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STORIES



**This collection of
Resistance Stories
Songs, reflections, paintings,
and lived experiences were
submitted by community
members across the Prairie
provinces. The stories shared
are rooted in resistance and
resilience and we hope they
spark fires of courage and
compassion.**

May they bring you hope.

This project was conceived of by
members of Righting Relations
Western Hub.

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**RIGHTING RELATIONS IS A HEART-
CENTRED, PAN-CANADIAN NETWORK
THAT STRIVES TO STRENGTHEN THE
CAPACITY OF ADULT EDUCATORS AND
ADULT EDUCATION TO BRING SOCIAL
CHANGE THROUGH POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC LITERACY FOR A JUST
SOCIETY IN CANADA.**

I lost my talk

by Mirtha Rivera

I lost my talk and i am
lost

The space could be no
space

My mother is lost in a
word

My life is nowhere in
the end

I lost my talk and i talk
to you

I lost my thoughts but
i don't know

Life feels different
with no words

The air smells in a
different talk

I lost my talk,
the land,
the air,
My mother
and the space

Now i have no more talk
No more talk...I am not safe..

I lost my talk nothing to say
Many talks many walks
I hear, I see, I smell, I taste
But not in my talk, not my way

I lost my talk wondering around

The sky is far from the earth is
it...brown

Where is my world, my spirit
My heart and the rest of my
feelings?

I lost...I talk ...I

Rising Above

When I look back on my Junior High school years, I am amazed at how much of a pushover I was. I am amazed at how weak I thought I was. The person that I am today is strong, confident, passionate, and determined. A complete and utter contrast to the person I was fifteen years ago. To best understand my experience, you will need to understand the foundation.

I am a person with a disability. I am visually and hearing impaired, have a speech impediment and have a learning disability. I have lived with these disabilities all my life. I have learned how to adapt and have found the things I need to be successful. Most of my life has been pretty good.

Unfortunately, during my Junior High school years I was bullied – not by students, by teachers and support staff who were supposed to help me.

One example of the bullying that I endured was from my Educational Assistant, let us call her Mrs. Miguel. Mrs. Miguel would never support me in interacting with other students. If we ran into some students in the hall, she would talk to them and completely ignore me..

Rising Above

An educational assistant should be helping students with disabilities engage with other kids and build friendships. The reason that this is so important is because there is an unfortunate stigma around people with disabilities which causes kids without disabilities to steer away from us. It is vital to our development to have allies that can help promote and stimulate those friendships.

Even worse, during lunch time I had to sit in the library with the other Educational Assistants and eat lunch by myself. Both occurrences hindered me from making friends, which in turn isolated me and made me feel invisible. I can remember walking down the hallways of that school feeling like a ghost.

Another example of the bullying by teachers, came from my Principal, let us call him Mr. Bundy. Mr. Bundy told my mother, when she was trying to advocate for me, that he did not see the point in making accommodations for me because he did not know how much longer I would live anyway. Not something a Principal should ever say.

Rising Above

One final example I will give, needless to say there are countless more, is another one to do with Mrs. Miguel.

In grade eight Science class we had an exam. For this exam we could use a cheat sheet. So, naturally, I spent hours writing down as much information as I could fit on this piece of paper. As a person with a disability, I was given, comically, extra time and Mrs. Miguel read the exam to myself and a few others. However, she gave me no time to look for and find the correct answer. I ended up failing the test because of her lack of professionalism.

As I said there are other stories I could tell.

The staff at that school beat me down until there was nothing left.

They beat me down so much that I tried to end my life in grade seven.

They beat me down so much that my self esteem was nonexistent.

Rising Above

Even though my experience was traumatic, I look back on it now with gratitude.

If I had not gone through the hardships I went through I would not have been able to grow.

I would not have been able to become the strong, determined advocate I am today. If I had not gone to a High School that took me on its shoulders and lifted me out of my self-deprecating state, I never would have learned that I could stand higher, and taller, than the hurtles my Junior high school tried to throw in my path. I never would have learned what true strength and courage was.

My advice to others with disabilities going through what I went through is simple. No matter what anyone tells you, no matter how anyone makes you feel about yourself, you are capable. You can achieve great things. Do not ever let the opinions of others cloud your judgement.

