like her to stand with us as equal partners to build a road forward based on mutual acceptance of our respective nationhood. Then, and only then, will reconciliation be possible.

From Truth Telling: Seven Conversations about Indigenous Life in Canada

by Michelle Good

RACISM, CAREFULLY SOWN

IT WAS 1949 WHEN MY FATHER SHARED HIS plans to marry my mother with his family. They would wed in late summer. My grandmother's reaction was disappointing, to say the least. She took to her bed for days and swore my father would be disowned if he followed through; that his choice of a wife was a disgrace and would bring the family into disrepute. My grandmother's response had nothing to do with my mother's character or conduct. In fact, at the time, my mother was a bit of a celebrity, feted in the national press upon her return from New Zealand, where she had trained as a nurse and a midwife. This and her other

accomplishments would have been extraordinary for any Canadian woman in the 1940s but so much more for my Cree mother. At the age of nine, she was forced to leave her family at the Red Pheasant Indian Reserve to attend the St. Barnabas Indian Residential School in Onion Lake, Saskatchewan. She was subjected to many of the brutalities that are commonly known to have occurred in those institutions. They certainly were not schools. She spoke no English when she arrived at St. Barnabas and so would have been punished for speaking Cree until she could pick up enough English words to get by. She spoke of always being hungry and the terrible food; the slurs that were thrown at her and, tragically, watching her friend Lily hemorrhage to death on the playground from advanced tuberculosis. The little girl was one of the thousands who died alone and far from home. The government was well aware of the extreme death rates associated with the rampant spread of tuberculosis in the institutions as their own study, conducted by Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, confirmed and condemned the deplorable conditions

and the resulting death rates. Nonetheless, Canada refused to make the necessary changes to stem the tide of tuberculosis infection, knowing full well the children were dying at rates as high as 50 per cent in some schools.

There was a violence inherent in the colonial framework of these institutions. Young girls were targeted in many ways, with particular emphasis on undermining their sense of themselves as eventually taking their rightful places in the matriarchy of their communities. When my mother refused to eat tainted food, she was made to sit for hours upon hours on a hard chair in the dining room, being told she would sit there until she ate the food. So, there she sat until it became clear to her jailers that she would not bend to their will. So instead, she was dragged before the principal, who was quick to tell her she was "nothing but an Indian slut and would never be anything but an Indian slut." She was eleven years old. Since the earliest days of colonization, this sexually charged characterization of Indigenous women was a carefully curated one. The story of Pocahontas is a prime example.

Settler Americans have re-characterized this story as a love story. That could not be further from the truth. A child when she first met John Smith, Pocahontas helped him obtain a rudimentary ability in her language while she also learned English. She assisted Smith in his negotiations about the land and where he was permitted to settle. Although Pocahontas was only twelve years old, artistic representations of her at the time portray this child as a highly sexualized adult woman. She was depicted as a princess, which both objectified her and presented her in a way that made other Native Americans seem less civilized.

The principal's response to my mother's defiance was to silence, demean, and disempower her. His weapon of choice was to resort to a derogatory, sexualized attack on her character. This careful creation of Indigenous women as lustful sexual objects was well established by the time my father shared his plans to marry an Indigenous woman. Shock and horror were the predictable responses from my non-Indigenous grandmother, stemming from a conditioned racist and deroga-

tory understanding of what it meant to be an Indigenous woman.

I often wonder what made my mother rise up so furiously, to accomplish things so beyond the reach of an Indigenous woman in Canada in the 1940s. But rise she did. Having been raised as a self-respecting person in our Cree ways, perhaps it was the outrage she felt at her treatment at St. Barnabas that inspired her wild dreams. My mother, like so many children, contracted tuberculosis in the institution. Treatment was rudimentary in the 1930s, and she was subjected to forced bed rest for three years in the St. Michaels' Sanatorium in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. She would have had so much time to think; time to dream, and for a plan to take shape. She wrote letters endlessly, looking for a way to get an education at a time when training beyond the ninth grade was prohibited for Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Upon her release, she somehow managed to find some support and won a scholarship to train with the Canadian Mothercraft Society in Toronto. Upon completion of the program, she was hired by a wealthy family

in Toronto as a nanny. Her world opened up with that job. The family took her everywhere with them, including such unlikely destinations, for a little Rez girl, as New York City, San Francisco, and Bermuda. It was another scholarship that took her to New Zealand for three years to train as a nurse and a midwife. Upon her return to Canada, she was inundated with offers from various universities, each accompanied by a full scholarship. She was thirty years old at this point, an accomplished, worldly, and educated woman. She had risen up against the odds of her circumstances and attained the benchmarks in a life that distinguish a person and imbue them with credentials worthy of respect.

