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# ME concedes mistake in declaring the death of a respected Métis woman a suicide

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

When respected Fort McMurray-based Métis entrepreneur and artist Lisa Marie Bourque unexpectedly died in an April vehicle collision, Alberta's chief medical examiner originally categorized it as a suicide.

But after Bourque's family requested a fatality inquiry, the examiner changed the manner of death to accidental—a move the family's lawyer said is unprecedented in his experience.

"I have not seen this type of amendment by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner before in my years in legal practice and so this in my opinion is an extraordinary outcome to our request for a fatality inquiry into the circumstances of Lisa's passing," lawyer Alex Yiu wrote in an email to Bourque's common law spouse, Manfred Bishop, who provided it to *Alberta Native News*.

Bourque died on April 27 after she crashed into a water truck that was parked on Highway 69, with the cause of death listed in the coroner's report as "blunt chest injuries." She was 47.

As the founder of the Fort McMurray Métis Trading Post and the New Dawn Métis Women's representative for Region 1 of the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), Bourque was a high-profile member of the Métis community in Alberta and a regular fixture at cultural events in the region.

"You talk to anybody from Fort Chip, McMurray, Anzac, Conklin, Janvier, Lac La Biche, everybody knows her. There isn't one person who thought she committed suicide," said Bishop, who owns a towing company in Fort Mac.

When Bourque died, the MNA issued a

statement on Facebook calling Bourque "a beacon of light, tirelessly advocating for Indigenous rights and sharing her beautiful culture with unwavering pride."

"Her absence leaves a void that will be felt deeply at every gathering, every event, every moment where her infectious smile and boundless energy once filled the room," the statement added.

In a separate statement, McMurray Métis Local 1935 described Bourque as a "a champion for sharing her culture and advocating for the rights of all Indigenous people."

"She was at many events, whether it was to celebrate or advocate. Always beaming with pride for her culture, often seen standing and clapping at the back of the room while kids jigged, or models showcased Indigenous fashions."

"Her absence will be felt at every artisan market, as her smile from ear to ear won't be there to welcome us in."

Nancy Critchley, a close friend of Bourque's who met her when they were both vendors at Treaty Days in Fort McKay several years ago, told *Alberta Native News* that Bourque "would have never taken her own life."

"There's no way, not one speck of cell in my body, that believes that she committed suicide," said Critchley, who is supporting Bourque's family in their efforts to get answers about her death.

Bishop noted that the medical officer's finding of suicide had a practical impact on his family, precluding him from filing an insurance claim to help pay for her funeral, since the accident was deemed to be Bourque's own fault.

Critchley, who like Bourque is Métis, said she suspects the suicide designation was an effort to conceal how state negligence caused



Lisa Marie Bourque

the death of an Indigenous woman.

The only reason the medical examiner changed the manner of death, she added, was because Bourque's family asked for a fatality inquiry, which she described as "covering up a cover up."

Bishop, who isn't Indigenous, doesn't think the suicide designation was an attempt to cover anything up, but the result of the limited information the RCMP provided.

The original medical examiner's report, which Bishop provided to *Alberta Native News*, cited Bourque's "major depression" and anxiety, the presence of antidepressants in her system, clear road conditions the day of her accident and a lack of brake marks on the road as reasons her "manner of death is best classified as suicide."

The autopsy report, citing multiple eyewitnesses, noted that Bourque "veered from her lane into the lane with the parked truck, and made no attempt to swerve away or slow down."

Conceding that Bourque struggled with anxiety, Critchley questioned the medical examiner's conclusion that Bourque was severely depressed to the extent that she would deliberately crash her car.

"I know a lot of people who are majorly depressed," said Critchley. "My friend Lisa was not majorly depressed."

On Nov. 14, lawyer Yiu sent a letter to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) requesting a fatality inquiry into Bourque's death, which often takes years to conclude, on Bishop's behalf.

In a Dec. 2 response to Yiu, chief medical examiner Dr. Akmal Coetzee-Khan said he

Continued on page 8

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# Award winning author Jordan Abel shares his journey

By Laura Mushumanski, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

While interviewing our Indigenous brother who giggles nonstop during conversation, this award-winning author, when learning who he is through his writing is quite the opposite. The Associate Professor within the Faculty of Arts, English & Film Studies Department at the University of Alberta, who loves helping emerging writers on their journey, is reminded of what it was like for himself during the early stages of his learning journey as an Indigenous writer.

The most recent recipient of the 2024 Governor General’s Literary Award for fiction, Jordan Abel, shared about his experience as a novice writer, how he became a writer, and the adventures in between. Before his most recent publication, *Empty Spaces* – that takes the reader on a descriptive journey of the outside world by capturing his audiences of the land through Abel’s observations - settler narratives through an Indigenous lens, Jordan never imagined himself to become an accomplished writer let alone obtaining a PhD from the Department of English at Simon Fraser University back in 2019.

During Abel’s undergraduate studies at the University of Alberta, he came to realize that when taking creative writing classes, he was receiving better grades and boosting his grade point average. He also found that school became joyful and the conversations he was having within his classes “morphed into wanting to try being a writer.”

The current instructor for Indigenous Literatures, Research-Creation, and Creative Writing, found solace in the idea of creating and writing starting at a young age. And once upon a time when Abel was a little boy, some of his fond memories were when visiting Value Village and looking at books. For as long as he can remember, Abel always engaged in reading and writing, and “found the idea of what books are to be enthralling.” The joy itself for Abel during his youth was found during the process of writing stories.

Some of Abel’s early short story publications, when he looks back on them, the humility within him finds his stories to be “embarrassing” while at the same time over the years he noticed that as he kept pursuing writing, the practice of writing shaped him as the writer he is today.

For writers in particular, as within any vocation, there is a craft to how a person goes about engaging in their work, in this case Abel’s work is more fluid. Some writers have a consistent everyday writing practice, and others find inspiration during moments of creativity throughout the year like Abel. Jordan usually “waits for moments of inspiration [that allow him] to genuinely write as much as [he] can in that time.”

Then there is the pressure of writing the first manuscript. Abel spoke about anxiety with his first book, *Place of Scraps*, that he put a lot of pressure on himself “to try and write something and make an impact.” This kind-hearted uncle that you can often find smiling, Abel really did his homework when writing *Place of Scraps*; his “goal was to hit the ground running, to publish a book and be happy with it for a long time” and in doing so Jordan became the winner of the *Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize*. And noting now that his first well-researched manuscript took 6 years, starting back in 2007 until publication with *Talonbooks* in 2013.

Along Abel’s journey, he came to realize the importance of genuinely trying to be a part of a community, and “to exist with community, you’re there actually to support people—it goes a long way.” Jordan realized that the more he opened up by becoming involved in community, actually make friends - because we writers are a bit of a

recluse, things started to open up for him, emphasizing on “be a part of those things that can support each other.”

