

Missing and Murdered Women: We must tell the stories

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If all we are - as has been said by others - is the stories we tell each other, then what does it mean for our nations, our families, and ourselves as individuals to continue to live while at the same time lacking pieces of who we are?

When we think about the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirited People gone from our communities - how much we have lost?

When someone goes missing, the stories we begin to tell are stories with holes.

The holes are the spaces left by the those missing, who could have gone on to be healers, nation builders, teachers, providers, lovers.

When these people are lost we begin to tell painful stories: the strain of being left behind, waiting for news, relying on the newspapers for information of the progress of an investigation - if one even occurs.

We've heard these stories from families; of the uncertainty, the desperation, the worry and the grief that settles in as time passes.

How does one measure the cost that comes from spending days searching, putting up posters of the fac-

es of loved ones, waiting at police stations for a moment to speak to the investigating officers, visiting hospitals and morgues?

The story the New Democrats want to tell is a different one. It is time to begin to tell new stories of all the strong and creative people who refuse to wait for the Canadian government to hold a needed inquiry into the structural causes of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirited People.

We need to share the story of Drag the Red! In Winnipeg, Manitoba; a group that formed after Tina Fontaine, 15 years old, was murdered and dumped into the Red River. So many have gone missing in Winnipeg that a few people got together to discuss the possibility of dragging the river. For a month last autumn that community scraped the bottom of the river in borrowed boats powered by donated gas, and the volunteers fed by homemade sandwiches. They plan to continue the search this spring.

We need to share news about the community patrol programs in Winnipeg and Regina designed to do everything from preventing break-ins, stopping fights, supporting sex workers and getting intoxicated people

home safely. Led by women, these groups take a proactive role in keeping our people safe.

We need to share the powerful story of artist Christi Belcourt's memorial project: Walking With Our Sisters. Since 2012, 1763 moccasin tops have been created by more than 1,400 caring and concerned people to create one large collaborative art piece. We must spread the word that community groups from Missouri to Whitehorse and from Comox to Halifax meet for months in ceremony, conversations, sewing circles, art installations, youth projects and education to honour our missing and rebuild community relationships.

One such story recently comes from Six Nations and Brantford - the Pink Feather Promise. Organized by Six Nations Polytechnic and Laurier Brantford, we read of the great strides made helping with a flash mob, handing out flyers and taking to the streets to raise awareness of the issue while also raising funds to help with the education of the children of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The Conservative government shames us all by ignoring the international

and nationwide calls for an inquiry into the root causes of colonial violence. They shame us all in their paternalistic attitude towards Indigenous Peoples. The Harper Government shames us all when it blatantly disregards the Constitution, the Nation-to-Nation Treaties and Inherent Indigenous rights on this land.

A story of developing a coordinated federal response to violence against Indigenous women, led by Indigenous communities and organizations, with sustained and multi-year funding. Of applying the wisdom and traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples to bring sustainable solutions to Canada's current challenges. Of building a new relationship based on the treaties between Indigenous peoples and Canada that will enhance social justice, strengthen the economy and reconcile the rights and interests of First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples with those of all Canadians.

Because Every day is an opportunity to honour the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirited People of this land, their families and their communities.