But none of this mattered to my grandmother. All that mattered was that my mother was Cree, and any children from the union with my father would be even worse. They would be "half breeds." After my parents married, my grandmother continued to torment my mother. During my mother's first pregnancy, my grandmother invited her to tea with her lady friends and announced her pregnancy by stating that my mother was "having puppies." She never missed an opportunity to degrade my mother and shame my father for marrying her.

Back then, as it still is now, racism was rampant in Saskatchewan. It's difficult for me to think about how so many people felt the impact of this hatefulness. My mother's situation was playing out in 1949, against the backdrop of the end of the Second World War, the role of Canadians in liberating survivors of the Holocaust still fresh in the collective consciousness. These were heady days when notions of human rights were gaining international momentum through the League of Nations and, ultimately, the establishment of the United Nations. *Never Again* carried a promise of a better world, an inclusive world. Paris, December 1948, and the lofty language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights rang out, lifting people up, asking them to insist on a world where *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.*[12] How could my mother have been treated this way at a time when the world was railing against intolerance and racial hatred? Was it because my

grandmother was a monster? Was her racism unusual? No. Sadly, she was a Canadian prairie woman of her time. Her attitudes, prejudices, and outright social brutality were the culmination of generations of conditioning that led to attitudes that only the most agile and critical mind could escape. Her parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were settlers, and if not active participants in the violent subjugation of Indigenous Peoples, they were certainly passive observers. Even the most well-meaning people of the time would have had to find a way to justify this hateful behaviour toward Indigenous people, which they knew was inhumane and contrary to any notion of human dignity.

In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) took hold in Canada, but nowhere like it did in Saskatchewan. By the late 1920s, the membership in the KKK was over 25,000 people, which represented almost 4 per cent of the population of the province. Saskatchewan also bears the dubious honour of having been represented in Parliament by the treasurer of its chapter of the KKK. Walter Davy Cowan served as mayor of Regina and

served as the Conservative-Unionist member of Parliament for Regina from 1917 to 1921 and then as Conservative MP for Long Lake from 1930 to 1934. To be a member of the KKK you had to be white, gentile, and Protestant. While the Canadian KKK was not limited to Saskatchewan, the views of this group dominated the politics of the day, just as my mother was trying to make a life for herself in Saskatchewan. I can only imagine the fear and anxiety she must have experienced trying to navigate her biracial marriage in such a racist environment.

It's so difficult to understand how successive generations of settlers reconciled the emerging notions of human and civil rights with the deep racism that justified the brutality they visited on my ancestors. To create a place for themselves in this land, the settlers accepted the belief that success necessitated the exploitation and destruction of Indigenous Peoples. I do not believe that these people were inhuman, but for people to act with such violent inhumanity, a justification is required. Violence without justification is indefensible. And so, just as our own people are blamed in politics

and society for the murder and disappearance of thousands of Indigenous women and girls, those in power during the days of aggressive, violent settlement created an image of Indigenous women that justified our treatment as chattel. That image developed into a worldview that has been conveyed with a terrible efficiency over time. When pressed, people cannot say why they believe the things they believe about Indigenous women. Through the everyday commentary of everyday citizens, this view of Indigenous women has proliferated and become entrenched in the collective subconscious of Canada, rendering Indigenous women disposable in the eyes of modern Canadian society.

"Happiness is but a dream for Canada because the malice that has marked so much of human history happened here too,"[13] says Professor James Daschuk in his arresting analysis of the role of disease and the politics of starvation in disenfranchising the Indigenous Peoples of Canada. In *Clearing the Plains*, Daschuk provides a meticulously researched analysis of how Indigenous women were reduced to items of ransom and bar-

ter as their families struggled with the horrors of a manufactured famine, which was intentionally created to establish economic supremacy for the newcomers and the subjugation of Indigenous Peoples.