You are strong. You are resilient. Most of all, you are you. If you don't give up, you will find your own path in this world. I guarantee it.

by Amy Park



My matrilineal Jewish lineage is traceable by movement and memories
of family gatherings for the sake of survival.

-Food is Love-

is food that won't spoil.

Resistance is making dinner with olive sisters
across distances
that never mattered.

by Maigan van der Giessen

PUMPKIN QUEEN

(SONG)

WE WILL NOT GO QUIETLY OR SIMPLY
DISAPPEAR

WE HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS AS YOU
ANYTIME OF YEAR

JUST BECAUSE WE'RE DIFFERENT IN
ACCENT, BELIEF OR NEED

JUST BECAUSE WE'RE DIFFERENT DO YOU
THINK WE DO NOT BLEED ?
WE ARE HUMANS!
YES YOU AND I

INEQUALITY ALWAYS MAKES ME CRY

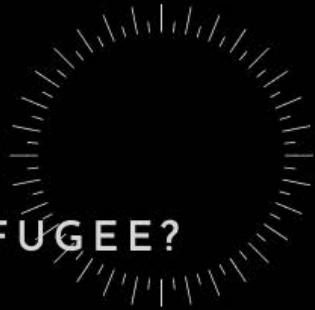
YOU HAVE EYES BUT STILL
YOU CANNOT SEE

THAT WE ARE THE SAME - YOU AND ME

WE ARE EQUAL ! 1 2 3
WE ARE EQUAL !

THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS
TO ME.

by Tara Mitrovic



WHAT MAKES A REFUGEE?

I LEFT BEHIND MY WHOLE FAMILY
IN EXCHANGE FOR SAFETY,
SO I CAN BE FREE.

I STOPPED THE NORMALCY OF WAR
OF MAKING THE BEST OF WHAT
I DON'T HAVE.

DURING THE WAR YOUR FRIEND IS THE
FEAR THAT MAKES YOU SURVIVE.
IT'S NIGHTS OF NO SLEEP WAITING
FOR WHEN THEY WILL COME
NOT KNOWING WHAT WOULD YOU EAT
BECAUSE THERE'S NOTHING AT HAND
SAVING WATER, SAVING BREAD HARD
AS A ROCK SO YOU CAN FEED YOUR SON
LEARNING TO TALK WITHOUT SOUND
THAT WAY THEY WILL NOT FIND YOU.

RUNNING UNTIL THERE IS NO BREATH
TO TAKE, AVOIDING THE BULLETS
SHOWERING YOUR PATH.
SWALLOWING TEARS INSTEAD OF FOOD
HOPING THAT DAY LIGHT WILL COME.

DON'T YOU THINK I CAME HERE
FOR A FREE RIDE,
I HAVE PAID FOR WHAT I HAVE.

I AM GRATEFUL NOW FOR THIS LIFE
THAT I CAN BE ME.

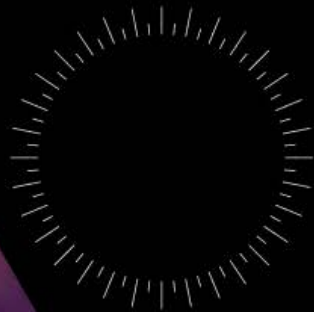
I LEARNT HOW TO TALK, WALK,
SING YOUR WAY.

WE ARE NO DIFFERENT IF YOU THINK ABOUT
IT COULD BE YOU WHO IS IN THE PLACE

WHERE I WAS, YES RIGHT HERE

YOU CAN BE A REFUGEE LOOKING FOR A
PLACE FOR YOUR LIFE FOR YOUR SON.

SOME OF US KNOW WHAT IT TAKES TO
LEAVE BEHIND YOUR DREAMS, START ALL
OVER AGAIN WITH JUST THE COURAGE TO
STAY ALIVE.



BY MIRTHA RIVERA

**SOMETIMES YOU HAVE
TO BREAK THE RULES**



**TO DO
WHATS
RIGHT!**

by
Maigan

A Righting Relationships Story

All over the world, human beings and nations are destroyed through acts of genocide.

Violence is committed against families because of wars, greed, ethnic cleansing, slavery, gender bias, and colonial appropriation of Indigenous peoples and their land. In our day, we hear reports of genocides against Uighars, Rohingyas, Roma, yazidis, and so on.

