractured bones than most people I know. She suffered through pain in her joints for years and doctors gave our family two possible explanations, childhood arthritis and growing pains. Finally in the winter of 2009 after more symptoms arose she was diagnosed with lupus, and her lifelong regiment of medication began. But Amanda does not let Lupus control her; she has a full and active life and she loves to sing her way through it. She is truly a strong young woman and she continues to show to me that everyday. My close friend Jillian is Inuit and she has showed me what a strong woman she can be. I have always looked up to her and I think of her as an older sister. Jillian fought through medical struggles and completed high school two years after I did. She is now a second year student in the Social Work program at Memorial University of Newfoundland and her grades are remarkable. The effort she puts into her work and how she faces challenges in life has made her one of my role models. Another strong Aboriginal woman in my life is my mother. I was born a year and half after she graduated from high school. She raised my sister, brother and I before thinking about her own career. Once I was old enough to help care for my younger siblings she entered college and completed a business administration course. My mother

is now working as a payroll administrator, and I'm happy to see that she is making her own path in life. It made me proud to see my mother follow her dream to go back to school. She made a statement to her children about the importance of an education and showed us that we can follow our dreams.

I am proud to say that I am an Aboriginal woman and that in my life I have been surrounded by many strong Aboriginal women. Together with Indigenous women everywhere I am shaping my life and doing my best to contribute to my culture. The survival and perseverance of all Aboriginal cultures and their accompanying history are invaluable and immeasurable in worth. Aboriginal women's leadership will always continue to be vital to the survival of Aboriginal culture and history. It provides young children with role models and it should be treasured as a jewel because it shows our strength as Indigenous people.

War Shirt Woman: Joane Cardinal-Schubert

By Patricia Jones

Art established a new beginning for Aboriginal people in Canada, causing uproar and praise from critics and admirers in the craft of creating. Uprooting the strength and agony of the past in order to concoct a beauty that had been hidden behind closed doors for centuries. Art is a chance for Aboriginal people to show their true colors and start to erase the stereotyping and consumption of their people. While doing so making actual and undeniably moving historical markers, putting Aboriginal people on the world map to stand immovable and concrete. Joane Cardinal-Schubert was a force to be reckoned with in the art world, defined through her outspoken and frequently brutal sense of identity. Joane was a war shirt woman: a warrior willing to sacrifice it all in order for the world to partake of her art and her strength as an Aboriginal woman. Partnered perfectly with her traditional influenced modern art Joanne began her journey to teach not only the art world of her Blackfoot roots, but set out to educate the public about her people and our on-going struggle to survive.

Joane was born in Red Deer Alberta during the year 1942. Beginning her post-secondary career at the Alberta College of Art and Design. She went on to earn a Bachelor of Fine Art Degree majoring in printmaking and painting in 1977 and eventually received a Doctorate degree; both from the University of Calgary. In my own family tree I have been blessed to have Joane as my third cousin on my father's side. My great-grandfather Henry Lee's sister Martha Caroline Lee was Joane's grandmother. I was regretfully never close to Joane and only had the privilege of meeting her once. My father Heber Lee Jones, my brother Lane Jones, and I were honorary parade marshals in the Crow's Nest Pass' annual Rum Runner Days in Blairmore, Alberta. Along with my family Joane was also an honorary parade marshal, after the parade had ended Joane approached my father and said " You're Heber Jones, aren't you? I'm you're cousin Joane". My father had never met her and she was his second cousin, but much younger. She spoke to me and my family and explained that she was an artist, but I had no idea of the magnitude of her success. When I tried to contact her she had just passed away of cancer in September 2009. Joane continues to dominate the art world and although her voice cannot not be heard anymore, her spirit is reborn through the ongoing significance of her work.

