# IN JEAN'S WORDS

"There's something about the slowing down … having a relationship, sitting and drinking together, drinking kind of medicinal drinks that I think's important... I'm really interested [in] thinking about tea as a form of *mishkiki wabo*, or medicine liquid, as a way that can bring us together."

- Dylan Miner, discussing his exhibit,
"The Elders Say We Don't Visit Anymore"

## From May

The following chapters are primarily excerpts – in Jean's own words – from the life history interviews I carried out with Jean in 2016 and 2017, in collaboration with Emma. These were very intimate conversations, full of laughter and tears, over many cups of tea. I guided Jean through an exploration of her own life, decade by decade, asking her to reflect on how she came to be an activist, how she came to "walk with First Peoples" for so many decades, what sustained her in this work, and what she hoped to impart to future generations.

Here are some of the questions we asked Jean:

1. Would you be able to reflect back to the moment in your life when you first became politicized? Can you remember what your earliest thoughts were—when did you first perceive the situation as unjust?

2. Were there any moments or events that you feel impacted how you thought about First Peoples? How you thought about the roles of settlers?

3. Do you want to reflect on the word "reconciliation"? Can you remember when this concept first became part of your consciousness? Can you reflect on how you have come to think about this word differently over time? What does reconciliation mean to you now? What would it mean in practice? What would be required?

4. In your blogs and recent writings, you write about "learning to listen" and about the idea that "we are all Treaty people." After nearly 60 years of "walking with First Peoples," are there a few key lessons you've learned that you think will be important for settlers to understand?

5. You have kept such detailed records and collections of your work and your writings. What drew you to do this? What are your hopes for these?

6. If you have to name your one most significant contribution, do you have a sense of what it would be?

This section is divided into five chapters, each featuring short stories told in Jean's own words. The opening of each chapter and the questions throughout are in my own voice. This section also includes pop-out reflections from Ziysah and myself.

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"I grew up in a home where I knew who I was. It wasn't much, but I knew who I was. I was born of a British mother and Scottish immigrant father. I was a member of the clan Mingus from Kirkney Scotland. I was only just a clansperson, but I knew myself as Jean Menzies, a member of the Mingus clan."

- Jean Koning, 2016

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# BEGINNING

***Jean was born in 1922 and spent her early childhood in Windsor, Amherstburg, and Stratford, Ontario.*** *Her parents were working-class British immigrants who came to Canada in 1921, a year before she was born. In my early interviews with Jean, I asked her about the roots of her activism. As Emma and I listened to her consider her earliest awareness of societal injustice, we heard most clearly about the intergenerational influences of the family's women.*

*Reflecting on the role of her family, Jean also offered this: "The one thing that really informed my whole life was the fact that my mother and father, both each in their own way, always gave me unconditional love... You have to grow up knowing that somewhere there's somebody who believes that you are worth loving. It has to do with worthiness." She would later come back to her sense of belonging and self-worth as a form of privilege, in contrast to the family and community fracture that so many Indigenous people experienced at the hands of the colonial state.*

*In 1942, Jean married Tony, a Dutch soldier stationed in Stratford during the Second World War. After the war, the couple spent a year in Holland, where Jean experienced living in a different culture for the first time. She also witnessed hunger, deprivation, and societal trauma. As Jean shared with us her meticulous collection of war letters, she described this time of her life as formative to the work she would eventually undertake.*

*- May*

From Jean's files, a photo Jean labelled as: "Jean Menzies Koning, 9 years old (1931)."

## “I knew who I was”

Jean: I grew up in a home where I knew who I was. It wasn't much, but I knew who I was. I was born of a British mother and Scottish immigrant father. I was a member of the clan Mingus from Kirkney, Scotland. I was only just a clansperson, but I knew myself as Jean Menzies, a member of the Mingus clan. I visited where my father grew up in later years and was able to meet his family and see the house where he was born and all this kind of stuff. So I knew who I was and I knew where I came from and I had a sense of pride. There was something around that that made me realize how privileged I am.

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## “A powerful sender”

May: *Are there any particular moments, events, or people that come to mind when you think back to what shaped your values, what might have seeded your early awareness of social injustice?*

Jean: My grandmother, my mother’s mother, had a very strong influence on my mother. My grandmother was a wife and mother, but she was also trained as what we called a “practical nurse.” That means if a local doctor had a woman who was going into labour and they needed somebody to look after her, my grandmother would have been called to go.

I can remember my grandmother telling us about this one woman who was giving birth to her tenth child. And so, the baby would have been delivered, and my grandmother was looking after the woman, and before the end of that day, her husband was at the door, saying “I’m coming to sleep with my wife.”

And my grandmother said, “No you’re not. She just had a child. You’re not going to do that!” And so, she sent him away. The woman told my grandmother that was the first time in all the children that she had born that she had not received her husband into her bed the same night that the child was born. So a little bit of a sense of justice there!

I always remembered my grandmother telling me that. And I guess I must have been old enough to know just how unfair women’s lives were. My grandmother was a big influence on me. She was also a powerful sender, and I imagine that is where I got it from.

We lived in Sandwich - which was a part of Windsor—it’s called Windsor now, it used to be called the Border Cities at the time of the Depression, 1929-1930. And those were very difficult days. My mother always said she was so thankful my father was able to have a job through the Depression. But they knew a lot of people who had children who had no job, no money coming in. And my mom and dad were very good about, you know, sharing. That sense that whatever you have, be it ever so humble, you share it with the people who come to your door or whom you invite in.

And that reminds me, I have not offered you two tea yet this morning. I am just finishing my coffee...

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## “Saying yes”

Jean: By 1939, when the war started for Canada, I was about 16. I was very much aware of the news. By the next year, when I was 18, we were getting word of boys I had gone to

school with who were killed in the war or coming back wounded. That's when I met Tony, my husband, on a blind date. The Royal Netherlands Army Recruiting Depot came to Stratford and we read about it in the paper. January 1941: the Dutch soldiers were coming. I can remember walking down the street with my friends and saying, "Well, I don't really know much about Holland and their language, but I do know 'yah' means 'yes'." Well, I think it was about a year later, I was saying "Yes!" and getting married.

So then the war took on a much more intimate awareness for me. On May 10th, 1940, the Nazis parachuted into Rotterdam and obliterated the downtown of Rotterdam and occupied the country. They were occupied until May the 5th, 1945.

In the meantime, I had married Tony in August of 1942. We lived together for a year. In September, 1943, his unit was called back to England. By that time, there were maybe fifteen Canadian women, mostly in Stratford and surrounding areas, who had married these guys, and were kind of a community of Dutch war brides.

Anyway, it was late October, 1945 that I was able to get on a ship and get to Holland, to Amsterdam. When we married, I lost my Canadian citizenship. If you married outside your British citizenship at that time, you lost it. So I became a Dutch citizen when I married Tony. When I went to Holland, I was among thousands of people who were coming back. The others were returning to Holland from all over the world, but I had never been there before.