Many years ago I discovered that my grandmother was a Jew who married a Christian man, and that was not acceptable at the turn of the century, so they came to Canada in 1909, to Saskatchewan, as homesteaders. I found this out when my grandmother died and her immigration papers were found. My mother told me grandmother's story at a time when I attended St. John's High School in Winnipeg, where many of my friends were Jewish. I became interested in Jewish history and religion.

Fast forward to 2007. I am living in Edmonton Alberta, I decided to gift my grown daughter with a trip to Europe after she received her permanent teaching certificate. We travelled to Budapest, Prague, Frankfurt, Vienna, Dachau and Thieresen, to explore our Jewish roots, and to visit synagogues, Holocaust Memorials, and ancient cemeteries. It was a profound experience for us both.

A Righting Relationships Story

One of the things that we remembered was that when people visited the cemeteries, they left small stones to honor the dead and to show they were there as witnesses.

When we came home, I was sitting on the loveseat looking out my window at the dry riverbed my son constructed in my front garden, and thought I would place a memorial stone there for the Holocaust.

As I was sitting, I listened to a news broadcast on CBC that described the rape of young girls, even toddlers, by the Congolese army. I cried for so long, and thought of the other genocides: Rwanda, Somalia, Ethiopia, Srebrenica, and ones that go back in history.

I decided it was time to speak out against genocide.

On June 21, 2009, I held the first Genocide Memorial Service in my front yard. After smudging and prayer by a First Nations elder, guests were invited to place stones inscribed with the names of their people who died violent deaths.

Each one shared why it is important to honor those whose names they brought to the garden.

On July 11, 2021, we will have the 13th annual Genocide Memorial Service online, at 10:30 a.m. mountain standard time.

A Righting Relationships Story

The service is no longer held in my front garden, there are over a hundred people in attendance each year, so the service was moved to the Unitarian Church of Edmonton, until 2020, when we were no longer allowed to have large gatherings. At these services, we grieve together, build resilience, share stories, form a beloved community of allies and speakers of truth. We are an interfaith and intercultural family.

Albert Einstein said,
"Peace cannot be kept by force, it can only be kept by understanding...all my life I have hated war; it is the greatest curse of man's (sic) history. It comes from absolute ignorance, absolute greed, and absolute cruelty..some paths a man takes cannot be retraced. Some acts cannot be undone."

The 2020 Genocide Memorial Service is available on Youtube, as will be the 2021 service, due to the Covid restrictions. Resource: Stanton's Eight Stages of Genocide, by Gregory Stanton, founder of Genocide Watch, 1966

By
Rev. Audrey Brooks Unitarian Community Minister
Interfaith Chaplain, University of Alberta (retired)
Member, Edmonton Raging Grannies and
Central Region Interfaith Housing Initiative

SOLIDARITY
IS
RESISTANCE



by maigan

ODDS ARE AGAINST ONE

1/7

I started skipping class in elementary. Much bigger problems were at home with my older siblings in and out of all angles of the system and I was quiet so no one really noticed.

Growing up white in an inter racial neighborhood on low income welfare with our own cop station built in the complex.

Childhood wasn't always a "childhood" or what society would refer to as normal.

Most think that school is an everyday thing in a child's life....but what if it wasn't?

Years of history with educational failure in my family was on repeat since early elementary. My mom fought receiving her High school diploma at the age of 46.

I was actually at her graduation ceremony.

In school, I always wanted to learn but "the how" got in the way as I did not fit in the typical scholastic standards.

Teachers seemed more concerned with how I was growing up in the hood rather than trying to teach me, they felt no support from home even if they did try. I was failing at everything other than gym.

The same remarks would flow in from other teachers, parents, fellow students. comments such as;

- ~We know you understand
- ~You're brilliant
- ~Why can't you do the same things like us?
- ~What's wrong with her Miss/Mr Teacher?
- ~Just do it like this.
- ~We don't know what to do with her.
- ~Place her in special resource everyday to keep her busy.

Yet since I was a child all I wanted was to be educated. I could see it.

The library was my favorite place to be taken, Although now I may be convinced that half of that love may have been the tranquil feel in a library...no chaos or screaming.