Another thing Abel realized was the importance of “writing things that are difficult... . speak to things that are extremely difficult to write” and how this insight shaped his writing journey throughout several of his publications.

As a writer, where we can be engulfed in creations, ideas of things and ambitions, one practice that Abel came to realize and words of wisdom he shares within anyone that is pursuing writing is “continue to find more time for joy.”



Author Jordan Abel



# Warmest Wishes

**December is a month full of celebrations, generosity and family time.**

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**On behalf of the AFCC Board and staff we would like to wish everyone a safe and healthy Christmas and New Year!**

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# Canada's Economic Statement does not meet First Nations urgent needs

Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak issued the following statement in response to the Government of Canada's Fall Economic Statement, tabled by Karina Gould, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, on December 16, 2024, in the House of Commons.

"The Fall Economic Statement once again falls short of meeting the urgent needs of First Nations," said National Chief Cindy Woodhouse Nepinak. "Critical areas like policing, clean water, housing, education and economic reconciliation remain severely underfunded."

The AFN National Chief also took exception to the government attributing the rising deficit to costs related to Indigenous claims. "These statements are misleading as these claims are a result of Canada failing to meet its obligations to First Nations. Instead of spending resources on legal battles that question our inherent rights, the government must prioritize sustained, targeted investments that will grow the Canadian economy and advance reconciliation."

"Addressing the First Nations infrastructure gap is a necessary step for strengthening Canada's economy. As demonstrated in the AFN's recently released report from the Conference Board of Canada, Economic Impact of Closing the Infrastructure Gap, investments in First Nations infrastructure, housing, broadband access, roads, and clean water will benefit all Canadians by improving quality of life, driving economic growth, and creating more than 300,000 jobs over the next seven years."

"Closing the Infrastructure Gap between First Nations and non-Indigenous Canadians will boost Canada's GDP by \$27.7 billion annually. It would strengthen Canada's position within the G7, moving us from our current mid-ranking position to a leading spot among the world's largest economies. Addressing barriers to education, employment, and economic participation for First Nations is essential for Canada's global economic competitiveness," concluded the AFN National Chief.

Acting Grand Chief Betsy Kennedy of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC) also expressed deep disappointment over the Canadian government's failure to deliver an address to the House of Commons on the 2024 Fall Economic Statement. The turmoil that erupted in Parliament in its aftermath only exacerbates the frustration of First Nations, whose critical needs remain unaddressed amid this political instability.

"At a time when our children are in crisis, and First Nations are declaring emergencies year after year, the failure to provide a clear economic

vision is unacceptable," stated Acting Grand Chief Kennedy. "First Nations in Manitoba, and across the country, have declared more than 320 emergencies over the last decade—a stark reminder of the systemic underfunding and neglect we continue to face. From infrastructure deficits and healthcare crises to the ongoing failure to implement equitable funding for First Nations children, these emergencies are preventable. Yet Canada chooses inaction over solutions. We should not have to remind Canada of its obligations to First Nations."

The Fall Economic Statement may indicate that spending for First Nations may have risen exponentially over the last ten years, but large amounts of those dollars are earmarked for claims won against the government of Canada, including the \$8 billion Safe Drinking Water compensation, \$10 billion for a Treaty Annuity Settlement, compensation to families and children for discrimination within their own CFS Program, and numerous specific claims to individual First Nations.

"The political infighting over what happened in the House of Commons yesterday, over these last few weeks with votes of non-confidence, and now the sudden resignation of Deputy Prime Minister Freeland hours before this financial update was to be presented, is not just disruptive—it's dangerous. It diverts attention from the critical issues affecting the most vulnerable. This government's failure to address First Nations' priorities in the Fall Economic Statement is a betrayal of its commitment to reconciliation," said Acting Grand Chief Kennedy.

Acting Grand Chief Kennedy emphasized that First Nations children must not be collateral damage in Canada's political turmoil. She called for immediate federal action to stabilize funding for child welfare, Jordan's Principle, and healthcare, noting the urgent need to implement the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal rulings and invest in long-term solutions to end the cycle of emergencies in First Nations.

"Reconciliation is not just a word—it's a commitment that requires action, transparency, and accountability. The lives of our children depend on it. We cannot afford to wait for political stability while our Nations are in crisis," Acting Grand Chief Kennedy added.

All federal leaders must prioritize First Nations children and communities in their economic and policy decisions, concluded the acting Grand Chief.

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# Our cover artist: Dale Auger

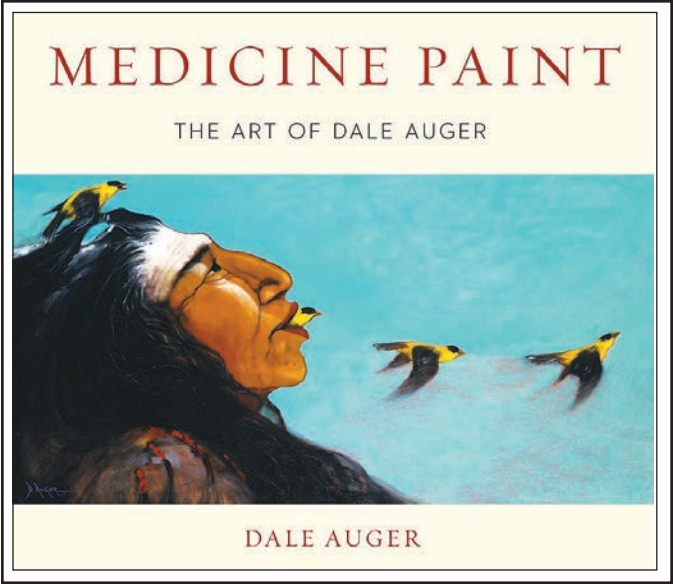
One of Canada's most evocative modern painters, Cree artist Dale Auger was a gifted interpreter of First Nations culture, who used the cross-cultural medium of art to portray scenes from the everyday to the sacred and dissemble stereotypes about Indigenous peoples. A second edition of his book *Medicine Paint: The Art of Dale Auger* was recently published. It is a collection of Auger's best work, reproduced in glorious full colour and reflecting the evolution of the artist's distinctive style. Including a revealing look back at his life and professional development, the book is a stunning tribute to the master Indigenous artist.

Auger uses bold, bright colours in his oil paintings to explore the intricate links between

spirituality and the natural laws of the land. Birds, beasts and human forms are carried from the dreamworld onto canvas, their spirits channeled through his paintbrush and presented in brilliant yellows, mystic blues, vibrant reds and swirls of black. Infusing his subjects with energy, life and colour, Dale Auger masterfully presents scenes that are powerful, spiritual and inspiring. A bald eagle is majestic in flight against a bright blue sky. An elder makes a solemn offering to the Sky Being. Horses dance playfully in the frame for a sweat lodge. A warrior draws his bow and points it skyward.