In the context of the vicious competition between Britain and Canada for supremacy in the fur trade, a horrifying brutality was routinely perpetrated against Indigenous women by officers of the Crown and condoned by those in power. The control of Indigenous populations and their transformation into indentured servants in the fur trade was critical to the quest for dominance in the fur trade. As Daschuk notes in his work:

> *Canadian traders (vs. the British Traders of the HBC) soon found ways to overcome the Chipewyan aversion to commercial trapping. By the early 1790s they routinely took women from their families to ensure payments of debts and sold them to company employees . . . "If the father or Husband or any of them resist the only satisfaction they get is a beating and*

they are frequently not satisfied with taking the Woman but their Gun and Tent likewise," wrote scandalized HBC surveyor Philip Turner. The chief Canadian trader along the Mackenzie, Duncan Livingston, was highly regarded by his peers. Under his management these people were modeled anew and brought under an implicit obedience to the white's authority. NWC post master Willard Wentzel wrote to Roderick Mackenzie. That "authority" in the Athabasca included a slave traffic in women.[14]

To achieve the compliance of the men and secure their participation in enriching the settlers through the fur trade, some women were held hostage, and worse. We must understand and acknowledge that this was not just the conduct of some rogue fur traders. This attack on Indigenous women was a weapon in the colonial toolkit that was used right into the second half of the twentieth century, and, arguably, it continues to this day.

Daschuk notes that the "sexual improprieties

of DIA (Department of Indian Affairs) employees" were widespread and well known by their superiors.[15] Forty-five per cent of government officials living in the then Northwest Territories were known to be engaged in predatory relations with young Indigenous girls, contrary to their stated mandate of being a moral example. Not only did these predatory relations cause great pain and havoc for Indigenous Peoples, but they also contributed to the escalation of violence against predatory Indian agents for which Indigenous people paid a heavy price. Referring to the so-called Frog Lake Massacre, Daschuk writes:

Twenty-six years after the killings, fur-trader-turned-missionary Jack Matheson provided a more sinister motive for the violence . . . "An Indian girl more or less didn't matter; and I've seen ration cards held back six months till girls of 13 were handed over to that . . . brute" (the Indian Agent). One of the killers at Frog Lake, Wandering Spirit, had spent eighteen months in prison for assaulting another DIA

employee, John Delaney. While he was incarcerated, Delaney "took his girl wife."[16]

Daschuk also notes that, in addition to being taken hostage and held as sex slaves, Indigenous women were forced into a form of prostitution when rations were withheld unless they provided sexual favours to the Indian agents:

> *Contrary to S.W. Hurrell's assertion that prostitution came to the North West Territories as sex workers moved west with the railway, prostitution among aboriginal women was a survival strategy resulting from the poverty experienced in their reserve communities after the disappearance of the bison.*

The desperation of starvation forced Indigenous women into this "sex for food" trade instigated by DIA employees, forcing them into a form of human trafficking.

In another instance, John Norrish, the farm instructor for the Blackfoot reserve, was engaged

in a practice of withholding and trading rations for sex. It was discovered that he was buying sex with flour when certain women on the reserve had bogus ration cards, provided by him, that gave them three extra rations of flour. It was believed within the Department of Indian Affairs that the women were not willing participants in this growing food-for-sex form of institutionalized predation. So, in response to the widespread "scandal over the traffic of Indian women involving DIA employees,"[17] the *Indian Act* was amended in 1886 to make Indigenous women prostitutes subject to prosecution. It was reported to Parliament that girls as young as thirteen were being sold to white men in the West for as little as ten dollars. Hector Langevin MP, now proudly remembered as a Father of Confederation, rejected the notion that Indigenous girls and women were being trafficked, asserting that "to Indians, marriage is simply a bargain and sale, that the parents of a young woman are always on the alert to find a buyer for her."[18] Langevin was an MP in the mid- to late-1800s, once again demonstrating that these were not events that

happened hundreds of years ago. These beliefs and behaviours are in the living memory of our people. They are also in the living memories of the descendants of the Fathers of Confederation.

