

A Nice Story of Nohkom

LANA WHISKEYJACK

Les grands-mères jouent un rôle important dans notre société, malheureusement trop souvent, on néglige leurs légendes, parfois on ne les reconnaît même plus. Nohkom a été tout au long de ma vie et continue à être une source constante d'inspiration, de sollicitude et d'élan vers le pouvoir. Ce texte est ma façon à moi de célébrer sa sagesse, son humour et sa mémoire.

Dedicated to Nohkom Caroline Whiskeyjack

So many memories of *Nohkom* and me
summers of stretched hide in the dancing trees
rez dog licking my wounded knee
galloping horses in storms they flee
long walks behind that ol' canvas tent
passed a tall birch was crooked and bent
Rusted t-ford to potbelly stove
places we played, moments I love
Tea and bannock by the kitchen window
sitting by her side as she played bingo
and ohhhh those handgames late into the night
drumming, laughing till the early morn light
rolling hills, silver sage, painted sky
picked purple berries in bacon grease they fry
together as a child *Nohkom* and me
traveling, visiting, being so free
I'd be of support feed her horse named buckskin
burnt down her smokehouse 'Whawaa' what a sin
tried to help with a big load of laundry
no more after that ol'ringer caught me
but there's no other place I'd rather be
than by her side
Nohkom and me.

Summer ended I started school
with a smile she said "Education is your tool"
then off we'd walk half a mile or so
chewing gum, spitballs flying down the bus aisle



*Lana Whiskeyjack, "Nohkom", mixed media
(plaster, acrylic, colour photocopy, hide, gem and pastels), 2002.*

speeding down narrow gravel roads
all us rez kids sent to town-school by the loads
wore hand-me-downs all stained and torn
at lunch eat frybread and Indian popcorn
and oohhh during those long lunch hours
kids all aggressive full of imitated power
a slap, a whack, all chanting "whiskeybottle"
come home scratched, bruised, get a cuddle
in her strong arms she'd whisper to me
"Go back my girl, be strong, don't flee
don't turn the other cheek, it's respect you seek."
swelled with confidence, tough as teak
came home next day bit battered but smiling
after that there was no more bullying
like there's any other place I'd want to be
than by her side
Nohkom and me.

I grew up the way she planned
strong, loving and independent
then one day as if it were meant
a phone call from a woman who was pregnant

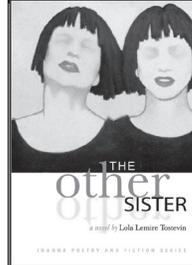
she—a non-native—pleaded to me
 “It’s his, your ex, won’t you let him be
 he still calls your name deep in his sleep
 his heart’s not yours but mine to keep
 so take back your love medicine
 that is what he said you’d do to win”
 I gasped then laughed in disbelief
 being blamed for something I’d never weave
 I called *Nohkom* with tears in my eyes
 cried and muttered “That man’s full of lies!”
 then she told me like I already knew
 lovingly consoling me like she experienced a few
 “The only medicine we have is between our legs.”
 an instinctive wisdom a life-giving force begs
 enlightened by knowledge forever there
mistahi respect, love, wisdom to share
 worked hard like she did clearing fields
 studying, writing, creating, those are my shields
 and like there’s any other place I’d rather be
 than by her side
Nohkom and me.

Finished school, worked, fell in love
 our nations capital is where we moved
 walked and talked in unrecognized territory
 humour like hers provokes social foray
 so far from home an emptiness reappears
 then moments of gathered memories soothe my fears
 visions of healthy relations, animate landscapes
 veiled ancient teachings my wondrous gaze
 swiftly I return to my many colourful places
 of mountains, pow wows, medicines, and old faces
 still haunted, challenged as restlessness consumes
 the wisdom and spirit of *Nohkom* blooms
 “*Kiyam*, don’t worry, do your best and share”
 powerful words of hers remind me to care
 gift-giving of paintings, buffalo stew and laughter
 ways I offer love—my desired character
 an earthy role strengthens my intrinsic ember
 sweetgrass smolder carries thanksgiving of her
 her rhythmic visits of songs, stories and humour
 teaches us women to grow strong and together
 sometimes we listen many times we don’t
 eventually we learn to balance as others won’t
 but we’re here for each other together as one
 collective roles our children’s continuum
 and there’s no other place I’d rather be
 than by my family’s side
 Hiy-hiy to *Nohkom* and me.

The artwork on the previous page is a casting of my seven-month pregnant belly. The image within the casting is of my nohkom Caroline. I transferred my favourite picture of her so that her heart is centred on my belly button. Lana Whiskeyjack is a Nehiyaw (Cree) from Saddle Lake First Nation, Alberta. She is currently living in Alberta.

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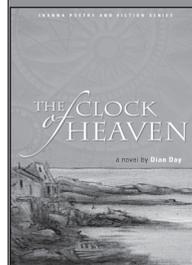


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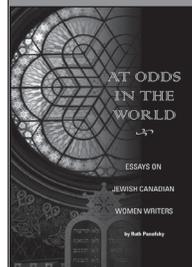


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