Dale Auger (1958–2008) was a Sakaw Cree artist and storyteller from the Bigstone Cree Nation in northern Alberta. He was born in High Prairie, Alberta, near that province's second-largest body of water, Lesser Slave Lake. He attended the Alberta College of Art and the University of Calgary, obtaining a master's degree in education and a PhD in education. His children's book *Mwákwa Talks to the Loon* was named Aboriginal Children's Book of the Year at the 2006 Anskohk Aboriginal Literature Festival and Book Awards and also received the 2007 R. Ross Annett Award for Children's Literature.

*Medicine Paint: The Art of Dale Auger*, published by Heritage House Press, is an epic collection of his art, featuring more than 150 of his most powerful and inspiring oil paintings. The book includes a fascinating foreword written by Mary-Beth Laviolette that chronicles Auger's artistic journey and offers insights into his perspectives on life. His art is beautifully presented



in three phases ending with his death in 2008. The display of paintings are varied and demonstrate an amazing evolution throughout his lifetime, from aspects of First Nations history and the natural laws of the land and animals, to exploring the deeper, more spiritual complexities of First Nations life in the contemporary world.

This book is dedicated to the life, artistic vision, natural spirit and lasting memory of husband, father, grandfather, artist, educator, mentor and author Dale Auger. The artist penned the preface to the book. In it he states, "I would like to think of myself as a mentor to the artists who are following or walking alongside me on this journey. The truth is that we are all part of a greater community that needs to work together to achieve our goals."

*Medicine Paint* (sku: 9781772034967) is available wherever books are sold. For more information visit [heritagehouse.ca](http://heritagehouse.ca).



Dale Auger (1958 - 2008)

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# Beautiful beading and more by Metis Cree-ations

By Regan Treewater-Lipes

Tracy and Candace Lussier are the mother-daughter-duo behind the culturally enchanting and artistically mesmerizing clothing and accessory pieces that have become identifiably part of the original collection at Metis Cree-ations. “We have always crafted together, not just my mother and I, but as a family,” explained Candace in a recent phone interview with *Alberta Native News*. “We did our first market in September of 2022, but we’ve been creating for years together. It’s just that before it would be for family and friends: first as gifts, and then by request,” she continued. “We were encouraged by those in our circle, and that’s what inspired Metis Cree-ations.”

Tracy, originally from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, learned the art of beading and sewing from her grandmother, Candace’s great-grandmother, and has passed this knowledge on to her children. The first garment Tracy learned to make were moccasins. “Sometimes when we are getting pieces ready for a farmer’s market or crafts fair the entire family gets involved,” said Tracy. “It’s all in my living room, and there will be fabric everywhere. My husband will be helping, my son will be working away, and of course Candace and I.” It is a labor of love and an outlet for inspiration. Their business is a project of passion and not necessity. “I’m a full-time ER nurse,” added Candace. “So, I can have crazy schedules. I stitch and bead when I’m not at the ER because I love it. I love being a nurse, but Metis Cree-ations is the perfect way to balance it. I respond to customer emails when I’m not at work, but it can be at odd hours.”

Although Team Lussier does continuously replenish their showcase of hand-crafted clothing

and accessories, a large portion of their business focusses on custom orders. “It’s about listening to people’s stories to be able to understand their vision. We want to bring life to what it is they imagine, and this requires communication.” Candace continued by expanding on their process for catering to customer needs. “We need to talk about the fabrics and the hides that we use so our customers understand texture and how the material will feel. To create the perfect piece for each person is always a journey for both us and them.”

Since Tracy and Candace are diligent in trying to source locally, this also necessitates building a professional network of artisans. “Sometimes a client will see a particular colour they fall in love with, and then we go to our suppliers and work with them to find it.” Listening to their customers is what Tracy and Candace’s business takes pride in. “We make many styles and different designs of earrings, but then people started coming to us and telling us how much they love the jewelry, but their ears aren’t pierced. Now we carry clip-ons, and we’ve also sourced special mounts for the backs of earrings to convert them to clip-ons,” Candace elaborated with enthusiasm wonderfully reflecting her passion for their creative process.

The two are gaining a fan-following because of their traditional designs with unique artistic embellishments. A bit of flare added to a classic ribbon skirt or some personalized embroidery on a hat stands out, and people take notice. They have been creating memorial ribbon skirts, which have been a tremendous comfort to many throughout their processes of grieving. “The journey of designing and customizing a memorial ribbon skirt can be very therapeutic for our clients,” explained Candace meaningfully.

“Every year we make beaded poppy pins for Remembrance Day. We had a lady who bought several, but asked if we could make one in purple,” Candace paused. “At first, we were like, ‘sure, of course, but why purple?’ and after mentioning it to a neighbour we learned that a purple poppy recognizes commissioned service animals. It really is so vital that we listen to the

stories our customers tell us, and we learn from them. Now we carry different colours of poppies to signify different kinds of service.”

As Metis women, Tracy and Candace, at times, feel caught between two worlds: one of European heritage, and the other of proud Indigenous inheritance. “I think we see our work as a way to promote unity,” Candace offered. “We’ve had some beautiful teachings passed down to us through generations of family, and we’re sharing that with a greater community.” When asked if they feel that non-Indigenous clientele purchasing and wearing their one-of-a-kind fashions smacks of cultural appropriation, Candace responded emphatically: “No, when non-Indigenous customers are drawn to our work and appreciate it, I’m honoured.” Tracy added: “Yes, I agree. When people take an interest in any of our pieces it’s because something resonates with them, and they’re open to learning about what inspired the work.”

Metis Cree-ations has a vibrant and active social media presence. “We prefer it when people contact us by email. It’s because of my schedule as a nurse, since I handle communications with customers, a standard business phone isn’t always the most practical: I’m quick with replying though,” added Candace. Despite only officially establishing as a business in the past few years, Metis Cree-ations is solidifying its presence within the realm of Indigenous crafts. Those interested in browsing their ever-evolving collection should check them out on Facebook and Instagram and contact them at metis.creations@gmail.com.

Regan Treewater-Lipes is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter



Look for Metis Cree-ations at craft markets in Edmonton and area. Contact them by email at metis.creations@gmail.com

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# Owl River Métis Community partners to build solar power plants

By Jeremy Appel, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Owl River Métis Community has entered into an agreement with Culture Pathways Development Corp to build three solar power plants in Lac La Biche, which are expected to generate a combined 65 megawatts of clean energy once they go online.

The partnership was officially announced at a Dec. 16 press conference at Edmonton’s Fairmont Hotel Macdonald.