The winter before in Holland had been what they called the "Hunger Winter." People died from starvation. Tony's mother and father and sister had survived simply because

they had met a farm family from up north and they were able to go there on their bicycles—the only kind of transportation. They had no more rubber tires, so they cycled on wooden rimmed tires. Took them a couple of weeks to get up there. After the war was ended, they came back to their home.

It was the kind of culture shock that, in some ways, preceded the culture shock that I experienced when I went into Wikwemikong. I can't say they were alike in many ways, except that I had reached the understanding that people were different. We were all human, but still had differences, cultural differences. And you know, in those days in Holland, there was so much hurt, and so you didn't talk about things that hurt too much. German soldiers would just come into the neighbourhood and take 12 or 15 young people and shoot them in the town square. And they experienced all that, they saw that. It was not a good time. You can't expect people to be normal after that.

## "I walked across the ocean both ways!"

May: *When you came back to Canada, did you see Canada differently? Did you see your home differently?*

Jean: Oh yes! It was the end of September, and we were on a little tiny ship. It had taken us about 14 days to make that trip from Rotterdam and up to Montreal. My way of crossing the ocean was to be out on the deck, out in the air. If I stayed down underneath, I got seasick. So I walked across the ocean both ways!

But I remember this one morning, coming up on deck. I looked out and there were the trees that would have been

the Gaspé Peninsula area, as we came up the St. Lawrence. I can remember the smell of the sun on the pines. Ah, I thought I never smelled anything so gorgeous. And then when we got home, I looked in the refrigerator and there was a roasted beef in there, with maybe a few slices taken off. A whole roasted beef! I had not seen more than soup bones and sweet bread in the year I was in Holland, in terms of meat. Day after day, we ate vegetables. Potatoes and vegetables. Everything was on coupons and rationed so very much.

If I think about that, it's quite easy for me to understand that intergenerational trauma. You know, you just do not wipe out that kind of trauma in people's lives in one generation. You certainly don't wipe it out in that first generation. And a certain amount of that carries over. That awful feeling of not having control over one's own life—that's what oppression is! And Holland—that's what occupation was! Holland was occupied. It was oppressed. And if anybody should ever understand what occupation, assimilation, colonization is like, it's people who have experienced it first-hand. But not everybody can make the link.

### From Ziysah

It was amazing to hear how detailed Jean's memories were of moments that shifted her consciousness, I was particularly touched by this story she shared while touring me through an old photo album on one of our visits:

The summer after we were married, we went to Wasaga Beach. We took a picture of us in front of the lodge where we stayed, and across the sort of upstairs balcony was a big sign that said Gentiles Only. I really didn't pay any attention one way or another. I was kind of aware of it not being very nice but I accepted the way it was. I left this in my album to show my grandchildren that this was what Canada was like at the time.

About that same time, I was visiting a friend in Stratford, and I said something about a Jewish person that was derogatory that I had picked up in conversation from my mother. And my friend's mother took exception and said, "What's wrong with that?" Her son was going with a Jewish girl. I kind of backed myself out of that and felt badly about it.

It's important to know I've been there, done that. I've gone through the process, and it is a process you have to go through if you are a thinking kind of person. But many people get stuck because they don't think beyond what they see. And they don't think in terms of relationship. It's important to know I've been there, done that. I've gone through the process, and it is a process you have to go through if you are a thinking kind of person.

> But many people get stuck because they don't think beyond what they see. And they don't think in terms of relationship. I feel badly, it was a terrible way for me to be, but it also means that when I am talking to people who are out and out racist and I think: We are all capable of that. We don't have to think of ourselves as better or righteous. If I say I love Jewish people, that just does not cut it. You've got to go through a process from your mind to your heart. (July, 2023)

Perhaps Jean was particularly keen to share this story with me because of my Jewish identity. It was strange to think of my own grandmother's family spending their summers on Georgian Bay not too far from where Jean stood in the photo. I was humbled by Jean's honesty and how she harnessed her memory of her own bias to strengthen her compassion.

Jean continued on to another story:

> Around that same time, I was reading about a terrible famine. Children were dying by the dozen in East Africa.
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> When I talked to my mother about it, she said, "Well, our children are alright here."
>
> I said, "Yeah, but those kids are not."

And she said, "You don't mean to tell me you would care about those children! You need to care about your own."

And I said, "Of course I would, they're all children together!"

And so you can see in that time how I was beginning to become affected by the way Canadian society lived and thought and so on, and the way I was beginning to formulate things in my own mind. (July, 2023)

From Jean's files, a photo she labelled as: "Jean and Tony Koning wedding, Stratford ON, Aug 22, 1942."

# BECOMING

***When Jean and Tony returned from Holland, they lived in many different Ontario towns.*** *Their first child, Stephen, was born in 1950 in Stratford; Valerie was born in 1952 in London; and Philip was born in 1956 in Huntsville.*

*The family settled into life in Huntsville for over a decade, and Jean described these years as very happy ones. Tony worked as a bookkeeper and accountant. Jean was the primary caregiver for their three children; she also taught dance classes in the evenings, became a square dance caller, volunteered, and co-founded an organization for people with disabilities. When Tony began studying to become an Anglican priest, Jean supported the family by working with the Muskoka Children's Aid Society (MCAS).*

*I asked Jean about what drew her into her volunteering and working with vulnerable children during this time, and whether she drew a connection between this early advocacy work and her later solidarity with First Peoples. She reflected that she always felt called to support children and families. She also credited MCAS training she received, which she considered unusual for its time: unlike the colonial practices she would later encounter in youth protection services in Manitowaning, this training prioritized keeping families intact.*

*- May*


From Jean's files, a photo of Jean and Tony at the Huntsville Hospital Ladies Auxiliary Spring Dance, 1964.

## "That sense of what's fair"

Jean: So we moved to Huntsville. And those years, 1955 to 1966, eleven years, were the longest I ever lived in one place until now. We were an average post-war immigrant family, very much involved with the Anglican Church, bringing our children up in a small town. But as a wife who didn't work, I was always engaged in what would now be referred to as volunteer work, I guess, but I never thought of it as that. I just thought of it as being active, a part of things.

I became involved through friends that we knew who had a disabled child at that time, and I was a founding member of the Huntsville and District Association for the Mentally Retarded. We wouldn't use that terminology now, but that's what it was then. What we did is we set up a place where they could come for schooling or drop-in or whatever. What really amazed me was how mothers and fathers were bringing their children or young adults who had never really seen the light of day. You could be very isolated in Muskoka in the country in those days, as you could anywhere in rural Canada, I expect.

It was astounding to realize how those children had been treated, you know? It felt so unjust! I very much responded to that sense of what's fair. I was such a big mouth and, you know, always into everything, always in some sort of position of leadership. I talked louder than anybody else, perhaps. I suppose that being involved with supporting people with developmental disabilities brought to light that sense of needing to watch for people who weren't being properly taken care of.

## "No way was I cut out to be a minster's wife"

Jean: Over this time, Tony became very much involved in church life. He came home to me one day and he said, "What would you think if I became a Dominee?" That was the word he used, which is the Dutch word for Minister. I said, "Well, I thought you were always so happy to be an accountant." And he said, "No, to tell you the truth, I really always wanted to be a Dominee."