Likewise, it is well known that Hayter Reed, a strong proponent of the control and subjugation of Indigenous Peoples and who initiated the Pass System that made it unlawful for Indigenous people to leave the reserve without the permission of the Indian agent, took a young girl from the Touchwood Hills as his "mistress" and that she bore him a child. Rather than being censured, he was promoted to the role of Indian Commissioner and played a key role in the development of Indian Residential Schools and in the government's stubborn refusal to respond in any way to the concerns about sexual abuse, disease, and starvation in those schools.

Daschuk's research is invaluable because it outlines in horrific detail the methods that were employed in the process of subjugating and dehumanizing Indigenous people in the name of settling the West. The legacy of this dark chapter

of colonialism is that Indigenous women are still seen as disposable, as a commodity to be used by members of the non-Indigenous community as they see fit.

The role of "word of mouth" in the creation and perpetuation of the negative stereotypes that plague the lives of Indigenous women was an idea that first came to me while I was teaching as a sessional history instructor. I was teaching a year-long history unit on Indigenous people in Canada. As any Indigenous person knows, that "story" is not our story. So, out of a desire to inspire my students, and to challenge their preconceptions, I asked them in a group discussion to share what they "knew" about Indigenous people in Canada. I sat there, listening to all the tired, old stereotypes rolling out of the mouths of these young people like memorized nursery rhymes. And it hit me. They *are,* in a hideous sort of way, memorized nursery rhymes. I thought about all those childhood rhymes and folk songs: "I See London, I See France," or "Ring around the Rosy." How do we come to know these chants? Ask yourself, *Where DID I learn that?* I

feel pretty confident that you will not, with specificity, be able to say where you learned this. So, I took things a little further and asked them, *Now, how do you know these things to be true?* To their credit, they were aghast. They could not at first even speculate about how they had come to know and hold as true the deeply racist stereotypes they had internalized. Slowly their assumptions started to unravel. My dad told me. My grandfather used to live next to a reserve and he told me. My auntie, my mother, my grandmother said. Always, invariably, the source of the "information" was familial.

So, then I turn my thoughts to the likes of Hector Langevin, Hayter Reed, Duncan Campbell Scott, and every other non-Indigenous person, and think about the things their children overheard them say as well as the things they would have actively taught their children to justify the way Indigenous people were (and still are) treated in this country. Generation upon generation of non-Indigenous Canadians have been weaned on racism and bigotry and, rather than nurturing acceptance and respect, a bedrock of centuries-old

disgust and disregard informs the social conception and treatment of Indigenous women in Canada. Indigenous women are disposable, objects to be used and discarded. Indigenous women are less than human and can be treated as such.

It took years and years for the chorus of voices demanding an inquiry into the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada to be successful. We heard for years that one of the factors leading to the demise of these women was the assumption that they lived high-risk lifestyles such as working in the sex trade. This was a common reason for rejecting pleas for an inquiry. Even if this were true, does it justify a failure to protect them or properly investigate their deaths? It was only after the doctoral research of Maryanne Pearce demonstrated that, in fact, only a very small percentage of these murdered women were involved in the sex trade that an entirely new public perspective began to emerge. Rather than sex workers who contributed to their own fate, these were young girls, students, teachers, mothers, daughters, and sisters from all walks of life. Contrary to the

assumptions reinforced by the government and media, these women represented a cross section of the female Indigenous population. So how is it that media, politicians, police, and the public at large automatically assumed that these women had endangered themselves through participation in the sex trade? Even when releasing the report handed down by the RCMP in which they acknowledged the numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women, an RCMP representative once again voiced this myth that these women had put themselves in harm's way. Granted, the only information about the victims reported to the public at the sensational media trial of Robert Pickton, and the less prominent media coverage of John Martin Crawford, was that those particular women worked in the sex trade. But there is something deeper afoot.