The plans consist of a small five-megawatt, medium 20-megawatt and large 40-megawatt plant, which a handout provided to attendees said will be used to power hydroponic agriculture, AI and blockchain data centres and green hydrogen production.

Jack Quintal, president of the Owl River Métis Community, which is located at Lac La Biche’s northeastern shore, told attendees that the development will be “huge for our youth, our Elders [and] our culture that we need to bring back.”

“Aboriginal people always believe in good practice, and to me this is good practice, because we’ll take the energy from the sun and utilize that in our homes and businesses,” he told reporters.

Quintal anticipates that the project will create between 880 and 1,150 permanent jobs in Lac La Biche once all three plants are built—between 80 and 100 at the five-megawatt facility, 300 and 350 at the 20-megawatt plant, and 500 and 700 at the 40-megawatt facility.

Speaking to reporters, Culture Pathways CEO Charlie Chen noted that Lac La Biche is a suitable location for these plants, because it’s located outside the 70,000 sq-km “buffer zone” for renewable energy projects in western Alberta the provincial government imposed earlier this month.

It’s also outside 82,000 sq-km of provincially mandated “visual impact assessment zones,”

which include Wood Buffalo National Park in the north and Cypress Hills Provincial Park in the south. Renewable energy projects in these areas require an automatic review of their potential impact on the surrounding landscape.

“The Owl River area is [an] unimpacted zone, so that is a great area for us to put the solar power plants,” explained Chen.

The abundance of agricultural land in the area is an added bonus, which enables the solar plants to provide clean power to local greenhouses, and northern Alberta’s chilly climate “makes it a perfect location to build data centers,” he said.

According to Chen, the 5-megawatt plant will be the first to get built, with construction beginning in 2026, while the larger plants are expected to take a few years before getting the approvals necessary to begin construction.

Chen said his company plans on applying for regulatory approval for the small plant next month, but representatives have already reached out to the Alberta Utilities Commission, which regulates electricity development in the province.

Building all three plants is expected to cost between \$100 million and \$120 million over a span of three to five years, Chen added.

He said Culture Pathways is in talks with Royal Bank of Canada, the Bank for Canadian Entrepreneurs and the Canada Investment Bank, as well as a Hong Kong mutual fund, to secure funding for the project.

The project has the support of the Lakeland Métis Nation, which is also based in Lac La Biche, and the Fort McKay Métis Nation, both of which had representatives speak at the announcement.

Owl River, Lakeland and Fort McKay are all members of the Alberta Métis Federation, which consists of seven communities that broke away from the Métis Nation of Alberta in 2020.



Culture Pathways Development Corp. CEO Charlie Chen and Owl River Métis Community president Jack Quintal.

“It’s vital that we support each other, whether it’s renewable energy, environmental stewardship or economic development, our shared vision helps create a stronger collective future,” said Lakeland Métis Nation president Melina Power.

“Projects like the solar initiative are excellent examples of how partnerships and collaboration can inspire and benefit everyone involved.”

Dwayne Roth, CEO of the McKay Métis Group, a company owned by Fort McKay Métis Nation, said the partnership between Owl River and Culture Pathways is an example of how Indigenous communities are playing an increasingly active role in economic development on their lands.

“It used to be that communities would get together with a joint venture partner, sign on the dotted line and basically do nothing else, sit back, and collect a couple little royalty checks, maybe as their partner, with no real investment, no real say in the development,” said Roth.

He identified former premier Jason Kenney’s 2019 establishment of the \$1-billion Indigenous Opportunities Corporation as a turning point, which enabled Indigenous communities to take an active ownership role in projects on their lands.

“This particular initiative is part of that trend,” Roth said. “The Owl River Métis actually own the land that this is going to be developed on, so it’s a true partnership on Métis land.”

## ME concedes cont. from p 2

conducted a “complete review of our office’s investigation” into Bourque’s death, adding that he’s received “several letters... from friends and community members” echoing Yiu’s request.

Upon reviewing the investigation into Bourque’s death with Dr. Daniel Smyk, who wrote the original medical examiner’s report, the

physicians concluded “that based on the balance of probabilities, the death occurred accidentally,” Coetzee-Khan wrote to Yiu.

An amended medical examiner’s report now notes that since completing its initial investigation, the OCME “received additional collateral information and background social history regarding Ms. Bourque which prompted a review of the findings and conclusions.”

“There are still some aspects of the collision that are unclear, but given the new information, the manner of death has been amended to accidental,” Smyk wrote.

While the original autopsy report said that Bourque “made no

attempt to swerve away or slow down,” the amended version, citing an RCMP Technical Collision Investigation Report, noted that Bourque did move her foot from the accelerator pedal to the brake pedal, but by the time she did it was too late.

Bishop noted that there were no traffic cones surrounding the stationary water truck, which would have provided an advance warning to Bourque to slow down.

He added that police told him that there’s no legal requirement for there to be traffic cones or signage to protect drivers.

Section 194 of Alberta’s Occupational Health and Safety Code requires the use of “lane control devices” if workers are put in danger of highway traffic. It doesn’t deal with risks to drivers.

“I’ve towed for just under 50 years, I’ve been in McMurray just about 52 years now,” said Bishop. “The laws have to change.”

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and laughter this holiday season  
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# Helpful tools to use over the holidays

By Laura Mushumanski, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Time during and leading up to Christmas can be heart heavy and distressing for a lot of people. Factoring in grief within Indigenous communities, the economy impacted by natural disasters, daily challenges—various things can impact a person’s health and well-being. And when asking for help, it can be overwhelming, another barrier can be not knowing who to trust, and or not knowing how to ask for help. The following psychological insights, tools and resources can also support a person when there may be barriers from accessing support for a person’s emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual health and well-being.

An Indigenous counselling therapist who has been working in the area of mental health for the past 15 years, and founder of Mamisewin Counselling & Consulting Services, Joanna Gladue shared her insight, resources and tools to support all our relatives during the holiday season.

Gladue, a member of Bigstone Cree Nation and resident of Edmonton takes pride in being an Indigenous woman, a mother of two and proud to see her children do well and be independent. Her goal is to provide compassionate support and guidance to those around her.

Being well-versed in trauma-informed therapy, curriculum development and facilitation, Gladue also travels to different communities across Alberta to provide in-person counselling and facilitate trauma informed workshops, focusing on Indigenous Mental Wellness and land-based learning while creating partnerships and building relationships with communities.

The first thing that came to mind for Gladue when sharing insight towards expectations during the holidays was, “set realistic expectations for yourself”—speaking to how many people have an idea of what the holidays should be like, instead “do what feels right for you, spend time with whatever family looks like for you, and know that’s okay [for having these expectations].”