Very quickly, I did some mental calculations. I thought that if I told him I did not want him to, then for the rest of our lives, he could say, "Well, you didn't want me to." I was quite happy with him being an accountant and I was happy living in Huntsville. By this time, I was also into the Rotary Review. I choreographed with another young woman, danced on the stage and all. We had a marvellous time, I was thoroughly enjoying myself in Huntsville.

So anyway, I said, "You better do whatever you think."

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**"It was my whole approach, you know? Talk about rebellious!"**

**- Jean Koning, 2016**

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No way was I cut out to be a minister's wife. A couple of times, we had to go to see this dear sweet archdeacon's wife. There were about thirty of us young women whose husbands were going to be ordained, and she was trying to tell us what to expect, you know, how to behave, how we dressed. If I didn't say it at that meeting, I certainly said it on the way home. I said, "Well, I don't give a damn what the parish says. I'm going to dress the way I want to." It was my whole approach, you know? Talk about rebellious!

Another time, I can remember, after Tony was ordained, Tony was talking with another priest, who said, "Well, I don't see how you can have a woman priest. I mean, if she has to get moved from one parish to another, she can't do that because of her husband's job."

So that was how the thinking had to change. Of course, today we have bishops and archbishops in the Anglican Church who are women. I mean, the whole structure has totally changed. But even so, there are men who will not accept those women priests of any level of ordination.

## "They just missed the boat completely!"

Jean: While Tony was studying, I worked for 16 months with the Muskoka Children's Aid Society. We knew the local director and chief supervisor of the staff very well; Tony had been working with them as an accountant. Tony had to go down to Toronto to spend a year in Wycliffe College, which cut down our income. They said: "Well, Jean, we're going to lose one of our staff, so would you come and work for us as a childcare worker?" This appealed to me because I really liked working with children. I've always really loved children and felt very much at home and at ease with them. So anyway, that's what I did.

While I worked there, I got all sorts of what I call "in-service training" as a childcare worker. I was very lucky that extremely good people trained me in children's aid work. They came from England, and they were way ahead of what was happening here in Canada in terms of protection work and preventive work. I was taught that you never took a child away from a family unless you kept

them in touch. That was the background that I took into my work for the Manitoulin Children's Aid.

I did not have academic training and education in social work, and I kind of think it was a good thing. Because even now when I look at the problems that the Children's Aid, anywhere across the country, has with First Peoples, their first problem is that they are academically trained to do social work. If that doesn't include understanding how families operate within different cultures, then they're totally lost! They just missed the boat completely with the First Peoples! And that's what I saw happening at the grassroots when I later went to work for the Children's Aid Manitoulin.

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> "I was taught that you never took a child away from a family unless you kept them in touch. That was the background that I took into my work for the Manitoulin Children's Aid."
>
> - Jean Koning, 2016

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# UNVEILING

***In 1966, Tony was ordained by the Anglican Church and the family moved to Manitoulin Island, where Tony worked for the Algoma Diocese.*** *Jean initially worked for the CAS in Manitowaning, which is where she began to witness the workings of colonial power and violence on First Peoples. Jean resigned from the Manitowaning CAS after one year, both because she was needed at home and because she could not support the permanent removal of children from their families and communities. Despite attempts to report these practices to authorities, Jean described feeling helpless to change them. She later she came to understand that she was unknowingly implicated in the currents of the devastating Sixties Scoop.*

*In 1969, Jean co-founded the organization Voices of Manitoulin Women with Josephine Manitowabi, which supported Indigenous women's advocacy for their children's access to education. She also wrote for the Anglican Church newsletter, often about what she was coming to understand as the harmful impacts of the Indian Act.*

*In 1970, Jean's daughter, Val, who was by then a teenager, survived a life-threatening car crash. The accident, caused by an inebriated driver from a nearby reserve, left Val with a permanent brain injury. Jean tenderly told me about Val's accident, describing this time as the hardest of her life. She also thoughtfully reflected on the tensions within her family, as she persisted in writing and speaking out about colonial*

*injustices, even as she supported Val through rehabilitation. Jean understood that alcohol addiction was a direct result of colonial violence.*

*Through this time, she developed deep friendships with members of the Anishinaabe community in nearby Wikwemikong—some of these relationships became life-long, even extending through the generations. Jean opened herself up to learning the Ojibwe language and to witnessing the beauty beneath the colonial harm.*

*- May*

From Jean's files, a photo of Jean and Tony during their Manitoulin Island years. Jean's label: "Note the long gloves—gold in colour. Is that my bra strap showing? Or maybe slip? Ugh! Between 1966-1977?"

## "I saw power at work"

May: *In those early adult years—married, becoming a mother, working for the first time—was there a moment you would describe in a turning point for you?*

Jean: Yes! So, Tony gets ordained, and we're sent to Manitowaning. When I look back now, I realize that was a huge turning point. It took me into a totally different world.

The first thing was coming face to face with First Peoples, geographically, because we lived across Manitowaning Bay from Wikwemikong, which was this really large reserve. The move also took me within the workings of the Church. The Diocese of Algoma picked me up, because of my experience with working with children, to be the director of what we called the Junior Girls Guild.

So I became involved within the inner workings of the Anglican Church of Canada. That took me into the corridors of power where I began to see how organizations manage their corporate lives in such a way that they amass a tremendous amount of power. Sometimes not necessarily in money at all, but in influence, their authoritative stance, and so on. I saw power at work.

Because I worked at the grassroots, I also saw the power oppressed people have. I didn't realize it at the time, but if I look back now, I realize that that was how I became a social activist, if you want to put words to it. But it was just the way my life went, it was just the process of my life. I never thought about it in those academic terms.

## "We were human beings together"

May: *Do you want to reflect back to a moment or event when you first became aware of the injustices facing Indigenous communities? When you first became aware of that or politicized around that?*

Jean: Well, it was probably when I was asked to go on staff with the Manitoulin Children's Aid Society in 1966. Within the week, I was in court as an observer. The Ontario Court came over once a month and held their court session in the Band Office or the community centre at Wikwemikong.

The first week I was there, I met up with the probation officer, who said, "You see that woman over there? She has a number of children. You see, she is standing there talking to her mother. Her mother is an alcoholic; she's an alcoholic. She's gonna go back home with her mother and within a month she is gonna be back here." Because, of course, they drink, get into trouble, the police are called, and they end up in court.

I can't imagine now why I did this. I went over and said, "I'm Jean Koning." I said, "I'm wondering if you'd like to come home, I live here in Manitowaning." Her mother was saying no, but this young woman said she would come with me.

So I took her home to the Anglican Rectory in Manitowaning. She didn't say very much. It was a big house; I had a room for her to move into. I had never been in this situation before. I had no idea, you know, just playing it by ear, as it were. She said, "I have no cigarettes." So I asked my son, Phil, to run over to the store. (This was a long time ago, as you can tell.)

Phil went over to the corner store and came back with a pack of cigarettes, which I gave to her. And she started to cry. I thought, "Oh, that's strange." Because my teaching from school and so on had been that Indian People don't cry. I put my arms around her, and I said, "It's gonna be okay, we'll figure something out." But my thought was: she's a woman, and she's got children just like me. When you're hurting, you cry.

