

# VISITING JEAN

LEARNING TO LISTEN ON  
COLONIZED LAND

May Chazan

With Ziysah von Bieberstein and Emma Langley

Featuring the words of Jean Koning

# Visiting Jean: Learning to Listen on Colonized Land

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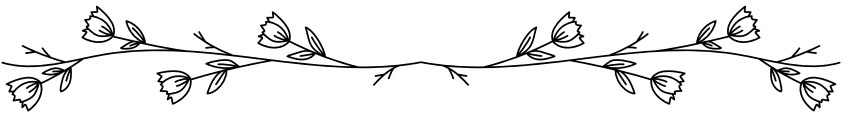
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In honour of Jean Koning

1922-2024



“Visiting... is a sharing of oneself through story, through principled and respectful consensual reciprocity with another living being.”

- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Land as Pedagogy”

"This is not easy to do 'briefly' after 90+ years of 'bio!' I could introduce myself as I do in the Ojibwe language when I'm with my Anishinaabe friends: My name is Jean Koning. I was born in Windsor, Ontario. I now live in Peterborough, Ontario. I am a white woman. I have walked with Ojibwe people for many years. I am learning to speak Ojibwe. Beyond that, I have been a wife, mother of three, and I have 11 grands and five great-grands, with more on the way, I understand (happily!) My husband was an Anglican priest who served in Manitoulin Island, where we met "Indians" for the first time in 1966, and where I began to stand in solidarity with the First Peoples, eventually serving with Project North, later Aboriginal Rights Coalition (now a branch of KAIROS). I worked closely with Aboriginal Anglican Church people throughout southwestern Ontario, as well as Traditional First Peoples. As a member of the Kawartha Truth & Reconciliation Support Group, I have begun to understand just how prophetic those words have been, as I continue to learn, and benefit from, what they mean to me in my life journey."

- Jean Koning, 2015, in preparation for Aging Activisms' inaugural symposium



Jean Koning and Elder Shirley Ida Williams (Wikwemikong First Nation) at the inaugural Aging Activisms symposium, Nogojiwanong (Peterborough, Ontario), 2015.

“Jean and I became friends in many places with the work we did. We were grandmother warriors together, fighting for justice!”

- Elder Shirley Williams, 2025

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge Jean Koning: thank you, Jean, for your time, love, and teaching. Your tenacity, care for the world, and authenticity have long been an inspiration to me. I am grateful to Jean's family for playing such an important role in making Jean who she was. And to the many dear friends with whom Jean "walked" over six decades: thank you for persisting life, language, and culture, in the face of so much violence. From you, Jean learned about the transformative potential of humility, uncertainty, and deep listening—the central messages of this book.

I have carried out this work as a settler on Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe territory, held and sustained by the land and water here. I am continually learning and growing in this place, nurtured by a beautiful community of artists, activists, Elders, youth, and scholars. I want to especially acknowledge Aging Activisms collaborators and participants, so many of whom have shaped my thinking: special thanks to Elder Shirley Williams and Elder Alice Olsen Williams, and to longtime research team members, Ziysah von Bieberstein, Jenn Cole, Melissa Baldwin, Mehrangiz Monsef, and so many others! Thank you to my children, Alex and Anthony Hodson, who teach me daily about intergenerational magic, and to the Youth Climate Action Club members, who have inspired me through some difficult years. At Trent, I am grateful for my brilliant colleagues in Gender and Social Justice: Kelly McGuire, Karleen Pendleton Jimenez, Jenn Cole, Nael Bhanji, Sally Chivers, and Lisa Boucher.

Ziysah collaborated with me on every part of this project: the grant-writing and visioning, the selection of materials, and the writing, editing, and design of this little book. Thank you, Ziysah, for your word wizardry, immense generosity, ongoing willingness to co-conspire, deep personal care, and steadfast friendship.

Emma Langley collaborated on the research I carried out with Jean in 2016-2017 and wrote a beautiful thesis on this work in 2018. Emma, I will always cherish our intergenerational trio and the hours we spent sharing stories, tea, laughter, and tears. Thank you for contributing your heartfelt song for Jean to this project.

Jenn Cole has generously shared her creativity, brilliance, and listening with me for as long as I can remember. Thank you, Jenn, for somehow finding the time, and for your guidance, beautiful cover art, and wisdom.

Thank you, Jillian Ackert, for bringing your creative talent and gentle patience to this work, and for your commitment to intergenerational community care.

And thank you, Alex Hodson, for jumping in with a fun illustration. I love the joy, hope, and vision you bring to this world, especially your dream of a summer camp run by grandmothers like Jean.

Finally, I am grateful to my wonderful colleagues at Concordia University, the Aging in Data Partnership Grant led by the formidable Kim Sawchuck, for their support with this project and help in building my research program over the last decade. Thanks also to Trent University, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Canada Research Chairs Program.

-May Chazan



# COVER ARTIST'S STATEMENT

I was lucky enough to grow up in the bush in my home territory in the Kiji Sibi watershed. My Nan and her brothers and sisters went to Mattawa Day School. As a queer, neurodivergent, mixed ancestry Algonquin anishinaabekwe coming into activist and scholarly work with May and Ziysah, I experienced Indigenous people being put first in gatherings. In visits with Elders, scholars, artists, knowledge holders and changemakers in Michi Saagig territory, we entered into ceremony together with smudge, words, prayers, laughter and food. I never got to work with Jean in these spaces, but when I met her at the Aging Activisms book launch in 2018, her legacy was well known to me: beloved, an advocate for Indigenous people, fierce and funny, dedicated to visiting and contributing to the archive of settler-allyship in a time where this is desperately needed. We met one another and I complimented her on her bright red shoes. Mine were also red. Kinship in intergenerational fashion! In this artwork, I circled my hand, tracing a tree ring, abstractly, allowing my gestures to follow the shapes of time as I thought about intergenerational relationships and knowledge sharing. I used oranges to foreground those who have survived residential school and the children who didn't. I brought pink—a bright spot of levity for Jean's heart and bold shoes—to meet the orange hues in an act of responsive visiting.

-Jenn Cole