Gladue emphasised “prioritizing yourself ... whatever self-care looks like for you, taking time

for self and reflecting, being on the land [is also important], even changing body temperature just by feeling the snow [makes a big difference].” These insights come from her practice within somatic therapy, teaching us to connect with our senses, like when we smudge, same goes with connecting with the land. She recommends going outside for a walk, bundling up, and breathing in the cold air. Take your time to feel yourself grounded and really connected to the land.

Anxiety around large gatherings also could surface and feelings of pressure might occur. Gladue shared, “consider limiting social media use and try not to reflect on the past hardship.”

A few somatic practices to try when feeling overwhelmed, Gladue suggests are: Engage with the body, do some stretching; Breathing exercises (box breathing on YouTube); Slowing down, get yourself centered; and Process feelings without reacting to them.

Regulation, another important way to center oneself as “healing part of yourself,” Gladue spoke about finding balance, “Focus on what you are capable of doing, ignore the ‘should’—from others and yourself. ‘Should’ is a driving word that can create a trauma vortex, tune out expectations about ‘you should be doing this, [instead] “focus on gratitude by naming 3 things you are grateful for.”

She offers the following insights: Connecting with loved ones and friends is important, it is also important to set boundaries of what you are capable of doing and what you cannot; give yourself permission to rest and move at a slower pace.

“Self-sovereignty, [meaning] bringing it back to who you are, put [your own] perspective into



Joanna Gladue

self-healing, and normalize mental health and wellness by reaching out for support and help,” Gladue shared her understanding of mental health being “no different than going to the doctor.”

A holistic approach to wellness: mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Ask yourself, what is it you are doing for each?

What are some things that you can do to connect with your wellness? List activities you can do for yourself that connect you with your true self. A few activities could be reading, listening or playing music, going to ceremony, dancing, learning, laughing, journaling, drawing, arts and crafts, and exercising.

And when speaking to self-healing, remember to “honour where you are at.... recognize and acknowledge losses you had—relationships, jobs, stability, loved ones... healing encompasses so much. You don’t have to carry all this yourself. There are supports. There is a way out. Trust your inner spirit and voice, don’t be afraid, there is always hope. You have a lot of things to be grateful for.”

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# First claim period for FNCFS to open March 10, 2025

Class Members of the First Nations Child and Family Services and Jordan's Principle Settlement will be able to submit their Claims for compensation starting on March 10, 2025.

The first Claims Period to open is for the Removed Claims Class and the Removed Child Family Class, which represent two of nine Classes included in the Settlement. These first two Classes include First Nations individuals who were removed from their homes as Children between April 1, 1991, and March 31, 2022, while on reserve or in the Yukon and placed into care funded by Indigenous Services Canada, as well as their Caregiving Parents or Caregiving Grandparents.

When the first Claims Period opens, Removed Child and Removed Child Family Class Members can make their Claim for compensation by submitting a Claim Form to the Administrator. Until then, compensation is not available.

Individuals who are adults (Age of Majority) as of March 10, 2025 will have three years from the date the Claims Period opens to submit their Claim; however, minors (those who have not reached Age of Majority as of March 10, 2025) will have three years from the date they reach the Age of Majority to submit their Claim.

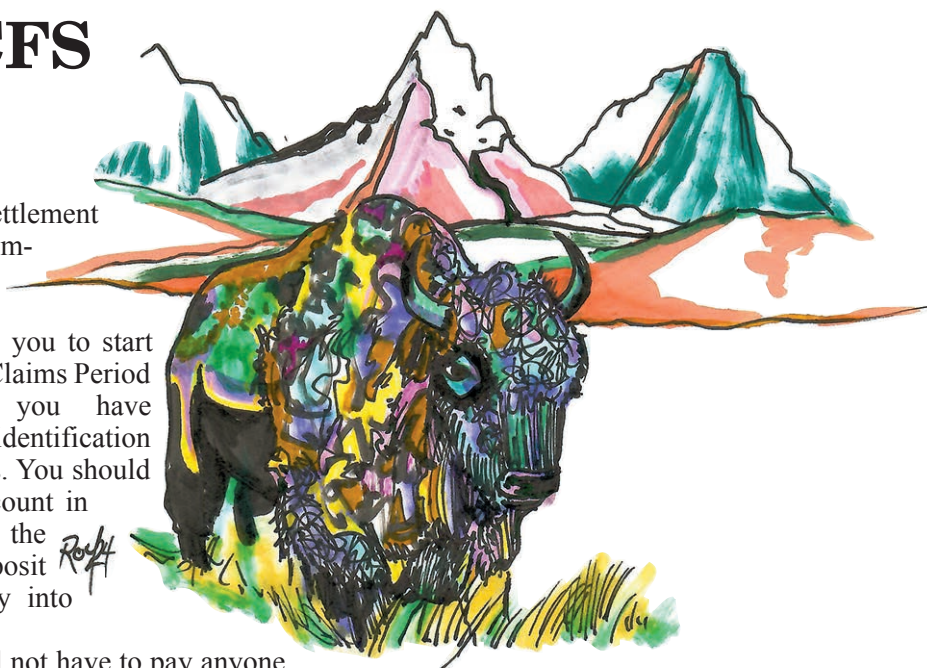
"Class Members can take steps now to prepare for when the Claims Period opens," says David Sterns, Class Counsel, partner at Sotos LLP

and member of the Settlement Implementation Committee. “If you are planning to submit a Claim, we encourage you to start getting ready for the Claims Period by making sure you have government-issued identification and a mailing address. You should also have a bank account in your name so that the Administrator can deposit compensation directly into your account.”

Class Members will not have to pay anyone to help them submit their Claim to receive payment under this Settlement.

Several resources and supports will be available at no cost to help Class Members submit a Claim. Currently, the Settlement's Contact Centre (1-833-852-0755) is open Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. ET to 8 p.m. ET, excluding statutory holidays. Once the Claims Period opens, the Contact Centre will also be able to connect Class Members to Claims Helpers, who can provide one-on-one support with completing the Claim Form virtually or in-person, where available. Claims Helpers can also assist Class Members with connecting to local services and wellness resources.

General information and updates about the



Settlement and the Claims Process are available to Class Members through the First Nations Child and Family Services and Jordan's Principle website. Class Members who have questions about the Settlement can also contact the Administrator at 1-833-852-0755.

Mental health counselling and crisis support is available to Class Members 24 hours a day through the Hope for Wellness Helpline at 1-855-242-3310 or at the Hope for Wellness website. Counselling is available in English, French, Cree and Ojibway upon request. Children and youth can also call the Kids Help Phone anytime at 1-800-668-6868 or text FIRSTNATIONS to 686868.