The legacy of the men (founding fathers, bureaucrats, and company men) who reduced our women to disposable goods can be found in virtually every stratum of society. Indigenous women live our lives in a state of fear that we might be next on the list of the missing or murdered. All

the while, the country glorifies the likes of Hector Langevin (yes, the same Langevin for whom the building housing the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council was named, until very recently) and Hayter Reed, a sexual predator and one of the architects of the Pass System, the Peasant Farming Policy, and residential schools. It's easier to understand how our women came to be perceived as disposable when we imagine how these prominent men brutalized our women as a strategy in the subjugation of a people. The same men who are glorified for their contributions to Canada in our history books.

The practice of ignoring the deaths and disappearances of Indigenous women is rooted in the history of colonialism. As Daschuk notes, the killing of Europeans was widely publicized in the media at the time and continues to be a focal point in the broader historical examination of various so-called uprisings in Canadian history. The murder of Indigenous people during these conflicts or during this time of great upheaval received scant attention at the time. And the failure of the media

to report on the wholesale murder of Indigenous women today is reflective of their history of maintaining an illusionary image of both Canada and Indigenous people. In *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers*, the authors provide a careful analysis of the media in Canada and suggest that:

> *Insofar as the content of newspaper imagery derives from the larger culture in which its readers participate, one might reasonably expect a consonance between press content and pre-existing reader bias, the result is that the news constitutes a kind of national curriculum, which emerges organically as if nothing were more natural. In short, as curriculum news, images do not present new material so much as they simply reinforce the status quo.*[19]

The writers conclude that colonial archetypes and behaviours have become essentialized so that wildly inaccurate ideas about Indigenous Peoples have become normalized and form a kind of

Canadian "common sense," one that informs reactions to issues as devastating as the disappearance and murder of thousands of Indigenous women. Rather than sparking an urgent sense of something terrible happening over and over again that must be addressed, and operating out of this carefully contrived national mindset, media reports elicit "nothing more than tsk tsks and knowing nods of the head."[20] Those tsk tsks are a shorthand for a complex colonial curriculum that, if anything, culminates in the oft-reported notion that these women brought this violence onto themselves.

In addition to the random violence against individual Indigenous women, there is another form of institutionalized violence that strikes at the very heart of Indigenous matriarchy. I refer to the long history of Indigenous women being subjected to forced sterilizations in Canada. For decades, many Indigenous women have been subjected to tubal ligations without their consent and, often, despite their explicit refusal to provide consent, and in yet other cases, without their knowledge. Indigenous women have reported coercive tactics such as

threats to report them post-partum to child welfare if they did not consent, which in most cases would result in the apprehension of newborns.

Under Section B and D of Article II of the Genocide Convention, genocidal acts include "causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group" and the imposition of "measures intended to prevent births within the group," all with the intent to destroy an entire group or population.

Consider the foundation of colonialism, the Doctrine of Discovery. This Catholic decree, issued in the form of papal bulls, deemed lands inhabited for centuries by Indigenous Peoples as *terra nullius*. This is a legal finding that a land is considered unpopulated on the basis that the peoples living there were not Christian, in particular, Catholic. Those populations were deemed subhuman and, therefore, their territories could simply be taken. For me, the Doctrine is the foundation of colonialism because it allowed the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island to be deemed less than human, allowed for the wholesale appropriation of lands, and established a position of superiority

and authority in white Christians over Indigenous Peoples. This sense of superiority is reflected in all colonial policy, and the harm created continues to ripple through the lives of Indigenous people.

I think about my grandmother again and the way she equated my mother to a dog and, by extension, the way all Indigenous women were seen in this light. What do those in control of female dogs do? They spay them. The forced sterilization of Indigenous women was undertaken with the same belief that to do so was the right and purview of the state-run medical system.

Recently, at least one class action lawsuit by Indigenous women who were subjected to forced sterilization has been launched. Likewise, the Senate began studying the issue in 2019 and put forward Bill S-250, which would see the criminalization of forced or coerced sterilization. Under the current criminal code, forced or coerced sterilization could be the basis for a charge of assault, but the Senate decided to categorize it as its own form of crime carrying a maximum sentence on conviction of fourteen years.

This practice of forced sterilization is yet another example of the devastating attack on the Indigenous matriarchy aimed at the depopulation of Indigenous Peoples.