My mom knew how different I was in comparison to her other children. At 10 She decided to place me in Navy League cadets in order to keep me away from home as much as possible.

Here we see a HUGE difference I was going, I wasn't walking out during it,

I was learning with my peers & not being separated.

I was passing for the first time ever! What was being done differently? First we would be taught the theory, then performed the task till it was mastered; always being coached & supported.

If extra time was needed to grasp something I was always granted that space and if more time was needed an instructor would be there after everyone else was done.

which taught me I COULD LEARN!

4/7

I graduated with great success from the sea cadet program when I was 18. I was the only one of my graduating class (around 13 of us) that did not go onto the military, university or college.
What happened?

I knew I'd be set up for failure at that level in the military as well as school & I came so far! I was not prepared to feel that way or up for failure from a system that shrugged me aside. I felt torn on what was next so I settled for being a CI (civilian instructor). From 21 to 25 I tried to obtain the GED course 4x.

Goodness, I think I only wrote my name on the first exam I attempted and handed it in!

I worked full time, put myself through school & on my off time & I would seek well educated tutors and resources and maxed out my benefits with speech therapy for three years. My last time trying I was 23.

The company I worked for at the time brought a few of the staff our own NS board approved teacher to improve our skills.

I came the closest I had ever to passing a standardized test,
-still failed.

I paused the whole hope of being educated till one day at 25 my neighbor shared with me another way to get my HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA it was called ALP (Adult Learning Program) that is held at all Canadian colleges.

I was all ears and knew this time I had to be a better advocate for myself. I had to go through lots of hoops having grade 7 in order to get into a high school program but my butt was in that class that fall! The opportunity of a self paced program made a huge difference in my personal learning.

I now found myself in school for the first time for more than 3 weeks consecutively since grade 5! Teachers had the time and awareness to watch my learning patterns and what may have contributed to my overall failure in the school system. I knew that something was not right with my learning.

After sending myself to Sullivan Learning Center to be tested the school teacher advisor made me aware in the meeting that it seemed like I had multiple processing issues that aligned with learning disabilities and that they wanted me to go see the psycho-education specialist.

Even though I was attaining good grades, I was still far behind again from my peers.

We went down this route and discovered many underlying issues that related to ADHD and all the branches' of its subcategories.

Because of very little change in schools over the years I knew if I did not want to be set up for failure again, because I clearly could learn.

I went ahead and educated myself from the work of doctors and teachers so I could know what rumbled through the one way system of how they choose to teach everyone.



7/7

Testing teachers and the system and myself to create new ways of effective learning.

Fast forward another year and at the age of 27 I finally received my high school diploma, just a few marks shy of making the honour roll.

" Resolve to throw off the influences of any unfortunate environment, and to build your life to order" ~Napoleon Hill

by Jillian Bouwen

The Ancestors: A Reflection

by Ayesha Talreja

I wonder if my body was made for the
cold.

Was it made for the frigid temperatures,
the soft, careful stepping on the shiny,
black ice with the sun reflecting off of it,
so deceptively welcoming?

Was it made for the tentative footsteps
upon a bank of white, fluffy snow,
tethered to your breath the hope you
don't fall in?

Sometimes,

I even wonder if it was made for the
rapid walking on the flat grey landscapes,
skyscrapers towering over head,
each building the same insipid shade of
brown, the occasional flash of glass.

Was it made for looking out at a frozen
lake, transfixed at the tranquility?



Or was it made for the sandy dunes,
the scorching sun sending waves of sweat down
your forehead,
for the luscious taste of the coconut water from the
fruit from the trees that sway back and forth,
back and forth
with the soft bowing of the warm winds.

Was it made for the colourful flowers and kites,
the tang of a raw mango with a squirt of tart lime?
Or perhaps for the cacophony of sounds and
colours,
a never-ending whirlwind of sights, sounds and
smells?

Is this what my ancestors foresaw for me,
while they traversed wide plains of sand,
land and river to make a better life for themselves,
while their homes were taken away from them?

Did the wisdom they carry in their bodies ever
predict the future that their great great grand-
daughter would end up miles and miles from where
the land that had borne her, and yet be able to call
that foreign land a home?



Could they imagine me now, walking on the precipice of here
and there?

The omnipresent tightrope of the immigrant life, teetering on
the fine line between the past and the present, the where we
are from and the where we are going.

