

# Raising a CRITICAL thinker

by Saga Williams

*L'auteure parle de sa relation avec sa fille et ce que veut dire, pour une mère des Premières Nations, d'éveiller la conscience sociale de sa jeune fille.*

It was during my first pregnancy that I began to think critically and I began labeling myself as a feminist. I have been strongly influenced by the many powerful and amazing women in my life: from my 80-year-old grandmother to my eleven-year-old daughter. I have been very fortunate to have exposure to my rich Anishinabe teachings and know who I am and where I have come from.

As I sit on the couch in our new home and I watch my 11-year-old daughter stomp up the stairs, a bundle of folded laundry in arm. I am reminded of myself at her age: confused, angry, and annoyed. I hated the authority figures in my life, especially their rules. If anything, at that moment, I did not want Amelia to feel the same angst and anger I did.

Life at her age is very complicated. I have to constantly remember that she is watching me to see how I behave, what I wear, and the things I say. There are rules that have to be enforced and consistency in the messages her stepfather, Derek, and I convey to her.

I refocus on Amelia, hearing her now in her bedroom (hopefully putting her clothes away). I am concerned with her well-being. We recently moved from the comforts and security of our reserve, to Ottawa, a big city in her eyes. She is not used to her new environment. And this is all compounded by her sense of loss—she misses her grandmother and her friends. Together we miss the sense of safety and security we felt living in a close-knit community. She had a well-established group of friends and social life, and she also had adults in her life that she could call to talk with and visit. She has none of these in this new city.

I think about her relationships with the many wonderful Anishinabe women who allowed her to see the positive and wonderful aspects of our cultural heritage. From her *Kookom* (grandmother), who reviewed her language and cultural teachings, to her *Toosis* (Auntie Kaaren), who took her out on the gathering and hunting territory of my mother's people to teach her how to live a traditional lifestyle, to her Auntie Marilyn, who gently scolds her for acting too rambunctious (and rewards her just for being herself), to my sisters and my role models/friends who write and call her, inquiring about her school-

ing, her friends and her little life. She knows that she is cared for and loved by many people. She also knows who she is and where she came from. For the many women and men in her life who helped her shape this sense of

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herself as a young, bright Anishnaabe-kwe, we are thankful and grateful for their contributions.

We (Derek, Amelia, and I) often discuss political things, from Indian Affairs to Aboriginal Health. She actively participates on most occasions. Amelia is aware of racism (not necessarily on a personal level) but on a historical and theoretical level. She knows about the socialized sexism within society, and discusses this from her point of reference: boys and girls socializing at school and on television. Amelia is concerned about the children who live in developing countries that are used as labourers in GAP factories. She has even commented that some of her friends refuse to wear GAP because of their labour practices. She has yet to actively put her socialist thinking into action but I'm positive that with the role-modeling and lifestyles that she has been exposed to, she will make choices in her life that will reflect her politics. She has been given a lot of great things in her life, and I am waiting on the edge of my seat for her to put her thoughts into action. It's exciting for us, as her parents, to see Amelia develop her own version of political sense.

In the meantime, I work on trying not to antagonize her with the many irritating details that fill her life, like putting her clothes away, taking the dog for a walk, doing dishes three times a day, etc. I try to guide our conversations into areas that will allow her to talk to me about her feelings and ambitions. I want her to explore with me the powerful teachings of our ancestors and how she will incorporate this knowledge in the decisions that she will soon be faced with. I also want for her to be grateful for living in a country that is so vast and beautiful. She has many wonderful things to bring into her life, and instead of feeling the angst of teenage conflict and rebelling

against me (as her mother), I am hoping that she explores feminist thinking, Marxism, critical theory—all the things I learned at home, in university, from my peers and friends, to give me a context with which to evaluate my environment and empower me to think analytically. As a feminist and a mother of a young woman, this is the greatest gift I can pass on to my daughter—the ability to think critically and to feel secure enough to express her own thoughts.

*Saga Williams is 28 years old and has an eleven-year-old daughter. She and her husband are currently expecting a new addition to their family and have recently moved to Ottawa from Curve Lake First Nation. Saga is working at Health Canada, focusing specifically on First Nation and Inuit Health. She has a law degree from York University's Osgoode Hall Law School and has completed an undergraduate honours degree in Native Studies and Political Science from Trent University.*

## CARLA RIBEIRO

### Made in Canada

Sittin' on a Vaughan bus  
to St. Clair West, at 6AM  
I can't help but notice how  
many black people, women  
mainly get on  
a couple of Asian women, one latino  
man, even the driver is black  
three filipino women  
all going to work, no doubt  
perhaps, very far away,  
all they could get,  
to domestic work  
gotta arrive in time for breakfast  
close to where I'm going  
or a factory near leslie and the 401  
to sew together pieces of a living  
and a self-righteous "made in Canada"  
label, worthy of a letter home  
to Manila, Bombay, Georgetown,  
"life is better in Canada"

*Carla Ribeiro is a newer Canadian who was "born and bred" in Trinidad and Tobago. She has a poet in her and is working on not being afraid of the implications. Carla lives in Toronto with the love of her life.*



## Student Violence Prevention Initiatives Women's Habitat of Etobicoke

Women's Habitat was established in 1974 and exists to empower women and children through support and advocacy of their right to live free from violence in their personal relationships by providing emergency shelter, counseling and public education.

The Student Violence Prevention Initiatives team offers dynamic, interactive classroom or school-wide presentations for elementary and secondary schools on issues of:

- self-esteem
- conflict resolution
- anger management
- bullying
- healthy relationships
- dating violence.

Among the programs available are:

- **dating violence prevention** — provides students with information and an opportunity to question and address attitudes and power dynamics of dating relationships;
- **peer support** — focuses on issues of dating violence and woman abuse and trains students to support their peers on these issues;
- **violence-prevention** — teaches students to understand the dynamics of healthy and unhealthy relationships;
- **peer mediator** — encourages students to learn peaceful, non-violent coping strategies and constructive conflict resolution techniques.

Each program is designed to meet the particular needs of individual schools. (Many of the programs are available in American Sign Language). We also address school, faculty, parents, and community groups on any of these issues.

**For more information contact Student Violence Prevention Initiatives at (416) 251-8337.**

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