During the formation of Canada as we know it today, the degradation of Indigenous women was entrenched in the national sensibility. Is it any wonder that less than a hundred years later, my grandmother would be horrified at the prospect of a Cree daughter-in-law? Someone educated my grandmother to think of Indigenous women as less than human. At the same time, her entire generation, and the one before it and after it, received what I think of as a form of oral history, passed down from one generation to the next, perpetrating these ideas so effectively that 155 years after Confederation, these negative images are still superimposed on our women. These damaging ideas about Indigenous women are killing us, like a permission slip for rape and murder.

Non-Indigenous populations of Canada would be well advised to take a page from the book of those Indigenous groups who argued at law that

oral history must be given equal weight to written history. First in the decision in *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* [1997] 1010 and later in *Squamish Indian Band v. Canada* (2001 FCT 480) and *R. v. Ironeagle* (2000 2 CLNR 163), the courts began to recognize the legitimacy of the modalities of our way of keeping history.

In our struggles for recognition of our rights, we fought for the recognition of oral history at law. In the arguments we made to the courts, what the mainstream saw as our "myths" and superstitions were presented as cogent histories of our peoples. These arguments formed a foundation for the recognition at law that information is transferred orally from one generation to the next. Our value systems and social structures were conveyed through our oral traditions. I believe that the same thing, though structurally different, is true for non-Indigenous Canada. The way of spoken traditions passing from one generation to another is not exclusive to us and, in fact, played a key role in passing this tradition of bigotry, hatred, and violence from colonial to postcolonial Canada.

The values of the colonial era have been perpetuated through an oral tradition, bolstered by the media and the blatant (or thinly veiled) racism that underlies government policy.

The triumvirate of media as curriculum, government policy, and oral history colludes to make it exceptionally difficult to deconstruct this carefully curated and devastatingly wrong perception of Indigenous women. This must, however, be done if we are to end the profound violence against our women.

There is so much work to be done to combat the generations of inaccuracy and erroneous ideas about Indigenous women. For decades, we have demonstrated artistically, intellectually, culturally, politically, and socially that our ways of life, social structures, cultures, and spiritual beliefs are sophisticated and entirely contrary to the proliferative and brutish Canadian mainstream depiction of Indigenous women. And yet, it is an image Canadian society still stubbornly refuses to relinquish. Indigenous women remain locked in a mirror with a false reflection, created by political and social

forces. Why has Canada failed so miserably in correcting this erroneous sense of who Indigenous women really are? In my view, the influence of the founding fathers was deeply successful in promulgating the idea of Indigenous women as unimportant and worthless to their own communities, much less having any value in the non-Indigenous community. This negative idea is deeply entrenched in the fabric of this country and has been conditioned into Canadian society since those horrific times when we were being starved out of our homelands.

It is only when I look through this lens that I am able to understand how it is that my grandmother would be so shaken to her core at the prospect of my mother joining her family. It was conditioned into her and those generations before and after her, as thoroughly as the words to "O Canada."

The horrors perpetrated against Indigenous women in Canada, with what can only be described as a silent acceptance by government and society alike, stem from these deeply held beliefs. Increasing policing and government programs and teaching women how to be safe is not going to correct

this situation. Only understanding and a commitment to telling the truth about the cruelty inflicted on our women in the name of settling this country would help change people's perceptions, end their complacency, and stop the continued brutalization and dehumanization of our women.

Canada must know the truth of our history. Now that the door is starting to open and the truth of Indian Residential Schools as a life-and-death experience is finally coming to light, the treatment of Indigenous women throughout our history must be recognized and acknowledged if we ever expect to be treated with the respect and dignity we deserve.

$13.69

THIS PAST WEEK, I RECEIVED THE FINAL instalment of my Sixties Scoop compensation. Given the number of people accepted into the class action, the compensation per person amounted to $25,000. With so much time and distance between me and those terrible years in care, I can look back and consider that experience through the eyes of an adult. I was in care for five years with six different placements in that time frame. I did the math. This compensation works out to $13.69 per day in government custody. Memories of some of those days rise to the surface and I wonder, who might think that any one of