Maybe my body was not made for the cold climes, nor for the
tropical breeze.

It was created uniquely for the space I inhabit, the past,
present, future and everything in between.

It is the same for all of us; our bodies are spaces of resistance
and resiliency, beautiful sites of mixing and changes,
transforming as quickly as the waves lapping on the ocean
shore, as they have for time immemorial, as they will always
continue to do so.

The places we go and people we meet and the knowledge we
share offer us chances to bring our collective learnings
together.

The wisdom, the strength, the resistance and resiliency of the
ancestors we carry in our bones, is a gift we will always have,
in times of uncertainty and of hope.

Sometimes, we have to look back to move forward.

A MANS WORST FEAR

By Jean Hillabold

I've come to know that men, like women, are afraid of having their lives ruined by the "opposite sex."

The male fear of losing power, especially to women, seems to be the oldest moral panic on earth. In some cultures, boys are recruited into the patriarchy at young ages by being taught that an immodest or unfaithful daughter, sister, or wife spreads shame throughout her family. If a man doesn't appear to be in charge of the sex lives of "his" woman and all the unmarried girls in his family, he loses face.

I believe that a fear of this worst-case scenario is widespread among men, and not only in "Third World" cultures.

In the 1970s, I was married to a Nigerian whom I had met in London, England, where he had gone to escape the civil war in his country, though officially he went abroad to study.

He warned me about other men in general when we lived together in London.

A MANS WORST FEAR

After he came to join me in Canada, and we were married, he was stranded in a place where the climate and the culture were foreign to him. In London, the Nigerian community had been about 50,000 strong. He went from there to Regina, a white town of less than 200,000 people, where passersby stared at him because Africans were a rare sight.

I knew he felt isolated, and I hoped I could be his source of emotional support. Instead, I seemed to be his greatest source of anxiety.

Later, I suspected that his goal in making such a long journey was to marry into an upper-class family that would support him financially, so he could be the one in his family who had "made it" in a rich country.

My parents were not about to provide him with an unearned income, and as long as I was with him, they saw no need to support me either.

If I was adult enough to choose my own husband,
I was no longer dependent on them.

A MANS WORST FEAR

I was a university student, and I really hoped my man and I could both be upwardly-mobile. The last thing we needed, I thought, was to begin having babies before either of us could find a good-enough job.

He was alarmed that I had begun taking the birth-control pill before he even arrived. I explained that we needed to plan ahead and save money. Preferably, I needed to find a job that provided maternity leave so I would have a source of income to go back to after the birth.

Husband just didn't see it.

What kind of wife makes sure she won't get pregnant on her wedding night?

And why does she need to take magic pills to prevent pregnancy when her husband isn't even there?

I explained that I needed to begin at least two weeks before I needed the pill to work because the pill has to coordinate with a woman's 28-day cycle.

To his credit,

Husband never hit me, though he went into rages for days.

A MANS WORST FEAR

He would do his best to keep me trapped in our apartment while he recited his list of clues. (I had spent hours at the university, supposedly working on the school newspaper—why had this taken so long? Why couldn't I explain the origin of a stain on a second-hand armchair I had bought before he arrived?). Eventually, he told me that he was about to graduate from the local university, so we could afford to have our first baby. I went off the pill, and after several months, I conceived. I hoped that the adventure of parenthood would bring us together.

We had our ultimate blowup when our baby girl was three months old, and I escaped as soon as Husband was out of the house. Baby and I spent a week in a women's shelter, and then my parents invited me to move in with them in order to go back to university and make myself more employable.

My escape, of course, seemed to confirm everything Husband had feared for the past two years. His demands on the phone that I should stop this nonsense and come back to him focused on MY irrational approach to marriage. What kind of wife runs away with a newborn baby? As far as he could see, another man had to be lurking in the background.

A MANS WORST FEAR

Many years later, ex-Husband was diagnosed as a schizophrenic.

Whatever.

I've never been completely convinced by any of the explanations I've heard which focused on him as an individual, as though the culture he came from had no influence on him. When I was contacted on-line by ex-Husband's niece, many years after my escape, her reaction to my story was that some Nigerians can't survive well in other countries.

I thought that made a lot of sense.

