

Young Six Nations authors launch book in Toronto

By Chezney Martin

TORONTO – The official launch of the novel "From the Sky, Stories of Women Who Inspire Us," filled with stories written by Kawenni:io/Gaweniyo Grade seven and Grade eight students took place within the Ben McNally Book Store on Tuesday, June 14 in Toronto.

The book is blended with Haudenosaunee culture and language and shows appreciation for significant women in the lives of the students, who presented themselves and their stories to more than 50 attendants within the book store, even introducing themselves using the Mohawk or Cayuga language.

Instructor Alisha Thomas explained this novel as a "huge accomplishment," as the process of bringing the idea to life was something that took nine long months, but helped the students in many different ways.

"Lorrie and Jazmin came into one of our staff meetings one day," said Thomas. "They came in with the idea of writing stories about women who inspire [the students]. So, we went with the [students] English teacher, because all of these children were never introduced to any English, grammar, reading, writing or anything until Grade seven," she said.



The student authors pose at the Ben McNally Book Store moments before their presentations began. PHOTO BY CHEZNEY MARTIN

"Our school is totally immersion so they're learning Cayuga or Mohawk all the way up to Grade six. So, what these children accomplish in a year or two [in English] usually takes most kids five."

Project co-ordinator Lorrie Gallant said that the students stories are "pure, honest and from their hearts."

"The students from the Kaweni:io School shared in their stories the importance of the significance of women in their lives," said Gallant. "It was just giving them the tools and then watching them be creative, because that comes naturally to them. So, they were the ones that actually inspired me just by watching them do what they do, which comes natural," she said. "It's a gift, all of us have

been given gifts, and from those gifts we're able to put our hands to things that bless other peoples lives, and that's exactly what these kids did by honouring the women in their lives."

Sanzo Hill (Tahontsawákon), 12, focused his story on his mother who inspired him to want to become a police officer in the future.

"My mother inspired me to want a career that

at first I never thought I would have," said Hill, as he explained that he hopes his story will show readers; "how inspirational, their mother can be."

But overall, Hill explained that he thinks the book itself will serve more purpose.

"I think that it's gonna show that women can do more than people think, and it's gonna show that women can inspire more

than they think," he said.

When asked if he feels that this book is a good example of how much Haudenosaunee people honour women, he simply said "yes."

Another author that chose her sister as her stories subject was aspiring architect Lauryn Porter (Gaōhiyo), 12, who said that she was "excited but surprised" when she was told her story would be published.

"Actually, I didn't really imagine that I would ever, ever help write a book," said Porter. "But I'm grateful that we got to do this, and I hope that people read it and kind of respect our culture more."

When asked what she hopes readers take away from her story, Porter thoughtfully paused before offering a good answer.

"Probably that they should spend more time with the woman that they're inspired by in their lives. My story kind of points toward my sister, so if they have a sister or sibling, [the main thing they should take away] is to be more in touch with their family," she said.

At the end of her interview, Porter kindly asked that her quote "Hi, Catherine," be published in tribute to her sister.

The novel is available on the Ben McNally website for the curious and interested; and it is safe to say that the launch and the book itself is a success.



Copies of "From the Sky, Stories of Women Who Inspire Us," were signed by the students, and copies can be ordered online. PHOTO BY CHEZNEY MARTIN