Joane was a multimedia artist, lobbyist for the Society of Canadian Artists of Native Ancestry, winner of the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Award in 1976, and won the Banff Center Scholarships three times over. Being the fourth woman in Alberta to be inducted in the Royal Academy of Arts and a recipient of the Queen's Jubilee Medal for contribution to the arts in Canada. Joane was also a published writer, film maker, and lecturer. In 2006 the government of Alberta gave Joane's painting entitled Medicine Wheel Nebula to be viewed in the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. Then receiving an honorary eagle feather from Red Crow College on the Kainai reserve, Joane's work has been displayed internationally in London, Tokyo, Paris, South America, Sweden and Korea. Joane's paintings are filled with bright inspirational shades of blues, reds, yellows, and oranges all based on traditional Aboriginal ceremonies and strife. Many of her paintings incorporate themes of residential schools, alcoholism, and the buffalo. Joane was a strong, proud, and educated Blackfoot woman with an abundance of spirituality and true ties to her people. She helped to put Blackfoot women into consideration as well as liberate and give hope to all Aboriginal people across North America.

To share blood and family with Joane is an honor. Joane has been praised world wide, but most importantly in her own community. Raising awareness of Aboriginal presence for those who without her art work would never have known of the depth and pain Aboriginal people in Canada have encountered. Calling Joane Cardinal-Schubert an Aboriginal woman of distinction and importance is a vast understatement; Joane Cardinal-Schubert was a revelation. Helping to show the world the complex and unstoppable power of Aboriginal people through creating timeless artwork, that will continue to install inspiration for centuries to come.

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By Shauna Ponask

A boriginal women's leadership means that society has accepted, supported and followed the values and beliefs of female leaders who originally occupied our country. These leaders have passed on their culture, traditions and spirituality onto the next generation. Leadership does not have to involve power or prestige. Leadership can mean a mother caring for her child. Leadership can mean being a positive role model for a community. Leadership can mean fighting for the rights of individuals who cannot fight for themselves. I believe that all Aboriginal women are leaders, even though society has attempted to undermine them. Aboriginal women continue to be leaders since the early days of traditional Aboriginal societies.

In traditional Aboriginal societies, women are seen and respected as equals. Aboriginal women were respected and honored as leaders who were significant members involved in the family, government, as well as in spiritual ceremonies. Women were just as important as the men in traditional Aboriginal societies, as they both performed functions that were vital to the survival of their people. Women were mainly responsible for the household duties and were viewed as both life givers and as caretakers.

During the time of first contact between Aboriginals and Europeans involved in the fur trade, Aboriginal women were seen as a great asset. Aboriginal women took on the role of caretakers for these newcomers. Aboriginal women were usually the translators, guides, and they also ensured that these newcomers would survive the harsh and unpredictable conditions of this unique and unfamiliar land. For example, one famous Aboriginal woman was Thanadelthur, a Chipewyan woman who assisted the Hudson's Bay Company and acted as a guide, as well as an interpreter in the late 1700s. Thanadelthur was also a key member in the peace agreement between the Chipewyan and the Cree people during a time of great distress.

Through the advancement of the fur trade, Aboriginal women struggled to maintain their traditional identities. Aboriginal women played a vital role in establishing trade relations between their people and the newcomers. These women were responsible for ensuring survival of their communities by following the traditional Aboriginal customs

and culture. Many of the Aboriginal women were important members of society such as a daughter of a Chief. Although Aboriginal women were viewed as leaders they were still forced to assimilate to European style by giving up their traditional clothing. During the 1800s, Aboriginal women and their Métis predecessors were important members of society, even though sexism, racism, and discrimination were incorporated into daily life. This was the time when Aboriginal women began to follow European traditions and take on more domestic roles such as cleaning and harvesting vegetables. During this time, Aboriginal women had few rights as men were considered their social, legal, and political masters. Any rights which an Aboriginal woman possessed were acquired directly from her husband. During this time, Aboriginal women did not have the right to vote; to own property; or to enter into any kind of contract. This attitude was ultimately reflected in the Indian Act, which segregated Aboriginal women from actively participating in politics.

Through the Indian Act, Aboriginal women were denied equality. Many Aboriginal women were denied their Indian status upon marrying a man of non status ancestry. European economic and cultural expansion was especially devastating for Aboriginal women. Their value as equal partners in traditional Aboriginal societies was completely undermined. Aboriginal women were further oppressed with the creation of the residential school system. Children attending a residential school were denied the right to learn their language, learn their traditions and learn their culture. During this time, Aboriginal women were denied the right to learn leadership from their mothers. Parenting skills were never taught at these institutions. Many Aboriginal women who attended residential schools suffered emotional, physical, and sexual abuse.