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**By John Wirth, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter**

The event was paired with live music for the entire three days in the museum. The lineup

Lorrie shared that “we had visitors from Nunavut to Prince George, and we had a total of 103 vendors and artists. Marcell was the featured



**Emcee Lance Cardinal**

Speaking about the early days and the importance of maintaining a sense of humour when you are interacting with customers, she says “We started in 2018 in the farmers markets with a single tent...When they laugh, it’s important to share that it’s our experience on a daily basis. If we meet it with adversity, we are only going to get that back.” Wisely she adds that a little humour and jokes can go a long way to dismantling barriers that Indigenous people negotiate daily.



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# I see you, I hear you, I honour you

By Laura Mushumanski, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

*sâkihitin...* I love you in *nehiyawewin* translates to the bond, insight, and understanding that we have towards all our relatives—including the green people, our winged friends, the ones that live in the waters, the four legged, the two legged, and all that reside on Mother Earth. And embedded in this understanding is love being a by-product of how we honour we each other, acknowledge one another, take care of each other, and walk beside each other as a reflection of how we honour ourselves in our wholeness of messy, of wild spirits, of being the ultimate auntie or uncle some days, and of what it is to be human—an adventure of a lifetime, a learning journey of what speaks to each one of our gifts that we get to share with the world..

When thinking about love in a way that honours all our relatives, the sense of community and togetherness, the bonds and connections we form over time, our *nehiyawe* sister, Michelle Nieviadomy speaks to self-love as a transformation of ‘what was’ that leans into ‘welcome home.’ Michelle braids the understanding of health as taking care of the body physically, as well as emotionally, mentally, and spiritually through teachings of love and has supported communities within and outside of Edmonton, Alberta for over 16 years, and

continues to thrive in ways that speaks to *wahkohtowin* understandings of how we can ‘take care of each other.’

This journey for Michelle started when she was an *iskwesis*, a little girl, in the flat lands of southern Saskatchewan while watching her mother exercise her buns and guns, as a way to connect with her spirit, that ultimately contributed to what Michelle understands as ‘self-love.’ For Michelle, Iskew Health, started as a dream where at the time Indigenous women’s fitness and wellness was taboo, to present day being able to reach Indigenous women across turtle island on the moccasin telegram we call Facebook. And as Michelle’s visions grew, so did she as a woman, where the *iskotew*, the fire inside her became a product of another adventure into supporting community through outreach, Healing Her Homefire.

The one thing that Michelle found healing in, became a daily practice of prayer, honouring our ancestors by walking with ceremony that helped her find her gifts and how she could share them with the world. Michelle, also the Assistant Director at Edmonton Native Healing Centre, continues to enrich her life, so in turn can give back to community in a good way. As the next generations start to step into their learning



Iskew health: Michelle Nieviadomy

journey, Michelle is beside them, along with her next adventures into counselling psychology as both health and healing practices of walking alongside community.

Healing Her Homefire is always looking for volunteers to support community. The most recent community care gathering for Healing Her Homefire began December 15, 2024; if anyone would like to start being a part of community care in the new year, please reach out to Healing Her Homefire.

For any Iskew interested in being a part of community wellness, there are ongoing events posted on Iskew Health’s Facebook page and Website.

## Confederacy of Treaty 6 appoints new Grand Chief

The Confederacy of Treaty No. 6 First Nations has announced that Chief Gregory Desjarlais is its new Grand Chief.

Succeeding Chief Cody Thomas, Grand Chief Desjarlais has been officially appointed to his new role during a transfer ceremony. His duties as Grand Chief will formally commence on January 1 for the duration of one year.

“It’s my honour to be able to serve my People and accept the role of Grand Chief,” says Grand Chief Desjarlais. “Over the next year, I will continue to advocate for recognition of Treaty rights and inclusion of First Nations’ representation at all levels of decision making.

I am passionate about the well-being, prosperity and cultural preservation of People and during my tenure I will work towards ensuring these goals are advanced.”

During his term, Grand Chief Desjarlais’ priorities will focus on affordable housing for Indigenous Peoples on- and off-reserve, establishing community driven First Nations policing services, exploring revenue sharing opportunities and continuing to build relationships with all levels of government.

Grand Chief Desjarlais was elected as Chief of Frog Lake First Nation on April 16, 2019, where he continues to serve after three successful terms. Aside from his duties as Chief, he sits on various boards and has played a pivotal role in numerous Indigenous stakeholder engagement initiatives, all aimed at improving the quality of life within



Grand Chief Greg Desjarlais

Indigenous communities. Born in High Prairie to Albert and Alma Desjarlais, Grand Chief Desjarlais and his wife Benita have three children and find grandchildren.

### Happy Holidays

May your days be filled with Peace, Hope and Health this holiday season.

We wish you strength, success and prosperity in the coming year.

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# For my brother Philip

By Xavier Kataquapit

I'm dedicating this column to my late brother Philip Kataquapit who passed away on Christmas Day in 1990 at the age of 16.

Philip was a very charismatic character. Everyone loved him and wanted to be around him. I always felt that he was a great combination of so many characters in our family all rolled up in one person. He was handsome, slender and tall like the men in mom's side of the family. He was exciting, quick witted, funny and ready to laugh like dad's side of the family. Guys wanted to be his friend because he was so easy to be with. Girls hovered around him because he was a handsome confident young man. He was well connected with our traditional culture as dad had often taken him out hunting, trapping and fishing from the time he was really young. He was the youngest out of my four older brothers with Lawrence being the eldest, then Mario, then Anthony and lastly Philip. Myself and my younger brothers Joseph and Paul always looked up to our older siblings as being real traditional hunters who knew how to survive on the land. Philip was theatrical and sensitive and could easily send my mom Susan and my sisters Jackie and Janie into fits of laughter. He was the type of boy that lit up the room when he walked in.

Whenever I think of him I see him in so many different ways. He will always be my older brother so I always see him as wiser and smarter than me. Now 34 years later, I think more and more of him as a young 16 year old that was getting ready for the world.