It seems silly to say, but all the stereotypes that we got from our schooling just fell away like that. That was my first awareness of the fact that that woman and I, no matter what our backgrounds, we were human beings together. We were female human beings together. You know, I couldn't separate myself from that.

The things that she and I went through over the next four years were so massive, both good and bad. I can tell you of the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of that particular woman. We have a good relationship. I didn't think of it as injustice at the time, I just kept seeing the differences. Her life went that way, my life went this way. It's only now when you ask me something like this that I'm thinking that was the beginning of my understanding that there was an injustice, as I came to know her story.

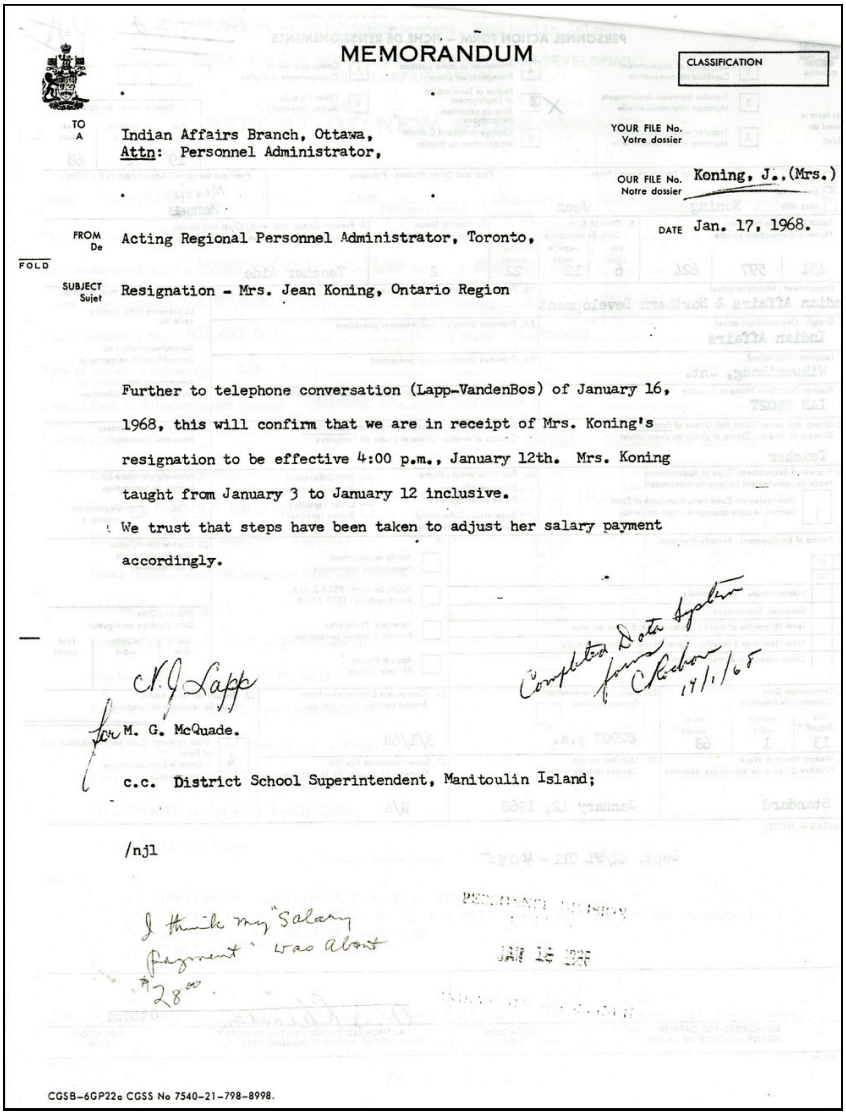
That must have been my first connection with First Peoples that made me understand that we are simply human beings who share exactly the same kind of human feelings and thoughts, no matter what our backgrounds.

## “I couldn’t believe what I was seeing”

Jean: This woman who had directed the Manitoulin Children’s Aid for years, she used to take 10 or more children from one family. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. She saw the parents were not taking care of their children because of alcohol or unemployment or all of those poverty issues. So she would just take them and put them into homes all across Ontario, maybe beyond. Those kids never made contact again with their families. Those are the Sixties Scoop children who have grown up to be in exactly the same kind of positions as the kids who came out of residential schools. This is why you have the intergenerational damage.

I didn’t know anything about the Indian Act and all that legal side of things at the time. I was a woman who had just been asked to work for Children's Aid, which was heavily, heavily invested in working with Indian people on Manitoulin Island. There were five reserves on Manitoulin Island, and Children's Aid covered the care of children in that whole area. And of course, there were children being raised in those homes by parents who had been raised in residential schools, who therefore had been raised in an institution where they had been taken away from their traditional cultural way of raising children.

It took me about one week of working at Children’s Aid to figure out that residential schools were the whole crux of the matter. You need to look after children who were being born to, and therefore in the care of, parents who had come through the residential schools without any knowledge whatsoever of how they lost their traditional knowledge of how to raise children. That’s what was wrong.



MEMORANDUM

CLASSIFICATION

TO / A: Indian Affairs Branch, Ottawa,
Attn: Personnel Administrator,

YOUR FILE No. / Votre dossier

OUR FILE No. / Notre dossier: Koning, J.,(Mrs.)

FROM / De: Acting Regional Personnel Administrator, Toronto,

DATE: Jan. 17, 1968.

FOLD

SUBJECT / Sujet: Resignation - Mrs. Jean Koning, Ontario Region

Further to telephone conversation (Lapp-VandenBos) of January 16, 1968, this will confirm that we are in receipt of Mrs. Koning's resignation to be effective 4:00 p.m., January 12th. Mrs. Koning taught from January 3 to January 12 inclusive.

We trust that steps have been taken to adjust her salary payment accordingly.

N. J. Lapp
for M. G. McQuade.

Completed Date Stamp
17/1/68

c.c. District School Superintendent, Manitoulin Island;

/njl

I think my "Salary Payment" was about $28.00

PERSONNEL DIVISION
JAN 18 1968

CGSB-6GP22a CGSS No 7540-21-798-8998.

From Jean's files, a memorandum to Indian Affairs Ottawa indicating Jean's resignation from teaching at the government school in Wikwemikong, Ontario, in 1968.

I hadn't really thought about residential school before that. And then I went into these homes. The parents would be off drinking, trying to drown their sorrows. That's what was happening, the state was saying, "You can't take care of your kids, therefore we're going to take them away without any consent."

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"There's something happening here that's very wrong. And we have to listen to what the First Peoples have to say."

- Jean Koning, 2017

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I just said, "Look, I've not been trained like that." My training was that you never took a child away from a home without very good reason. And most of the time, the first thing you tried to do was to repair the family, so if you had to take the child into care for a while and put the child in a foster home, then you made arrangements so that you kept the child in touch with the family that they were going to go back to. See what I mean? You didn't destroy the relationship completely. And the whole purpose of taking the child into care was to help the family get back on their feet so that they could take the child back. It was a rehabilitative kind of thing, not this cut-off and that's the end of it. I mean, that's terrible! I refused to do this.