Aboriginal women remained strong leaders despite being discriminated against through government legislation, as well, as the educational school system. Aboriginal women began to turn back to their traditional culture and began to assume the role of equals in their personal life, as well as in society. Aboriginal women began to take on the role of leaders and they began to fight for their right to vote and to be recognized as legal persons. The role of leadership did not fall in the hands of just one woman, but in the hands of all Aboriginal women.

Bill C-3 is a great example of how Aboriginal women fought for their rights. Effective as of January 31, 2011, the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act reinstated Aboriginal women's rights to pass on their Indian status onto their grandchildren regardless of a marriage with a non-Aboriginal man. Just the fact that women fought for their rights, and never gave up shows leadership.

Many Aboriginal women continue to give their voice on the issues of inequality. These leaders continue to fight for their children, for their communities, and for those who cannot fight for themselves. Aboriginal women took the leadership role in developing the Sisters in Spirit initiative for all of the missing Aboriginal women and children across Canada. Many were finding that these individuals were invisible to society even before they went missing. These individuals may have been going through a tough time or came from a rough background. Nobody was standing up for their rights. It was Aboriginal women who joined forces to give a sense of hope and closure for all of the families affected by such tragedies.

As an employment counselor in an Aboriginal organization, I see many women who are fighting to survive. I see many women who have overcome addictions and poverty, to become advocates for others who are living in negative situations. I see many women who are fighting for all of the missing Aboriginal women and children. Every time I meet with these women I think to myself how do these women do it? How do they remain so strong and so resilient?

The fact is, women are not selfish human beings. Women overcome hard times for the benefits of others; may it be family, friends, or strangers. Women are leaders for the benefit of society. Women are teachers to pass on traditions and survival skills on to the next generation.

I cannot name just one woman as a leader, but I can name Aboriginal women as a whole as leaders. I believe that Aboriginal women have overcome many obstacles throughout the decades, which makes all Aboriginal women born leaders. Aboriginal women carry on the traditions and culture of the past and believe in equality. Aboriginal women will always be life givers, caretakers and leaders.

The Aboriginal Woman Leader: A way of love

By Sita-Rani MacMillan

As my years on earth progress the wonderment of women only continues to be built up. The strong Aboriginal women I have encountered come from a place of love. To me these women are fearless because they do not allow the thoughts, views, and limitations set by others to control their life journey. These women believe in the world, and most importantly, they believe in who they are and what they stand for. As I sit here writing, flashes of my many Aboriginal women mentors appear. They have shown me how important honouring the self is so that they may honour others.

Strong Aboriginal leadership means living a life led by love; instead of fear. One who acknowledges, accepts, and speaks from their emotional self can truly understand fearless leadership. These resilient, beautiful, and intelligent women speak from a place that is deeper than any surface thought. Powerful leaders who speak from their heart show others how to lead through love instead of fear.

That is the way of potent leadership.

Currently I am employed in the non-profit sector for Aboriginal women who attend spiritual healing programs. Throughout my days I am inspired by the amount of love and leadership that fills the room. As they enter the program the strength and dedication for creating their life journey and asking for their needs to be met is love - is leadership. Most start the journey from a place of fear, but as time goes on the love shines much brighter and envelops the darkness of fearful beliefs. These strong Aboriginal women are taking the lead. They honour themselves and in turn honour those around them. Through such acts of love they break down walls of stereotypes, of self-loathing, and fear. They erase the negative tapes that play in their minds and recreate them.

They are truly inspirational leaders.

These women pave their way with love, not only for themselves but for many generations. The strength, courage, honour, respect, wisdom and love each brings forth

allow the next born to continue and build upon their love. When I look back at the history of women, and especially Aboriginal women, I am filled with gratitude. I am grateful for those who came before me and made choices from the love sphere so that I can sit here and write these words. I have been able to achieve all the successes that I have due to the love of many strong women leaders before me.

