

Voices of Our Sisters: Poems on experiences of violence and homelessness

The Learning Network team is honoured to share these insightful and moving poems with you.

We are grateful to Bonnie Doxtator, Maggie Traynor, B.J. Bilyea, and Christine Bolton for sharing their experiences through poetry for this special Newsletter.

In Solidarity...

Being a woman comes with a price

Being a woman comes with a price
Always on guard
Waiting and listening
For that intrusion at any moment
To steal her away

She is like Jesus
Ready to forgive in a moment
Even though the pain she endured
Left her bloodied and broken
Never to be the same again

Reality for her
Is to hide it within
To make sure no one knows
The depth of her despair
At the same time
Trying to keep it all together.

Being a woman comes with a price
You can see it in her eyes
It's held so deep within
If it touches her soul
She sometimes can never make it back again
Being a woman comes with a price.

- Bonnie Doxtator

About the Family

About the family
With hearts made of stone
Whose fault is it anyway
Maybe our own

About the family
Crying all the time
Grieving for one another
To come together again

About the family
The young kids suffer
With rage and anger
And loss of control

About the family
With no one to guide them
They turn away from each other
To look for love

About the family
Being so afraid
Of what is right
Knowing only what is wrong

About the family
Hoping someday
We will be one again
To save what is left
Of the heartaches and tears
- Bonnie Doxtator

Looking Through Native Eyes

I look at you
You look at me
I can tell
You don't like what you see

Oh! By the way
I have something to say
Your looks and gestures
Will have to pay
Someday

Think as you may
Talk as you wish
I am not like you
Actually I'm quite a dish

So put me down
Jealous as you are
I am loved and cherished
More than you by far

Maybe the next time we meet
The judgement will be
Gone like the wind
As our ancestors say

I look at you
You look at me
Next time we meet
We might like what we see.
- Bonnie Doxtator

The Bridge

Sleeping under a starlit sky
The sounds of the cars as they pass by
Cement for a pillow, I guess that's ok
Under the bridge is where I'll stay
The nights are still warm I'm happy to say
But the cold days of winter are on their way
Try to survive on a cold winter's night
How the body aches, it just isn't right
All alone, no one by my side
This is where I think I'll hide
Out of mind, out of sight
This is where I'll spend the night
- Maggie Traynor

My Home

The lights that shine so bright at night
Home on the streets just isn't right
The sound of the cars as they pass by
Try to relax, at least I try
Sleeping in doorways, no way to live
To have a home what I wouldn't give
Those cold winter nights that lie ahead

Life on the streets is what I dread
People pass by like they just don't care
Life for some just isn't fair
A home is a necessity would you not agree
To have respect and dignity
- Maggie Traynor

What Am I

What am I
I am a survivor
I have survived
So what am I
I am a wanna be
I want to be an artist
I want to be an actor
I want I want I want
When will I see
I am just a want-a-be

So what am I now
I am a person filled with indecision
I am a person who has vision
I have envisioned

So what am I
I am a person before my time
I am a person with absolutely no rhyme

So what am I
I am person who flows like poetry
I am a person and I guess I'm just me
- B. J. Bilyea

Sister

She was our shelter from the storm
In her presence
We were all safe and warm.
She was the one
who took the blame.
We were all cowards
Cringing in the dark
Escaping with our shame.
She was the one
She wore our pain.
We had caused the storm to appear
Now in the dark

We all hid our fears.
For we all knew.
She would shelter us from the storm
She would keep us safe and warm.
In our guilt
In our fear
We should not shed a single tear.
For we all knew
She was near
Facing the storm alone.
She had no fear
She was our sister.
- B. J. Bilyea

Fairytale

Dressed up in a flower – We all have the power
To make a secret wish – For us, for that and this!
Inside of you is a magic – It’s always happy, never tragic!
Because the story continues on – Everything is right and rarely wrong!
Our voices sound like a gentle chime – When we sing it’s melodic, like a nursery rhyme!
When you sleep, we all hover around – As we patiently await your slumbers’ sound!
For in your dreams we are forever near – Painting pictures of glory, year after year!
So always remember there is a Fairyland – All giggles and purity, hand in hand!
If ever you’re lonely or faced by fear – Put a smile on your face and your Fairy will appear!
Though sometimes Fairies are hard to see – You can feel their presence if you truly believe!
- Christine Bolton

What you can do to help

The poets contributing to the newsletter suggested eight actions that any one of us could take to support women experiencing homelessness and violence.

Start today!

- ✓ Start a conversation with strangers
- ✓ Reduce stigma by creating spaces where everyone feels emotionally safe
- ✓ Ask politicians what is being done about homelessness and violence, and then vote accordingly
- ✓ Educate yourself about homelessness and violence in your community
- ✓ Volunteer at community organizations (a good way to understand the issues)
- ✓ Build more affordable and accessible housing. Encourage City Hall to do more about affordable housing
- ✓ Raise some funds; attend fundraising events
- ✓ Be nice, be kind

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In partnership with Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants

Women Living with Disabilities and Deaf Women, Homelessness, and Violence

In partnership with DisAbled Women's Network of Canada

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