A moral panic is far from an individual problem, but it can make an individual look insane outside the context in which the moral panic is part of the atmosphere.

Anyone who doesn't want to live with the demons of a particular culture —and all cultures have them— needs to take a hard look at the prevailing moral code from time to time.

In Being Brown:

Let Me See

“Eres morena, piel canela”. You are brown, cinnamon skin, that’s what grandma said, when I announce to her I was blonde and blue eyed; but you think I’m less because of the colour of my skin. You feel that I am arrogant well I have my dignity you know. You tell me I am belligerent, I defend my stands and my truth. You say I am volatile; I have passion for what’s dear to my heart. You feel I am rude and bossy. I like to speak my mind and sometimes I am not what you want me to be.

**Also that I’m crazy, if that is the same as spontaneous, immature
hmm... I’m playful and love to laugh.
So emotional, I cry when I need to, I tell you when I am mad at
you and then it’s gone and it’s all good.
I rage for no reason, I vent and express myself when I’m pissed
off. I’m illogical; well let me see my logic is very unique.
Very unstable, who are you comparing me to.
All this confuses me.
How can I be invisible?**

In Being Brown:

You talk over me as if I wasn't there.

**I have news for you, I'm here and I am present all the time.
Hello.....You like my food, my accent. By the way we all have accents, and yours is very hard to understand because you sound all the same.**

You like my music, my language, my dances, it's as if you want to be like me, I don't think that says I am that invisible.

A wannabe is somebody who takes another's reality and makes it theirs, you want to become one of us those exotic women those you see in movies or you when you go for holidays to get entertained by, those "exotic women", oh you also go to get tan, to look like me?!?...I am visible when I'm entertaining.

Somebody I'm not sure who said: "If you can't exploit them, make them entertain you".

My visibility goes when I talk about justice, equality and freedom, when I tell you about my rights.

Then it is as if I'm a ghost in the room.

In Being Brown:

Modern age slavery is to think that another human is inferior, and that that individual is a non-person...with no rights...; you think I am a second class citizen even though I contribute to society; I work as hard as or harder than others just to prove I deserve a job.

Why is it that your colour gives you more rights and my colour takes those same rights away and I'm kept down?

Being brown is it fate? Can I change my fate?

The answer is I wouldn't change me for the world.

See me, hear me, talk to me as an equal, unlearn what you grew up believing, leave the fear behind open your eyes listen with your heart and we will walk together, there is enough for you and you and yes enough for me too.

Can we talk about it and create a path of respect, a path of justice and freedom for you and me.

**Hoping this is very visible and clear for you
...come and take my hand.....**

by Mirtha Rivera

Hi my name is Adriane Poponne.

My spirit name is Four Winds, and Black Eagle and I'm from the Otter Clan. Now I'm here to talk about how I feel about Animals. Well, I love to learn about Animals and I am also really strict about them. I am strict about Animals because I'm worried that all of these poachers are killing more endangered animals like my favorite animal the tiger. So I want that to stop, don't you guys want the poaching to stop!?



Well, I can tell you that I think the endangered animals have had enough. What I mean by enough is that they had enough of getting poached. So yeah I love animals. If the animals are endangered and die out what would we do? We wouldn't be able to see all of these beautiful animals again.

I'm sure everyone loves animals like me.

Well goodbye!!

My First Fast

THIS WEEKEND I EXPERIENCED MY FIRST FAST WITH SO MUCH LOVE AND SUPPORT FROM MY SISTER ANAKWUDWABISAYQUAY AND ELDERS FLOYD AND FAYLENE SUTHERLAND.

I CAME TO THESE LANDS WHEN I WAS A CHILD. MY ANCESTORS ARE WHITE FARMERS IN THE MOUNTAINS OF SWITZERLAND AND I WAS RAISED ON A DAIRY FARM BUILT ON ANISHINAABE LANDS NEAR PEGUIS FIRST NATION. MY GROSSMAMIS (GRANDMOTHERS) WERE/ARE STRONG WOMEN, ONE STILL LIVING IN THIS WORLD ON HER OWN AT 102, AND THE OTHER ONE BEARING 13 CHILDREN ALL THE WHILE MILKING COWS.