My journey on earth began with my mother who will forever be the first amazing leader I have met. She honoured my needs with true love from the day she chose to have a child. She knew that in order to have the best for her children she had to have the best for her. She had many hurdles. My mother had overcome many stereotypes and racist beliefs from the outside world to stand tall and proud as an Aboriginal woman today.

My mother chose love.

She honoured her self by leaving her small town and travelling the world. She embraced a new way of life because that is what spoke to her. She followed a belief system that a small town of Saskatchewan would find difficult to accept. She travelled to the great Pacific Ocean and met my father. He was a Scotsman on a similar quest. She lived in Scotland, India, Panama, and across Canada. She respected her beliefs and stood up for them even when those closest to her sneered. Her beliefs developed as she continued on her spiritual quest, she became a vegetarian when vegetarianism was not considered cool and trendy, discovered and researched health benefits that would, in the end, keep my father from meeting an early death. This all came from a place of love.

It only takes a moment of reflection on society to see how much fear we live within. People fear what love offers, what love means; therefore, distrusting it. What would the world be like if all leaders came from a place of love? Some may scoff and think, Pollyanna syndrome, but what if we opened our hearts wide enough to allow that thought? What if we sat and asked: what would love do?

How different could the world look?

How different could we look?

This is what the strong Aboriginal women leaders have shown me.

My mother has never backed down from her beliefs. Even though those coming from a place of fear have verbally attacked her, even though she has been told to behave, even though her own mother does not always believe in her, she does not let them create her life. She holds strong and true to the love deep within. She listens to her heart and her mind. My mother has shown me not to fear life; instead, love and embrace it. Through love and acceptance one can take the next step and open the door of opportunity.

She has cleared a pathway of positive growth for many generations to come. She has taken that first step to accepting life circumstances and making the best choices for her from them. My parents have been married for thirty-seven years now and their love continues to shine throughout the world. My mother works on a continuous basis to make sure that her needs are met and honoured within all relationships. She knows she is worth it.

What more could a leader be, if not true to themselves?

By Stephanie Wood

A boriginal women's leadership can take on many meanings. It means women in the Aboriginal community getting involved in the community, taking roles and making changes for the better of Aboriginal people. It means Aboriginal women making better lives for their children after the many scarring effects on mothers after residential schools. It means Aboriginal women completing their education to get a good job to support themselves or their families on their own terms. It means Aboriginal women helping their children with school or sports. It means helping other women who have found themselves in messes they can't make their way out of on their own. It means doing all you can for others, as well as working to make your life meet your own expectations. The Aboriginal women who deserve to be admired are not only those who can take on titles, though they definitely deserve credit. Those who deserve admiration are all those women who work through struggles and efforts in their lives continuously until they can say they are happy and strong. Those who deserve admiration are those who work hard for those close to them, and when I think of strong women leaders, I immediately began to think of those within my family.

I strongly admired my great grandmother, Eva, for living through the oppression of Aboriginal people through the twentieth century, for surviving, for not letting herself fall apart but staying a gentle person until her last years. She did have struggles; many women were weren't fully capable, as mothers, as they had their own experiences haunting them, living on rough reserves and having dark pasts of harsh education and meager home lives. She passed some years ago, but when she was young she had a husband and children, and her life at home I still don't know much about. I know that it was hard. I know that she was greatly loved, greatly respected, and greatly cherished among our family and friends and in the Aboriginal community. I know her house was comforting, and I know she helped everyone she could and watched over my grandmother's children when it grew to be too much. To be remembered so vividly and valued as someone devoted and as a giver is to be an Aboriginal leader. Aboriginal people value these qualities, and my great-grandmother Eva expressed them through her life.