Like all our Christmases when I was growing up, 1990 was a chaotic dysfunctional mess of activity. Philip took part in it all as a teenager and like many of us, unaware of the dangers surrounding us in the middle of the wilderness in freezing weather. In the midst of party time

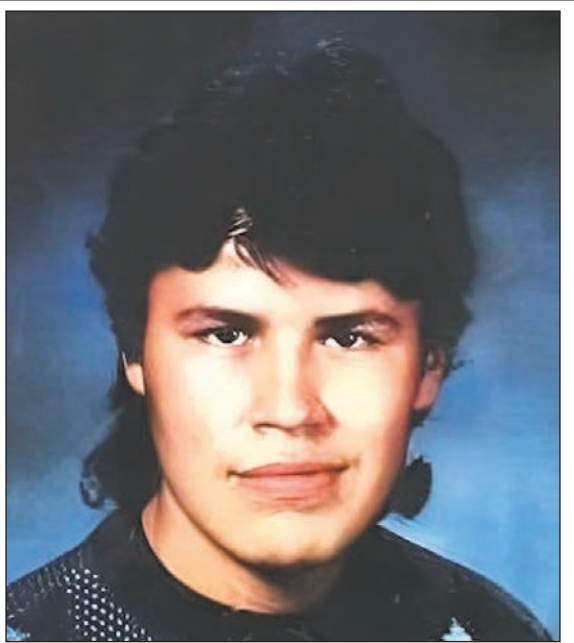
Christmas culture, Philip innocently grabbed a snowmachine on Christmas Eve to visit his friends in Kashechewan, 90 kilometers away to the south. The winter road was still a very rough road back then but it was a path that he had gone on with our dad several times.

He left the community on his own with the confidence he had been taught about living on the land but he was unprepared and ill equipped for this freezing ride. He ran out of fuel a third of the way and ended up near the Kapiskau River which dad had taken him and my brothers hunting to years before. He knew there were hunting cabins nearby so he made his way there to shelter himself from the cold. He arrived at the cabins with nothing and no way to keep warm.

Christmas Day in 1990 arrived without Philip and my parents and family were worried but they thought he must be overnighing at a friends home nearby in town. It didn't take long for everyone to sound the alarm that he was missing and search parties started wandering the community at first and then fanned out further. They found his abandoned snowmachine a day later and soon after discovered his final resting place at the hunting camp.

I was only 14 years of age and suddenly my life had taken a dark turn and everything was just a blur in time. I was numbed to the point that all I could do was carry on but with a sadness and guilt that tore at me. My entire family changed that day, however thankfully my mom Susan and my dad Marius were comforted by the fact that our family swelled with dozens of grandchildren. This made things easier although Christmas had become a day of a bizarre mix of joy and deep sadness.

My siblings and I will never forget our brother Philip. So many of our family, cousins, friends



Philip Kataquapit at 16 years of age

and relatives all along the James Bay coast will never forget him. He was loved by so many people in the short time he was with us. My brother's memory and so many other tragedies that my family and others have had to endure this time of year is the reason why I am always adamant about reminding everyone of the dangers of addictions, alcoholism or abuse and taking risks in the freezing cold. What seems like casual partying can take tragic turns when young people take risks. These days I worry about all of those teens as I realize the risk that one little pill laced with a tiny amount of fentanyl can easily kill.


I wish everyone a Merry Christmas but with the memory of my late amazing and kind brother Philip, I urge everyone to be easy with each other and watch out for one another during this festive but chaotic time of the year.

For more columns by Xavier Kataquapit visit [underthenorthernsky.com](http://underthenorthernsky.com).

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Merry Christmas. Wishing you a safe and happy holiday season!

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# Second Story Press Indigenous Writing Contest is Open!

Second Story Press recently announced the launch of their fourth Indigenous Writing Contest, inviting submissions from Indigenous writers. Second Story is excited to hold this new contest in partnership with GoodMinds.com - a First Nation owned business based on the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory in Brantford, Ontario, with a passion for books by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit authors. Both companies are excited to see what books will come from the contest this year, adding to the profound range of Indigenous literature.

This contest focuses on contemporary writing that reflects the experience of Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) Peoples written by an Indigenous writer aged 18 or older. All entrants must be citizens or permanent residents of Canada. The contest is open to manuscripts written for young children, middle grade, young adult, or adult audiences. The winner will be

offered a publishing contract from Second Story Press. The jury will be particularly interested in contemporary stories with an urban setting.

The contest deadline is January 31st, 2025. All entries must be made online via Submittable.

Previous winners and runners-up of the Second Story Press Indigenous Writing Contest include *Naaahsa is an Artist!* by Hali Heavy Shield; *Auntie's Rez Surprise* by Heather O'Watch; *The Train* by Jodie Callaghan; *The Case of Windy Lake* by Michael Hutchinson; *Stolen Words* by Melanie Florence; *The Mask That Sang* by Susan Currie; *What's in a Bead?* by Kelsey Borgford; and *The Water Walker* by Joanne Robertson.

The jury for the contest will be announced shortly, and the winner(s) will be announced in spring 2025. For complete information on the submission process, go to Submittable.

Contact [contest@secondstorypress.ca](mailto:contest@secondstorypress.ca) for all inquiries.



Snowy Setting © by Linus Woods. Available for purchase at [WakinaGallery.com](http://WakinaGallery.com)

# OMG advocates for Alberta Métis in Sixties Scoop Hearing

A class action aiming to hold Canada accountable for the harms it inflicted on Métis and non-status Indian children in the Sixties Scoop is currently before the courts. From December 9-12, the Otipemisiwak Métis Government (OMG) participated as an intervener in the summary judgment hearing in *Varley et al v. The Attorney General of Canada* (“**Varley Action**”). The Otipemisiwak Métis Government is seeking justice for the many Métis children taken from their parents, families, and communities in this heinous act of cultural genocide.

“This marks a pivotal moment in our ongoing journey toward justice for Métis Citizens who—through no fault of their own—were victims of Canada’s deliberate efforts to erase their identity as Indigenous people,” said Andrea Sandmaier, President of the Otipemisiwak Métis Government. “While we remain hopeful that the Court will recognize Canada’s responsibility for its actions—taking our children, disrupting our families, and stripping us of our ability to pass down our language, traditions, and culture—we know that true justice extends beyond addressing the harm done to individual victims. Our government is committed to holding Canada accountable for the profound damage inflicted on

the Métis Nation within Alberta as a collective. We will continue to work tirelessly to ensure our future generations are rooted in the richness of our Métis heritage.”

Brooke Bramfield, Secretary of Children and Family Services for the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, added, “the Sixties Scoop tore children away from the heart of their Métis identity, leaving scars that continue to affect families and communities today. As a government, we continue to seek accountability as we work to ensure that future generations of Métis children never experience the same erasure of their culture, language, and heritage.”

The Varley Action was brought in the wake of the 2018 Sixties Scoop settlement, which excluded Métis and non-status Indian victims from the compensation Canada promised victims. The summary judgment motion will address whether Canada had a responsibility to protect Métis and non-status Indian children who were taken from their families in the Sixties Scoop, and if Canada had a special obligation to act in the best interests of



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those children. Canada, for its part, denies responsibility and argues that the victims’ claims are out of time because the limitation period has lapsed.

WISHING YOU AND  
YOUR FAMILY A VERY  
*Merry Christmas*



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LEGEND

The Sacred Rock is provided by the Lac La Ronge Band, Curriculum Resource Unit who are dedicated to providing quality educational resources to all the people of the First Nations.