WE (MY FORMER COLLEAGUES) HAD BEEN TALKING ABOUT FASTING FOR ABOUT A YEAR, BUT SO MUCH HAS CHANGED IN THAT TIME. I HAVE TO ADMIT I WAS NERVOUS AND UNCERTAIN. WHAT IF I COULDN'T GO THROUGH WITH IT? WHAT IF I WASN'T MEANT TO BE THERE? WHAT IF I DIDN'T KNOW ENOUGH? I COULD HAVE COME UP WITH SO MANY DOUBTS AND EXCUSES BUT INSTEAD I DECIDE TO HAVE FAITH AND TRUST.

I ALSO KNEW I HAD SO MUCH ANGER AND THAT IT NEEDED MY ATTENTION SO I COULD LET GO. ELDER FLOYD TALKED ABOUT PEOPLE WITH BIG HEARTS. I THINK EVERYONE HAS A BIG HEART IT'S JUST THAT MANY DECIDE/OR ARE LED NOT TO FOLLOW IT. TO FOLLOW MY HEART IS A PART OF WHO I AM AND SO THAT'S WHAT I DECIDED TO DO.

My First Fast

I FELT SO CARED FOR. IT WAS SUCH A WARM CALM FEELING.

I SLEPT ON THE TENT GROUND AND COULD FEEL MYSELF SINKING INTO MOTHER EARTH, LIKE I WAS BEING ABSORBED BY HER. I ALSO COULD FEEL MY CHILDREN AROUND ME; THE EAST WIND, LOUD THUNDER, AND MY FOUR WINDS. A BEAR EVEN CAME AND WATCHED OVER ME.

I WAS TAKEN BACK TO WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, WHEN I'D SIT IN THE TREES, PLAY IN THE BUSH, SWIM IN THE CREEK, READ BOOKS IN THE HAYLOFT, SIT ON THE ROUND BALES. I

SO ENJOYED BEING BAREFOOT AND RUNNING AROUND SHIRTLESS AS A CHILD. THE BUSH WAS A FAMILIAR PLACE FOR ME; THE BUGS, COYOTES, WOLVES, BIRDS, TREES AND ALL THE THINGS I COULDN'T SEE.

FASTING REMINDED ME HOW IMPATIENT I AM. THAT I HAVE A HARD TIME TURNING OFF MY THINKING, ORGANIZING, COORDINATING BRAIN – THAT SIMPLY BEING IS SO HARD FOR ME. AND THAT I AM “PROGRAMMED” TO DO, CAUSE THERE'S JUST ALWAYS SO MUCH TO DO!

I HAD DREAMS THAT WILL HELP ME AND I LOOK FORWARD TO UNDERSTANDING THEM BETTER. ELDER FAYLENE TALKED ABOUT HAVING BOUNDARIES AND NOT DOING EVERYTHING FOR OTHERS. THAT'S SOMETHING I WANT TO LOOK AT TOO. AFTER PACKING UP, ANAKWUDWABISAYQUAY SAID IT FELT LIKE WE WERE JUST GETTING STARTED AND I AGREED.

WAABISHKI MISHWEQUAY - WHITE ELK WOMAN

Monologue

1 / 7

I remember I was five, playing outside with my friend she was 3 or 4.

I was wearing a flowery a dress my mom made me. I hated it. I hated all dresses.

I came home with her and announced to my mother that I was going to get married.

My mother's eyes were so big. She was white and she looked even whiter. I thought she was going to collapse.

"Don't say that, girls don't do that." I could never figure out what "that" was. Mom sent my friend home and I got yelled and screamed at, also she slapped my face. My friend ran to her house.

I went to my secret place, my feelings were the same, even when I hid.

That year I started school, a nuns' school. My mom said they will teach me how to be a lady and a good wife. I don't want to be either, ladies are boring, they wear dresses, sit properly with their knees together, smile nicely, and they wear white gloves

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I like to climb trees, run, go for long walks, wrestle with the boys, talk to my friend who nobody can see, I also like get lost on purpose. I am not afraid because when I do that, nothing can happen to me, mom can't hurt me then.

About the wife thing, I am not sure if I can be one. I know how to cook, clean and do laundry and I do iron sometimes; doing for a "husband is too much.