My great-grandmother had children, which included my own grandmother, Lucille, another Aboriginal woman who came to my mind as a leader. She is also valued in the community, she helps everyone she is able to, and she is present at many events. My grandmother knows nearly everyone in her community and is kind to all of them. She is learning the Squamish language and knows how to sew and how to weave. When I think of my grandmother I think of how traditional she is, how classic she is. While she is so involved she is humble and loving. Lucille was caring for a sick man during his final years; she would visit him and care for him. She did so much for him that when he passed, he left his house to her. Today they still live in that two story red house, right on the corner of the reserve, with a yard of long grass, plants hanging over the door and a large wooden deck. My grandmother is also faithful to her Aboriginal roots; this is another way in which Aboriginal women should be most admired: when they stay true to their heritage and its traditions. Only being native on my mother's side and not ever living on a reserve, I don't feel as active or involved with the Aboriginal community as I feel I should be, and I hope to become. My grandmother is active, and she is involved, and this compassionate commitment makes my grandmother also come to my mind when I think of what Aboriginal women leaders represent.

Another woman who stands as a leader in my family is my cousin, Leanne. Until a few years ago, she lived in Vancouver with the majority of our family, until she moved to Merritt with her new husband and young adopted son. Leanne is as a leader in several ways. Most prominently, it is because she inherited her father's title as chief when he passed away; I remember seeing her in traditional dress during the ceremony, strong and the expression on her face showed how moved she was. Leanne always came off as strong. Ever since I was young she was opinionated and social, she was open to everyone and expressed such a confidence. She was a true Canadian as well, a hockey fanatic, both following the National Hockey League and playing herself on a co-ed team, constantly injured and sore from playing tough hockey every week. Leanne was always so sure; when Leanne wanted a child, she was not left to guess and wait, she decided she truly wanted to be a mother and she adopted her son. Leanne was daring, and now has her son Isaac, lively, with a shock of black hair on his head and always kissing his parents and his grandmother, always running about and starting games with those around him. When Leanne calls him over or picks him up I see such a strong connection, I see Leanne was right when she knew she could be a mother. Independent and strong-minded, Leanne is

also a radiant mother. Pursuing what she truly wanted and maintaining such a strong title in our community, Leanne also stands as a strong Aboriginal person, a strong woman, and a strong leader.

The final woman that entered my mind was, of course, my mother Vera. My mother held a very close relationship to my great-grandmother, and when my great-grandmother passed, it was shaking for her. After her brother – my uncle – passed away, a few years before my great-grandmother, my mother didn't break at all during the time right after his passing, the planning of the funeral, the ceremony, or the family time after. When I asked her how, she said she felt she needed to stay strong for my great grandmother and my grandma. As a child I didn't completely understand but to this day there is something in that strength that is so beautiful. Years after both of their passing, talking of either of them brought tears to her eyes, and yet she continued with her job, with our family.

My mother did not have an easy life either. I've learned more about her past than any other woman in my family. She grew up on a reserve, not quite poor, but not exactly privileged. She grew up being told not to leave her own backyard, and not knowing why. She grew up hearing of violence and abuse all around her. She grew up having her friends slowly trickle out of high school in an environment that didn't strongly promote education. After she had my brother and sister, however, she completed a degree at Simon Fraser University and went on to earn a job at the Squamish Nation office. Today, she holds the title as Team Leader. The office finds children who live in unhealthy home environments and strives to put those children under safe care and help the parents through their problems so they can reunite with their children, and through this, hope to ultimately help and improve the quality of life in the Aboriginal community, particularly on reserves. After the harsh environment growing up, and the habits of the other youth on the reserve, my mother didn't get involved in drugs or violence. She holds an important job for the modern Aboriginal community and has relationships with many people within that community.

In the modern day, leaders take on different roles; different titles; different appearances. The leaders that are remembered the most are those who are within the communities and make personal relationships with others and personally try to help others. The

ones that are remembered are the ones that stayed strong, or regained strength, after the hardships that have presented themselves to Aboriginal people since the time of the settlers. Regaining the connections to traditions, the strength to support a family, and the continuous help in the community through professional or personal means, all establish leaders among Aboriginal people. Today, Aboriginal leaders stand as names Aboriginal people know across the community; this can be as national as Shawn Atleo or as local as Lucille Nicholson.