But I had to work within the Children's Aid legislation and I had no power. I was a very, very small voice. I started writing and talking, saying to people, "There's something happening here that's very wrong. And we have to listen to what the First Peoples have to say." There's a part of me that can agonize over the fact that I could be seen as a part

of that Sixties Scoop. I had very little clout there. It was a forgotten part of Ontario as far as government goes. But I did everything I could to try and keep families together.

After I had been working for the Children's Aid for a while, I got so upset by what I saw happening that I refused to report to work. I got in touch with the people down in Toronto in the Ontario government. And I reported to him everything that I was doing. And I know that that's all recorded somewhere in the province of Ontario and in the Department of Indian Affairs.

### From Ziysah

Jean told me several stories from her time in Wikwemikong that were about learning to listen.

> "I remember this guy. This man came to the door. Young, Aboriginal. He and his wife had six or seven children more, maybe. Anyway, he came to the door. And I knew he wanted to talk to me, otherwise he wouldn't have been there. So I invited him in and showed him to come and sit in the living room. And we smoked in those days, so he did so. He sat there, lit a cigarette, and he was sitting smoking, and I'm chatting away, you know, trying to make him feel at home. I'm talking about the weather and so on. And I suddenly realized that I was talking but he would just sit in there. I didn't even know whether he was listening or not, smoking his cigarette.

> And I thought to myself, "OK, Koning, shut your mouth and just listen." So I did that. I'm sitting here. He's sitting on the couch smoking a cigarette. And I just waited. And it was just silence. I didn't say a word. When he was ready, he started to talk. And he told me what the problem was. That was my personal learning: to shut your mouth and just listen, even to the silence. Because silence is important to First People." (August, 2023)

## "I wanted to tell the side nobody wanted to talk about"

Jean: I went to work learning about the Indian Act, learning about the culture, the language. I started writing. I wanted to tell the side nobody wanted to talk about.

With the Voice of Manitoulin Women, I had the good sense to know that if I was going to sit down with First Peoples to find out what the Indian Act was all about, when I came together with those women, it made sense for me to listen to what they wanted to do. It just made sense. Because I knew where I was with all of that, but I didn't know where they were. As I listened, I began to understand that there's another point of view besides the one that I've got, that I was born and raised with and so on.

During that time, I began to send out a Christmas letter every year, detailing what was going on in our family, and I also wrote about what I was seeing and learning in my

work with First Peoples. And I sent it to all kinds of people: all the people I'd square-danced with, all the people in Huntsville, all my family, everywhere. I would get enough responses that kind of indicated, "Well, Indians, who's that?" that I knew I was dealing with racism this high.

All those people that I knew out there, who were close to me, none of them could see or understand what I was seeing. And they weren't paying any attention to me when I tried to say to them, "Look, things are happening here! This is terrible what's happening." They never listened. So, the first thing I learned was that nobody's going to listen to me, nobody really gives a damn. And I think that's why I've been so aggressive and angry.

Sometimes, in those days, what would happen would be that there would be racist columnists who wrote in the paper. And they would be writing about various things that were happening because there were always activities, blockades, arguments, fights, different struggles. And so, these right-wing columnists would write and I would answer. I would send a rebuttal. Occasionally I would write because of something I saw in the news or something.

I suppose I fell into writing because if I couldn't talk to somebody, I had to write it. I wasn't thinking about educating or anything. It's just the way I am. I'm a gabby type! I don't keep it in, I let it all hang out. I'm a very powerful sender and I almost blow people over unless you're strong enough. There's no Mother Teresa about me, I'm just out there like that. And I regret that in some ways. But I decided, that's the way I am! It's just me, I can't help it. I can't be anything else!

# CONFRONTING

***In 1975, after nine years on Manitoulin Island, Tony was offered a job with the Huron Diocese, prompting the family to move to Oldcastle, Ontario.*** *With their children becoming young adults, Jean had more time for her journalism and solidarity work. She continued to draw on her position and contacts to support Indigenous struggles; she worked with organizations bringing Indigenous people and settlers together in meaningful dialogue; she deepened her relationships; and she spoke out against colonial violence.*

*In these conversations, Jean often lamented about what she witnessed from her role in the Church in the 1980s and 1990s. In Oldcastle, Jean began working with Project North and writing for the* Huron Church News, *largely on issues impacting Indigenous Anglicans within the Diocese. When Tony's work took them to Thedford in 1983, Jean was asked to support Indigenous struggles at Ipperwash as an Anglican Church person. When Tony retired and they moved to London in 1986, Jean worked for the Diocese office on communications and continued to support Stony and Kettle Point communities in the Ipperwash land claims.*

*In 1991, Tony suffered a stroke. Jean cared for him at home for four years until he had to move into long-term care, where he passed away in 1999. During those years, Jean continued to work for the Diocese and with First Peoples as much as she could. In 1998, survivors*

*of the Mohawk Institute Residential School filed a class-action lawsuit against the Anglican Church of Canada, the federal government, and the Diocese of Huron. Jean became involved with the apology process. She advocated for the Diocese to accept full responsibility for the Mohawk Institute and to take leadership from Indigenous communities about how to proceed. But the church took a different approach.*

*Jean described these years as a time of growing public recognition of Indigenous resistance, with the Ipperwash and Oka crises, and the years leading to Canada's national apology and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.*

*- May*

Oct 84

by Jean Koning

**Walking tall**



The truck and sign advertise the Walpole Island Band's latest development project.

**Local initiative and development mean independence for the people of Walpole Island.**

The printing on the shiny red half-ton truck parked in the driveway proclaims with a flourish: '**Walpole Island In-**

(14 are Band members), in the production of plastic and die-cast molds for the automotive industry as well as for household

members in 10 years.
What is the secret of the Walpole Island Band's success?
Chief Tooshkenig said he has

From Jean's files, one of many articles she wrote during her time in Huron County. Published in *Living Message: The National Magazine of the Anglican Church of Canada*, October 1984.


From Jean's files, a photo of Jean that she labelled as: "Jean Koning, Ipperwash Inquiry, Forest ON, July 2004." Published in the *London Free Press*.

## “I never started, it just took me over!” E.C. Row Expressway

Jean: One Saturday morning, I got this phone call from a professor of archaeology. The City Council of Windsor was building this E.C. Row Expressway that was to cut right through Windsor, and this professor felt that they had reached a particular land that was a prehistoric burial site. And he said: “People should know about this because you shouldn't be disturbing burial sites.”

I had some contacts with the newspapers, including the *Windsor Star*. So I phoned this reporter at the *Windsor Star* and I said, “Do you realize that the City is going to start constructing over a burial site?” He said, "No, I never heard that." So I told him what this guy said.

Well, all hell broke loose! I went through one of the most hectic, fear-producing weeks I've ever had in my life. All of a sudden, that went public into the paper. Of course, Indian people picked up on it, the Chiefs, the Council picked up on it. The City engineer was mad as hell, as you can imagine. And I was the fall guy with all of that. No way I was asking for that, but I knew enough to know that interfering with burial sites was a real no-no.

