

**Maria Campbell, *Eagle Feather News*, May 2007**

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I have a dog called Chi-pup. She's just an ordinary mish mash of Blue Heeler, Sheppard, Border Collie and goodness knows what else. Kind of like me I guess. She would never fit into the perfect little box created by experts on genealogy bloodlines or whatever to create a breed that would warrant recognition. Like most little mixed-blood dogs or mongrels, Chi-pup is gentle, very wise, hardworking and fierce. She will nudge your knee for a quick rub behind her ears or will rip your leg off if she thinks you are threatening her home or her people. She ended up as my companion and protector one lazy summer day thirteen years ago. My kids and I had just finished dinner and were sitting around on the verandah napping when Bailey, my granddaughter, who has a tendency to adopt any and every stray, homeless and sick creature she finds, including snakes, mice, turtles and salamanders, came running up to the house. "Grandma look. Some men threw her out of the truck by the bridge and she's so hurt."

Cradled in her arms was a tiny puppy with more cigarette burns than fur. Bailey sobbed as I took the pitiful little thing from her and put it on the table. "How could they be so cruel grandma," she cried. "She's just a baby."

The puppy was not only covered in cigarette burns but she had also been sexually abused and was torn and bleeding. She whimpered as I washed and cleaned her up, rubbing salve on her poor little body. Later I tried to explain to my granddaughters about the kind of sick people who would commit such vile acts. "Will those people do that to kids too grandma?" Bailey asked her eyes wide.

Crouched on the floor by the puppy's basket, my two granddaughters looked tiny, pure and innocent. I almost convinced myself that no one would ever hurt them and that there was no need for me to talk to them about such evil and ugliness. But I am an Aboriginal woman as are my granddaughters and to not answer their questions honestly, in a country where violence and abuse of Aboriginal women and children is almost normal would have been wrong and could one day jeopardize their safety. So I told them the things I thought they needed to know. Today my granddaughters are young women and Chi-pup is an old lady. Sometimes when I look at all of them my heart is almost too full to speak.

I was taught by my great-grandmother and by other old teachers that in our world, babies (including the babies of animals and other creatures), are the most important and the most sacred on the earth, and that without them there is no future for our peoples. The teaching says that all our actions, everything we say and everything we do is inherited by them. This is pretty frightening when you consider the present state of

our world. The poverty, neglect, abuses and lack of respect for children is overwhelming and speaks to the kind of people we have become.

Wars are raged all over the world, not only contaminating our earth for generations but also killing and maiming thousands upon thousands of children everyday. Scientists and activists warn us of environmental catastrophes and irreparable damage due to herbicides, pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, genetic modification, to name just a few. Every day, people, including children, die of cancer and diseases caused by all these toxins. And while all of this is happening, leaders in our houses of parliament waste our money and their dignity, hurling self-serving insults and accusations at each other. At the end of the day they pass laws to put children into prisons instead of eliminating the poverty and cruelty that shadows their lives. I find it overwhelming sometimes, and frightening to live in a world where people can so easily believe that children are the enemy. It is unbearable to think that they do not take responsibility for their role as protectors and caregivers.

Many people are like me I am sure, who when watching and listening to the leadership of today feel an overwhelming sense of powerlessness and fear -- not for self, but for our babies, our creatures, and our earth. It is during these times that Chi-pup, sensing my mood will nudge me. As I stroke her soft fur I remember her history, and how in spite of all the pain she has come through she still finds love in her heart. Together we walk to the river's edge, and I put tobacco and prayer cloth down for that first grandmother in our ancient achimowina. That grandmother spirit who loves children and animals.