Film: “Caught Between Worlds”

*Directed by: **Tanis Desjarlais***

My film is called “Caught Between Worlds”. I chose this title because I feel caught between a life of drugs and alcohol and living sober, following the red road. In the film I am trying to find a balance between living in an urban setting and following my Cree traditions. I feel people will relate to this film because a lot of Indigenous people feel disconnected from their land and traditions.

In the beginning of the film there are shots of myself, lying in bed, tossing and turning with shots of drugs and alcohol in between the scenes. This shows that when I do these substances I am in a sleeping state, unaware of the knowledge and tradition that is still alive, even in modern society.

The next scenes show myself awakening from this state, looking outside and realizing that the knowledge of traditions, language and art is out there and very much alive. It’s just a matter of getting up and going after it.

The final scenes are about gaining knowledge. I am reading a book about the colonization of Indigenous lands. This is to show that I am learning my past to change my future. There are also scenes of art, books and sweetgrass that show I am on a quest to knowledge and spiritual fulfillment but am still unsure whether or not I am ready to let go of drugs and alcohol.

I believe my work as a visual artist showcases my leadership because I am sharing my very personal experiences with my family, friends and my community. Visual art, media art, being honest and real, in my opinion can and will heal the Indigenous Peoples of Canada.

By TJ Lightfoot

Real Indigenous women's leadership to me means engaging in random acts of resistance to colonialism everyday. To me it means not relying on chiefs or politics to influence our communities. I think that Indigenous women are in many positions of leadership that often go unrecognized. Native women's leadership is reflected in the face of youth who learn how to treat each other by role modeling the strong women in their lives. Before colonization women took on strong roles within our families and communities. Since the onset of colonization our women have been degraded, silenced and erased from our histories and pushed to the side. However, there exists a paradox in that while our women are often taken out of the bigger picture, we are also the ones holding it together. Our leaders are the women who have dug trenches in Wounded Knee; they have mended lobster traps in Burnt Church, occupied airstrips in Goose Bay, taught Indigenous languages to their babies, and have blown the whistle on secret sterilizations. The lists of things that reflect leadership in an Indigenous sense are endless but I will attempt to outline a few of the most important as I see them.

Leadership has been reflected in the wonderful Indigenous women who have taught us compassion and pride in our culture, they've taught us our history, languages and lead us through our traditions. These teachers are barely ever recognized for the priceless gifts they pass onto us. In educating us about colonization, they give us tools to fight for a better life for Indigenous people everywhere. They encourage us to fight for our individual nations as well as for Native people as a collective. These are means that will ensure our survival when the world seems out to destroy what it truly means to be an Indigenous person. These women help us find our many roles in the world. True leadership, Indigenous women have shown me, comes without title and without thanks. It means sleepless nights worrying about your actions and its impact on everyone. The core of this leadership is all about the collective well being of a group of people and being willing to make sacrifices a lot of the time.

For me personally I see leadership in the women from our communities. These women (self identified) are women like my Migitjoo (grandmother) who have passed on the desire to take care of our family and community. She has taught her children and

grandchildren what strength and determination look like and how important it is to look after our people. In my own life I have been very lucky to have known strong Indigenous women. My Migitjoo and my big sister I owe the biggest thanks to because they fought for my education and my return home to them. Without these women I never would have found pieces of myself and I would have never had the opportunity to learn from some of the most amazing Native women alive. My Migitjoo was sent to an Indian day school, has fought breast cancer three times, and has experienced many other losses and yet she is still a proud woman who would do anything for her family. She is always involved in the politics in our community and yet she has never served on chief and council. She has helped more people on our reservation: feed their children, house them, put them through school, driven them to their medical appointments and attend graduation ceremonies, than anyone in our community could ever imagine. She has done this all without title and often time without a thanks or a favour in return. That is true leadership.