I had no idea where that would take me for the next two years. It led to our blockading, holding up that construction for two years. During that time, we discovered things. Like for example, it came to light that pioneer farmers who had settled all across Essex County, when they were ploughing their fields by hand, they would find bones, skulls. They’d take them home and put them on their mantels and that sort of thing. No concept whatsoever.

## “It’s always the women who stand up” Kettle and Stony Point

Jean: There was a place before the Second World War, a reserve called the Kettle and Stony Point. During the war, the community was displaced. They were forced to move from their territory and give it over under the War Measures Act to the Defence Department for training soldiers, with the promise that the land would be returned to them when the war was over.

Well, 50 years later, the war was over, and the land still hadn’t been returned. It became the Ipperwash situation—they still don't have their land back the way they want it. So in those years, we were living in Thedford outside of London, in the mid-80’s. This took a goodly chunk of my passionate energy out of my life, I’ll tell you.

The Anglican priest at the Kettle and Stony Point reserve, who was a dear friend, said to me, “Jean, the Stony Point people are trying to assert their right to the land. As an Anglican woman, would you like to go and sit in with them, to support them?” So that's how I was connected with the first group of Stony Pointers who were fighting for their land.

I used to go with a pen and paper in hand to make notes if I wanted to report on something. But I came to realize that that made me look suspect, so I stopped doing that. But when I came home, I would sit and write about what I had seen because I knew it was a dreadful part of our history that really had to be recorded in some way. I had not yet reached the stage in my development and understanding of how to relate in a good way to First Peoples, so I did not know enough to say, “I have some

writing skills which I could use to help you, but you tell me how you want those used." It just didn't occur to me at that time.

I remember it was the women—it's always the women who stand up—they take their kids, and they stand up, and they say, "We're not putting up with this anymore."

One time, this young man came, and he said: "My Elder said that I should ask you to do this." He told me where I had to be, and what time, and so on, on a certain day at Kettle Point. I knew this Elder well enough that if he thought I could do this, then I was going to do it.

I had no idea exactly what I was getting into. I don't know where Tony was at this time, busy doing his work I guess. So the time came for me to leave Thedford and go over to Kettle Point for this rendezvous. I met with the young women and their kids, and we went into the band office. We were prepared to stay the night, so we had sleeping bags and stuff. I think it was winter, it was cold, I remember I had overshoes on of some sort. So anyway, we're getting settled down to sort of spend the night, and all of a sudden, the next thing we know, there is a whole kind of mob of Kettle Point people.

They came into the building. I can remember the only thing I could think of was, "I'll phone the newspapers." So I phoned a guy that I knew, and I was talking to him on the phone in the band office. I happened to look out the window, and this woman was standing out there with a baseball bat. She was mad! So I'm telling this guy very quickly, "There is something going on here, you should send some people." And that was all I could do, and I hung up, and I went in.

There were a couple of local Kettle Point Police who came. The tension was building, it was like a standoff. I didn't get home until 5:00 the next morning. Other people came up too, and there was a lot of consultation. We all knew how lucky we were that we had gotten out without any bloodshed.

But I wasn't looking to be in a standoff. I just knew it was not right that my friends who cared for me and nourished me were fighting for what should have been theirs. It was complicated in the community, and I made mistakes along the way. But when I was asked to help, I did. And if it was connected in some way to the Anglican Church or we had people there, I had to get involved and do what I felt was right.

If Tony ever said anything about what I was doing, I just said to him, "Look. You preach the gospel. I listen to you preaching, sometimes four or five times a day. I hear what you're saying, and when I go out and see people in trouble, what am I supposed to do? You know, you tell me what I'm supposed to do, and I'm doing it! You know, it's your fault!"

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"It was complicated in the community, and I made mistakes along the way. But when I was asked to help, I did. And if it was connected in some way to the Anglican Church or we had people there, I had to get involved and do what I felt was right."

- Jean Koning, 2017

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## "We should have been doing the repair work" The Mohawk Institute

Jean: In 1986, Tony retired and said we should move to London because they had good medical facilities. He had no idea that he was the one who was going to make use of them as much as he did. In some ways, that move was good for me because I was quite involved with the Diocese still. I was still working with the Huron Church News and doing communications with the Diocese.

But by then, the Diocese of Huron had been hit with this lawsuit for the Mohawk Institute, the residential school. I was involved with that legal process through what was happening with the Church, with the Diocese, also what was happening with the people of Six Nations. So that was how my involvement continued there, and I worked with a group called ADHAWK and another group called LAIC. It was extremely emotional. And there were some very, very bad times at church.

What we should have done is said, "We've made a mistake as a Church. We don't need to fight this. We know that it's a fact: What we did was not good." We needed to go to the First Peoples and say, "Look. We made a mistake. We are sorry. How can you help us to make the right changes?" That's what we should've done, just man to man, woman to woman, sort of thing. But instead of doing that, we went all through the lawsuits. The lawsuits become a totally different kind of instrument to solve what are seen as problems. But they don't do much for building relationships.

I have some in files there, correspondences about this time. It was a bad, bad time. We should have been looking inside ourselves and understanding the bad we had done. And slowly, very slowly, we should have been doing the repair work to make those relationships right again, if even possible. But that is not how it went.

Jean Koning

by Jean Koning

"Living Message" April 1985

Seventeen years ago writer Jean Koning was employed as a child care worker on Manitoulin Island, Ontario. She recalls some of her impressions as she visited an Indian Reserve for the first time and experienced culture shock.

FAX copy

# The adoption of native Indian children

## Impressions

*He sat silently in my car, his shoulders hunched against the hopelessness which seemed to pervade his fourteen years of life. In a few minutes he would go back into the house to face his alcoholic father, listless mother and six younger brothers and sisters. What sort of future*

*be Indian. Wherever you go, whatever you do, always hold your head high and be proud of your Indian heritage. It's what makes you a very special person - to your people, to me, to the Creator."*

*He got out of the car and went into the house, still without*

The onslaught of family breakdown caused by alcohol overuse and the resulting poverty and neglect of family responsibilities. But even more appalling was the number of children who had been removed not only from their homes but also from the Reserve and placed in non-Indian foster or adoption homes

From Jean's files, an article in which Jean writes about the family breakdown she witnessed two decades earlier in Wikwemikong, as children were removed from their homes and communities. Published in *Living Message*, April 1985.

# REFLECTING

***Five years after Tony's death, Jean moved to Peterborough to be closer to her daughter, Val.*** *In 2008, she helped to found the Kawartha Truth and Reconciliation Support Group (KTRSG), which brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members in conversation around the national TRC process and its recommendations. Jean also joined the Indigenous-led Sacred Water Circle, which includes long-time friends and colleagues who had also ended up in Peterborough.*

*As Jean moved through her 80s and 90s, she supported food security and anti-poverty work within the community. She advised various groups, attended events, and educated fellow non-Indigenous Anglicans right until the final months of her life.*

*From about 2014 on, Jean was engaged with us in Aging Activisms, connecting with intergenerational groups of social changers and sharing reflections on her own life's journey. Many of the conversations included in this section were very emotional, bringing Jean to tears over what has been lost to ongoing colonial violence and injustice.*

*- May*

Jean with Shirley Williams, Aging Activisms symposium, Peterborough, 2015.

