

Maria Campbell, *Eagle Feather News*, August 2011

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Justice is a painful issue to write about

This issue is about justice and that's a hard one, thinking and talking about it always makes me a little crazy.

It is such a great and noble thing, yet there is so little of it in the world that I wonder about us humans sometime.

Yesterday I walked from Gabriel's Crossing with the Northerners who are walking from Pinehouse to Regina rallying support to stop our government from putting a nuclear waste dump in northern Saskatchewan. A nuclear waste dump! My Creator, even the word sounds awful.

Why would anyone, especially a government who is supposed to be our protector want to have waste in their yard, especially toxic waste? They are going to haul it from Ontario, down our highways, past our homes and into our North. That's if they don't have an accident on the road.

But I forgot, they tell us it's safe (isn't that what they said in Japan?) Now I understand why they were in such a hurry to build the St. Louis Bridge and why another multi-million dollar bridge is being built in Patuanak. It was foolish of me to think it was being built for the good citizens of the territory.

The walk itself was good and even if I didn't cover many miles, I at least let the universe know that I do not want this for my grand and great grandchildren nor do I want it for my country.

Thank you to all the people on the road who honked to show support or who stopped to sign the petitions, donate money, cook food and provide sleeping accommodation for the courageous young people and elders who are leading this walk.

Aboriginal leadership could well take a lesson from them, while they are, as usual, fighting each other as our people fend for themselves and for Mother Earth.

To the "old" leader who told the young man at a northern meeting: "Take the money or be prepared to go to jail or hang yourself with your Métis sash because that's the only choice you'll have if you don't accept this offer to put that stuff in the North." I say to you and all the "sell-out old men" if that's the only advice you can give our youth you are indeed more pitiful than I thought.

I just hope that you at least negotiated a decent fee for yourselves for the sale of our children's future. To our provincial government, I would like to say that I pray you will show us you have more care and vision for our children's future than your predecessors.

More on injustice? Well how about the beautification of our city, especially our riverbank where one has to look long and hard to find citizens and their dogs on a walk about or having picnics with their families? The only people I see using the riverbank on

any day but Saturday, when the crowds come to the market, are the people who have been dispossessed as a result of beautification, jacked up rent and real estate prices.

Six years ago I looked at a tiny two-bedroom house that the realtor said "only needs a little tender care." It was listed at \$45,000. I thought it was too much. The listing is up again and out of curiosity I called the realtor, who said again, it only needs "a bit of loving care." The price is now \$180,000.

The rent on an almost identical slum house beside it is \$1,300 per month and I understand that is reasonable. Now where is the justice in that?

Soon people will have to live in tent villages like they do in the United States. That was one of the sad sights on my trip to Hawaii. Tent villages of homeless families on the beach while across the road, blocks of boarded-up houses. I wonder if city hall here would let people pitch tents along that lovely deserted riverbank.

Tent villages of dispossessed people in our province have happened before. I believe it was in the 1940s. Just Google archival photos. I found one photo of Regina, a sea of tents on Broad Street and 12th Avenue.

The people ended up there as a result of Tommy Douglas's failed plan to move Métis and Non-Status people off the road allowances in southern Saskatchewan to Green Lake. In the late autumn, I might add, and put them in tents to spend the winter.

The majority of them survived the bitter winter, but many children and elders didn't. In the spring the people left, walking or using wagons and horses to make their way back to their homes, but their homes had been burned to the ground and so they went to Regina hoping to find work.

All of this, by the way, was done while men were away fighting in the Second World War. No one likes to hear that history, some deny it, and even some of our own people will not acknowledge or speak of it because of the shame that is attached to poverty and homelessness. I love our city and province. I think they are among, if not, the most beautiful in the world, but it frightens me to see the callousness shown to those who have no power.

I have always wondered how one justifies in their own mind the raising of funds to send to Third World countries when those conditions are right here at home.

True, they are not as visible or "in your face" so to speak, but there are people and lots of them, who are not only hungry but homeless as well. They are not just panhandling for something to do or standing around on street corners just to annoy us. And those are just the ones we see. There are many, many more that are not visible.

Don't get me wrong, I am not against money being sent away to help people in war-torn countries, but it seems to me justice would be better served if we addressed the issues of poverty and hunger at home before running off to save the world. And remember too that those countries are poverty stricken because someone cleaned out their resources and polluted their land.

If we continue to be as we are we will have tents of refugees here and that time is not so far away. Do I have answers on how to change that? Not really, but I believe that if we sat down together and put people first we could change anything.

That's my take on justice. I will try to be lighter next time. Ekosi, hiy hiy.