Through school I was mentored by people like Andrea Bear-Nicholas and Deanna Francis. Andrea showed me how to put my passion into praxis, she taught me how to really reach people and she opened up my eyes to the world. She lead without it being her main goal, this to me is what a leader does. It is a title that you earn and put into action. It is not one that is bestowed upon you by elected officials. For example I have witnessed on many occasions her unwavering dedication to revitalizing Indigenous languages and her commitment to standing up for our human rights to her own detriment. She has kept her fire through losing contacts and friends over intellectual disagreements and has never complained once, even though I could tell she must have been saddened. Because of this I knew that this is the type of person I was to be and this is the type of work I want to do. This is what a leader does, they inspire through their work. She has helped me make the connection between our colonization and the experiences of many other Indigenous people. She taught me to fly and asked for nothing in return.

Finally she introduced me to a Two-Spirit elder that showed me it was ok to love who I want and not to apologize for it. Like Andrea she often paid the price and had experienced many forms of violence and discrimination because she was openly Two-Spirit. But Deanna never backed down; in fact she has spoken out using her own

experience as a teaching tool to youth so that we can change the world. She has in her own way helped to shape a better tomorrow for other Two-Spirit people. I think that is such an amazing gift to youth like me. It is obvious to see that their strength shines through them everyday.

They all have taught us how things used to be and how they can be if we resist giving into mainstream ideology. In many of their lessons they gave pieces of themselves to us, a gift I will never be able to repay them for. It is because of these things that I think they are all strong beyond measure. It is due to these women that I know what kind of a leader I want to be. They have shown me the small steps I can take today to start to measure up to their example. Ultimately I see leaders in the women that make up the fabric of our communities.

By Carli Harris



The name of my painting is “Leadership begins at home”

My painting represents the bond between mother and daughter and it represents leadership too. The sunrise means the beginning of a new day. Children learn leadership from their parents. The leaders of the future are taught by examples of love. The leaders of tomorrow are shaped in our hands today. Women should be examples for their children, not only Aboriginal women but all women.

Leaders are strong people with good morals and wise judgement. Leadership isn't boastful, proud or pushy, it's patient and humble. It has wisdom and honesty and positive reinforcement of victory. I believe that the best kind of leader is somebody who has hit rock bottom and has risen above and become a better person because of it. Somebody who can empathise with people and take what they know to help those

less fortunate. The greatest leaders are not corrupt they want to make the world a better place.

My mother was the best example of what a mom should be. When she passed away from cancer I turned to my aunt for support. My aunt has always been there for me



and my sister. She grew up poor and with an absent father. Her mother, my grandmother raised three children alone. My aunt takes negative things and turns them into something positive. She's travelled the world from France, Greece, Spain, Honduras, The Cayman Islands, Hawaii, all over Mexico, Bali and she is now planning a trip to Prague. She's an Ironwoman, who has competed in five Ironman Triathlons's as well as over 13

marathons and 9 half marathons. She works for the Aboriginal policing directorate as an office manager and is the reason I gained knowledge about my Native ancestry. She educated me that my great-great-great-great grandfather was in the bytown museum in Ottawa "John Peter Pruden" who married "Nancy Henry" and she took me to the Métis society to register as a Métis citizen. She has made me very proud to say that part of my heritage is Native. She has taught me to think positively and to forgive and to forget, two lessons that are very difficult for people to learn.

The premise for this painting is a mother and a child, but it could very well represent a grandmother and a grandchild, or an aunt and her niece.

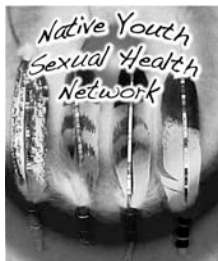
About the Organizations

The Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN) is a North America wide organization working on issues of healthy sexuality, cultural safety, youth empowerment, reproductive justice, and sex positivity by and for Indigenous youth. As a national Indigenous youth organization, NYSHN works closely with Indigenous youth, Elders, and allied peoples and communities at large across the United States, Canada, and Mexico to advocate for and build strong, comprehensive, and culturally relevant sexuality and reproductive health, rights, and justice work in their own communities.

www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com

Girls Action Foundation is a national charitable organization. We lead and seed girls' programs across Canada. We build girls' and young women's skills and confidence and inspire action to change the world. Through our innovative programs, research, and support to a network of over 200 partnering organizations and projects, Girls Action reaches over 60,000 girls and young women.

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