Emma Langley surprises Jean with a birthday cake, Aging Activisms workshop, Peterborough, 2016.

## On Privilege

May: *Jean, I want to go back to what you said about the young woman you brought home with you in your early days in Manitowaning. You said that, at the time, you did not yet understand her situation in terms of injustices she faced. It was just that you were both women, and your life had gone in one direction, whereas her life was going in another. Have you come to think about this differently now?*

Jean: When I came to be part of the TRC group that we have here in town, we came together, white and First Peoples, to listen to one another. I suppose a talking circle like that gives you a chance to do some reflection and I began to see some differences that you could call injustice.

I grew up in a home where I knew who I was. It wasn't much, but I knew who I was. I was born of a British mother and a Scottish father. I grew up on that, knowing that I was a very important person, I suppose. You don't think about it in those days, but looking back, I was a very important person because I knew who I was, and I was proud of who I was. My father was Menzies, he grew up in Kirkcaldy. I visited and was able to meet his family and see the house where he was born. So I knew where I came from, and I had a sense of pride.

But that young woman didn't have that. We took all that away from so many First Peoples. And there was something around that that made me realize how privileged I am, and if you want to call that white privilege, then okay.

I also realized that my whole upbringing as a small child, pretty well into my teenage years, I had a grandmother, my English grandmother who lived with us until she died.

She had a very powerful influence on me. She was probably a very powerful sender too, probably where I got it from. I realized that she had really instilled in me a sense of the British empire. I had received that into my psyche too. And in some ways, I don't totally decry that because it has enabled me personally to be able to stand up when people were not just challenging me, but I mean, really trying to hurt me. Like it gives me a kind of a courage, I suppose? But on the other hand, I began to see, yes, if I look back, even my 50 years of dealing with First Peoples, I was very much the white privileged person.

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## On Unlearning Supremacy

Jean: If I think back, I didn't think of myself as being, you know, “I'll tell you what to do.” But society put me in that position. Being a childcare worker, you have power. Being the head of Project North. Being a clergy wife, with a big mouth. All those kinds of things put me in the position of sort of being out there, in front. I am also very impulsive. You probably can tell that. I talk, I respond. What I've come to see is that when you're like that, by God, you're right in line for the fire. And I did get shot down so many times. But I've learned to say, "Okay, you know. That's good for me. I need to be humbled."

And if you extrapolate that, if I may, there's a part of being British that meant that you figured you knew what was best. And British people have a whole way of thinking. When they came here, they couldn't believe that First Peoples could possibly know what they knew. Or believe what they believed. Or could possibly live in the good way

that we lived as British people. It was built into us by virtue of being British. So, you've got generations of that. We are slowly having to learn that being British is not the be-all and end-all. There are all kinds of very beautiful, wonderful people, of all sorts of colours and conditions, and God knows we are all meant to be a part of Creation's garden of people.

## On Learning to Listen

Jean: The first time I heard this put to me directly from a First People's person, it was a woman from Walpole Island. She was trained as a nurse and responsible for looking after the community's health. And she was at this meeting where there were First Peoples and Anglican people, and there was talk going back and forth. At one point, she said, "You know, you white people think that we Indians are dumb. Because when you talk to us, we listen. And then we think about what you've said. And then we give you our answer."

"But," she said, "you don't listen to our answer because you think you already know, and you think that our pause to listen makes us less intelligent."

I mean, why do we do that? I'm the worst offender! I knew I was the worst offender because while the Indian person is sitting there trying to tell me something, I'm thinking, "Oh yeah, well this is what I'm going to answer." I haven't listened to what they've said, so how can I comprehend?

That's the problem with Canadian people all across our history. As white people, we think we know better. There's no way that that person of colour can possibly tell me anything that I don't know better. And it's born into us,

and it's something we have to learn to deal with, to change. "We think we know what's good for you." We came here and said that to the First Peoples. We never listened! We never thought they had anything to teach us. And I look back over these 50 years and I say, "Oh my God! We've really missed the boat!" Because they have so much to teach us.

And now, I look to the First Peoples to hopefully give leadership so that there will be a world for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to still live in. I mean, why don't we get that?

### From Ziysah

In the last few months of Jean's life, I was experiencing a deep depression as we witnessed the unfathomable violence unleashed on Gaza in retaliation for the Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023. At a time when everyone seemed to either take on a polarized position, or to shy away from speaking on the subject at all, Jean's perspective always grounded me. One time, I asked if she thought it made sense for people here to care about what is happening in Palestine. She said:

> "We are intricately tied to what's happening. We can't stand apart form it … How can we separate ourselves? We have been created to be together." (October, 2023)

Another time, she brought the subject back to her concept of hope:

> "Israeli and Palestinian parents who have lost children to the violence suffered as human beings, not as politicians or capitalists and money-powered people. That's where my hope and my prayers lie, with people who feel like that. People like you, people like me." (December, 2023.)

## On Heart Work

Jean: When I came to Peterborough, and when the National Truth and Reconciliation process was starting up, I would hear all these women talking about being allies and so on. I had already been through 40 years of being present to First Peoples. For me, it was like standing beside family and saying, "Dammit, we're gonna fight this together!" I was totally immersed, I guess, and I became more and more immersed. Right from the beginning, it became a heart trip for me, not a head trip.

And I think, since the TRC, you have a lot of people who are starting to learn. The first thing you have is your head says, "oh my God, something happened here, I have to know what that is. I better find out about that." But it's not until you get to the heart that that you really begin to understand and comprehend exactly what's been going on all these years, and what that involvement has done to us as people, to them as people. And that's something so much deeper than just sort of saying, "I'm your ally, how can I help?"

But, everybody has to make that journey in his or her own way. This happens to be the way my journey went.

## On Witnessing Change

Jean: For years, I've walked alone, in the midst of people who don't even know about Indians. But all of a sudden, I'm now finding everywhere I go, people are saying they know a little bit, or they're discovering a little bit, you know? And I realize this is growing and spreading! And I'm thinking, I've spent 50 years getting all this stuff! And all of a sudden it's just coming in on them? There's so much that can come at you all at once. How can people manage that in their minds? Because with me, it's been such a gradual process over so many years.

I first met this friend of mine, going back 10 or 11 years, who has always been involved in social action, homelessness, all this kind of stuff. Whenever I go to any of these meetings, I'm there on behalf of First Peoples. I'm there to see if the First Peoples' voice is being listened to or being given a chance. And that becomes very evident. So my friend saw this, and afterwards he would attempt to debunk everything I said about the First Peoples. And I'd say, "Yes, but you know, look at it this way," and so on. So I don't know how many conversations we had over the last 10 years after falling off after meetings... until my friend has done a complete turnaround.