In the nuns' school instead of Christian love, I found that perhaps they were not that happy. The sister who was with my class looked like she was ready to bark, always threatening with
"God will punish you,"
and
"You will go to Hell."
It was an all-girls school, of course. The nuns kept on telling us that we shouldn't look at boys.

If we did see a boy or say hello to a boy, we were sent for penitence. I just want to play.

How come boys are allowed to play with trucks, marbles, play ball, wrestle, and they don't have to worry about being impeccable or how they sat. Don't misunderstand me. I love my dolls and tell them stories and make them dresses, but in the privacy of my room.

About looking at boys, don't worry. I was busy looking at girls – so many, so beautiful, there were a few that drove me nuts: the whining ones “I'm gonna tell Mom.”

With me myself, when I want something, I go get it in any way I can, and if somebody tried to scare me, I pushed them aside, I just don't cry.

Time passed, I am sixteen, and she was always around with her long dark hair and her sad eyes that would only light up when she plays guitar or sings songs. She is good. How many times she tried to teach me but who could concentrate on the guitar while I feel like melting, this feeling is all over me. I can hear my mind trying to convince me that “girls don't like girls or else you will go to Hell.”

It was hard to admit to myself what was happening in my heart when I knew that just for thinking about her, somebody might find out and I could go to jail, be laughed at and called a pervert and other names I'd rather not say.

A few Hail Marys and maybe God could understand. Anyway, it didn't work so I became a rebel. I decided to join the guerillas so maybe then I could feel I belonged somewhere. There had to be somewhere I belonged.

I planned for days how to run away, what to tell my dad. My cousin was helping and told a big lie. Since it was summer, her and I were going to the beach with her class for the end of the school year, no more school.

That'll work.

When I was on my way I realized that I was secretly hoping not to go. I hated mosquitoes as much as I hated the nuns and my mom. Then was it or not a coincidence that the train left without me?

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As for her, the one I loved, she didn't have a clue about my feelings for her. All of a sudden, people noticed I was sixteen and had no boyfriend, so they tried to get me one. He was the weirdest 18-year-old creature of the male species, in kilometers around. Also he was a male slut, but nobody objected he was "a good catch".

I wasn't really fitting the image that I was supposed to. I thought having many boyfriends would stop the question "where's your boyfriend?" Now the question was "Whose turn is it?"

I partied, drank, by then mom had left this world, dad always said "I'm here for you, girl," and he always was. The only daughter of a man who had his hands full with me, his good girl was not so good anymore.

I decided to have as many boyfriends as I could have, I dated three brothers at the same time and none of them knew! The world was in shock.. I like to challenge the view of society about me being a lady. I didn't like what I was doing but I did.

The nice girl became too daring for the system, and they couldn't believe their eyes. I always found something wrong with each boy. It's no wonder. I was looking for her, and none were her.

Politics, music, and theatre became my love. They were much less harmful. There was a time when nothing else counted. My heart was frozen. I thought loving her would never die, but there was no fire to feed them.

I am twenty-one years old, I wanted a baby and found who I thought was better than the rest of the male species. I realized that he had many of her qualities. He was into music and had feelings, and believe it or not, a big marshmallow heart. He could father my baby. We got married and I we had a son. There was no other way we thought to quiet the interested minds. She was still around, and she loved my son. She called him her own, so he was our son. She spoiled him more than I thought any child could be.

One day, politics pulled us apart. I was an organizer, popular artists and activists at a time of a military coup, it got very dangerous and I ended up in jail for my political activities. In 1975 my son was three years old, we had to leave everything behind. I became a political refugee and was sent to Regina.

Her and I wrote back and forth for a few years, then we lost contact. In 1992, I heard she got married at 41. She has a baby girl, that's what she wanted all her life.

Well, fast forward, after two sons, a divorce, many dreams, many friends, many times falling in and out of love or believing I did, my first impossible crush on a woman, yes, here in Canada, I realized eh I can't hide any more.

I don't regret loving a woman. Now I have married a woman whom I love. I only wish I could ask my childhood love: "Did you feel the same?"

This is my story and the time and places and this me a woman who decided she couldn't live any longer denying who she was and finally came out.

I still feel weird and excited, maybe taken by surprise.

END

By Mirtha Rivera

With gratitude to all the co-conspirators across the Prairies who contributed to this collection.

*Love is Resistance.
Existence is Resistance.*

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