The Sacred Rock

Collected and illustrated by James Ratt; told by Jean Roberts



Long ago, there lived a widow who had two small boys. She made two small bows with arrows and taught them how to use them.

One day, she told them to go out and shoot some birds to eat. “Later, I will make you stronger bows so that you can shoot bigger game,” she told them.

She put some ready cooked meat in a bag and told them to sit on a large rock when they got hungry and wanted to eat.

One day while the boys were eating their lunch on a large rock, they heard a voice saying, “I’d like to tell you boys a story.”

They looked all around but did not see anyone so they kept on eating.

“Shall I tell you some stories?” the voice asked again. It was coming from the rock they were sitting on.

“What kind of stories do you tell?” the boys asked then. The rock said he told stories of

things that happened a long time ago. He said, “If you will give me your birds, I will tell you many stories.”

The two brothers laid their ducks and geese beside the rock and sat close to it as it told them strange stories and legends. It was almost sunset when the voice from the rock said, “You have to go home now, but come back tomorrow and I will tell you more stories.”

On their way home, the boys shot three birds each. When their mother asked why they didn’t have more, they said the ducks and geese were getting scarce. The same thing happened the next day and also the day after.

The mother knew that her children were not telling the truth. So, she went to the Chief and told him the problem.

The Chief said, “I will send two men tomorrow to follow your sons to see what they are doing with their catch.”

This was done and the two men watched the boys shoot ten birds each. The boys then laid them down beside the rock.

As the men watched, they were surprised to hear a voice coming from the rock saying, “Bring all the people from your village here tomorrow. Tell them to bring some food or a gift and I will tell them many stories.”

The Chief and all the people were astonished to hear what the braves had to tell. The Chief said, “We will do as the rock says.”

Everyone took gifts or some food and



went to the talking rock.

When the people had all made their offerings, they sat down around the stone and the voice began to speak. It told wonderful stories of beautiful lands and strange creatures. It told of animals that could talk to one another and of people yet to come to this land.

When it was almost sundown, the rock said, “I have told you many stories and it is up to you to keep them as long as the world lasts. Tell them to your children and grandchildren but make sure they always place tobacco or a little food before the story tellers.”

The rock never spoke again, but for many years



the people visited the sacred stone. Today, some old people still remember those legends and stories. When you visit old people, you should always carry a gift. The old person will never refuse it.

NEWSPAPER FOR SALE

After 40 years of publishing the Alberta Native News, the owners wish to retire.

We are hoping some enterprising individual(s) with a passion for communicating Indigenous issues will carry on with publishing the newspaper. It is not easy in this day and age to produce a print media with a supporting digital presence but it is something that serves a vital interest for the Indigenous communities across Treaty 6, 7 and 8 territories.

**Expressions of interest from serious individuals are welcome.**

**Please contact Deborah Shatz, [nativeads@gmail.com](mailto:nativeads@gmail.com)**





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# Helping Indigenous women remember who they are

By Laura Mushumanski, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Embedded within Mother Earth is a beautiful composition made up of broken-down organic matter, dense minerals, water, air, and tiny organisms going about their day to help all that reside on Mother Earth be nourished emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually. Then there are these certain stones made purely out of carbon and are rare to find, diamonds. And within the understanding of our natural environment being in a constant state of transformation by going through dark periods, only to come to realize that the contrast to darkness is light, medicine is found.

These diamonds that are formed deep within Mother Earth under pressure and heat, become one of the most sought-after gemstones. The color, clarity, and transparency of a diamond molds these precious stones into being valued for their rarity. And the medicine, the spirit of these gemstones and their teachings, collectively share the understanding that us Indigenous people, we go through dark times, trials and tribulations until one day—we come to know things differently. That we are the medicine within our own medicine wheel, and how we can transform from organic matter into understanding our gifts and the process that leads to acts of humility.

The medicine that started to be understood, that was found during a state of transformation similar to what a diamond goes through is shared within community by our iskwee sister from Samson Cree Nation and current Edmonton, Alberta resident, Natasha Delany. What started out as wanting to find inner peace and self-confidence led to an adventure of a lifetime for Natasha. Her story of experiencing systemic racism within her foster home and being a part of cultural genocide that has shaped our Indigenous brothers and sisters here on Turtle Island, one day Delany came to a tipping point in her life. After years of ongoing hardship and not understanding what happens in the body from experienced trauma, Natasha's worst fear became her reality—coping with active addictions and reaching the lowest point in her life.

The lived experiences that shaped Natasha's worldview started to shift when she started to connect to herself and community, that ultimately transformed her current worldview into possibilities. The 12-step meetings she attended, becoming a part of a ceremony family, listening to leaders and mentors share their story—all these positive influences shaped the trajectory of Natasha's learning journey.

Coming to the realization that she never finished anything she started; the devoted mother went back to school to finish a business degree (BA) through NAIT, that birthed the start of Natasha's Indigenous Projects & Events to empower connections and build meaningful relationships between Indigenous people and enterprise through experiences. This led Natasha's curiosity to grow, where her unquenchable thirst for knowledge, and like the wind spirit with a mighty force, took her to obtaining a Master of Business Administration (MBA) through University Canada West. As Natasha began to shift perspectives and coming to know the beauty within Indigenous culture, she also came across a mastermind program that became the start of Diamonds Mastermind with Delany Enterprises Inc., officially launching the program in September of 2024.

The Diamonds Mastermind program, the teachings and experiences similar to being in a sweat lodge, of rebirth, renewal, reconnection, all shape the transformation of Indigenous women entrepreneurs becoming a part of Indigenous economic reconciliation and resurgence. The 6-month program takes learners on a journey of rewiring neuro pathways, the western science explanation for Indigenous understandings of healing and shifting behaviours, so that these women that Natasha walks beside find confidence in themselves to be able to find their medicine and share their gifts with community in a good way.

The second cohort for the 6-month Diamonds Mastermind program starts online on January 11th, 2025, with 16 courageous Indigenous women being able to be part of finding the contrast between darkness and light as their gifts to the world. These opportunities that contribute to shaping the longevity of our economy, is life-changing, shifts beliefs, heals past traumas and fosters exponential growth—our future leaders and change makers.

Delany Enterprises Inc. believes in the practice of co-creating, where community partners make these transformative journeys for Indigenous women entrepreneurs into a reality. Whether through funding, sponsorship, or connecting



Delany Enterprises Inc. with others who might be interested in being part of Indigenous economic reconciliation and resurgence, these contributions make a profound impact for everyone. Anyone interested in continuing to bring this vision to life, and or being a participant in the Diamonds Mastermind program, please reach out to Natasha Delany with Delany Enterprises Inc., so together we can change lives and redefine what is possible; LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Official Website, and Contact Information.

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