He kept listening, and what I said was enough to start him beginning to think, "Maybe there's a different way to look at this." And so I've watched the window of his mind actually open. And now you'll see him everywhere where

First Peoples are, he's very supportive. Now, that hasn't just come from me. Once you start to listen to other people, both Native and non-Native, your understanding begins to grow exponentially.

There's a whole different kind of awareness. I mean, since I began my journey 50 years ago, women have gone through the feminist movement. You know, there's so much more awareness. Whereas we were sort of isolated, insulated, all those years ago. And the other thing is the growth and development of the First Peoples themselves. That's tremendous. The pride is coming back now. People are learning their languages, claiming back their ceremonies and spiritual practices. More and more know who they are and they are proud of it. This is a change I am so happy to be seeing.

### From Ziysah

> "We must learn to listen to the First Peoples, they have some very important things to say to us."

Jean must have said this in some way, in some form, every single time I saw her. In the last year of her life, she began to make addenda. For example:

> "We must listen to the First Peoples tell their story *in the way they want to tell it*. Not to listen to them and tell their story to somebody else. There's more to listening to First Peoples

than just listening with your white man's ear. You have to listen, you have to try to listen from their point of view. What are they saying from where they are, psychologically and culturally and traditionally? … It's also a part of being in relationship. Recognizing two human beings. How do they interconnect in relationship? In the long run, I think it's good for humanity to have to go through this kind of struggle. If we learn how to do this better, I think we'll become human beings." (September, 2023).

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## On Reconciliation

May: *I wanted to ask you, Jean, about the idea of "reconciliation." What does it really look like to reconcile in practice for individuals and then for us as a society?*

Jean: Reconciliation is a word that you have to be very, very careful about. Reconciliation means that we have arrived. We are not reconciling. We're not even beginning to think about reconciling, for God's sake. We've got to do all the hard work in between!

You've got to start listening. And you've got to start trying to put yourself in that position to have some understanding of what the hell that was all about. You know, what were we doing to those children? And you've got to come to terms with what that does to you. And if you don't have anything happening inside of you when you

start to hear that stuff... You've got to go through your own pain, if you have any feelings at all as a human being. My God, what have we done, what have I done, am I responsible? How do I deal with that?

I will not use the word "reconciliation." I don't want people to talk to me about reconciliation. You're not ready, folks. Sorry. If that's judgmental, so be it. You are not ready. And you will know when you're ready, but only after you've done the work. You've got to be willing to be open. You've got to be willing to give, to change, to give way to another way of thinking and so on. That's awfully hard.

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"I will not use the word "reconciliation." I don't want people to talk to me about reconciliation. You're not ready, folks... You've got to be willing to be open. You've got to be willing to give, to change, to give way to another way of thinking."

- Jean Koning, 2017

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May: *What about for you personally? Have there been moments for you personally where you've been reconciling around relationships with First Peoples?*

Jean: Gosh, that makes me cry.

I go through moments of reconciliation every time I meet with First Peoples. And realize how beautiful they are. And how much we miss when we bypass them. Or ignore them. And how much warmth and love and beauty there is in having relationships with First Peoples. Good relationships with integrity.

Sometimes, I think my tears have dried up, but then all of a sudden, it just comes over me again. We've missed so much. My sadness is for what we've missed. How wonderful it is that there are any First Peoples anywhere who are willing to engage us in any kind of relationships.

And that's reconciliation. Reconciliation is not push a button and balloons or fireworks or something. It's a slow growing together. A slow back and forth kind of building as we yearn to listen to one another and care for one another. And yes, the past is horrible, but life has to go on. Life goes on in the little children that are born and then grow up, and we can only hope that their children and my great-grandchildren will be able to find a new way. That's where reconciliation may happen.

You and I will only be sowing the seeds which will move toward ultimate reconciliation. But it's a growth process. We're so push-button-minded, you know. If we just do it right, everything's going to change. It doesn't. We grow just like your plants in the garden.

### From May

Jean would often tell Emma and I how validating it was for her when we asked questions about her life and listened deeply to her answers. It was a very intimate and special time for all of us. Although the quotations shared throughout this book are edited to be stand-alone stories, these were often much more natural conversations, which we would cycle

in and out of while also making tea. Sometimes the "aha" moments around our big questions came about in these small, playful moments outside of our formal interviews, often while the recorder was still running.

This conversation was recorded in October 2016 during a break in a life history interview. It captures our dynamic and resonates with what Jean had to say about connecting the personal and societal dimensions of reconciliation.

Jean: You both have tea, don't you?

May: Yes, please.

Emma: Please. Yeah. Thank you for sharing all of that. It's very-

Jean: Well I have to say, you sure know how to hit the buttons here.

[Laughter]

May: We weren't really trying to hit your buttons, Jean!

Jean: I know! But you're very good at it! Whatever's going to come out of this, I don't know, but I hope it's as good as the interviewers, because I have been on your side of things often enough to know where you're coming from. You're very good.

May: Well, luckily, we have a good person to work with here, because we don't have to say too much and you fill in the blanks.

[Laughter]

Jean: Well, I guess I gear myself that when you come, I'm gonna let you have it with both barrels.

[Laughter]

Jean: Isn't it funny how much our situation, the ordinary things in life, inform the very deep?

Emma: Yeah.

Jean: Reconciling efforts that we undertake. You both take tea?

May (to Emma): And that's your thesis statement?

[Laughter]

Jean: And Emma likes milk and sugar?

Emma: Yes, that's right, please.

Jean: And May?

M: Black, please.

J: Clear.

[Laughter]

## On Faith

May: *How have you sustained this? How have you kept going in this work for so many years?*

Jean: Well, I think I go back to the beginning, my belief in God. What I call God is some form of divine love. It's not this old man in the sky with a long beard or whatever, but there's some divine power. I call that power 'love.'
So there's that power there that I feel I work with, I'm sustained by it, and that is very important to me. The ground of my being, perhaps. It's where I come from. It's my faith.

Because I believe that I was put here for a purpose, my life is not totally meaningless. When I think back over the things that have happened to me in my life, I realize I would not have survived without that power which is beyond me, but nevertheless a part of me. And that is that sense of the power of love. I use the word "love" in its best sense, meaning that as we love and care for one another, so we are working out this love in our lives.

I believe that ultimately there is that power that is there to care for us. And that's what still carries me, will carry me to my grave I'd expect.

I better make a cup of tea. Have you got time?

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## On Hope

Jean: If the window gets opened ever so slightly, the heart gets opened ever so slightly, I believe there's good that will enter. I believe in the goodness of Creation enough that in most cases, people really do want to be good. They really do.

I mean, we all have the potential for being good in our lives. There are so many influences that try to change that into bad. But if you count on the fact that there is goodness in every human being, then you can hope that, in a period of time, there will be enough people within whom that sense of goodness will begin to prevail in a way that will start to make changes in the world.

The one thing in my future at this moment that is important to me is the four letter word "hope." When all else fails, I still have hope. Because I do believe in people. I believe in human beings.

"We may only work in the timeframe that's been given to us to be part of this Creation. We don't really know where we came from and we don't really know where we're going. But that's my excitement that mixes with the hope."

- Jean Koning, 2023

*from Ziysah's audio files*