

Maria Campbell, *Eagle Feather News*, January 2018

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Enough silence, we need to talk about violence

In my last column (November) I invited people to write their thoughts on Louise Halfe's article about violence and also about the violence in our lives, our communities and in particular between men and women.

I said I would give my column in this newspaper.

I did that hoping it would begin a much-needed conversation but there were no takers. Two people thanked me for offering but didn't send anything. So, what's up? Are we in denial or are we being "traditional" and practicing non-interference by ignoring what is happening and why it is happening.

How can we begin to deal with this if we're not prepared to speak about it? We all know that not speaking about it will feed the Witiko. I know I don't want to talk about it. It's easier to talk about an outsider's violence against me or us because then I can remain the victim and not take responsibility for my own self or stuff or for changing it.

There are many sides to violence in our families and communities, my side, the abusers side, the family's side, and then there are the communities. No, I have not forgotten about all the faces of colonization but I can't do much about that Witiko till I have confronted it and chased it out of my life, my home and my community.

Then and only then can I be strong enough to work with everybody else who has done the same thing to make sure it does not come back in to pollute our bodies, our children and our land ever again. Like you, I know deep inside of me that no healing or moving past will happen if I don't do it or at least try.

I am one of those women who has been slapped around, punched out and put down by men I have loved and I thought loved me. And I wasn't the only one. I remember sitting around with girlfriends after a particularly bad time and we'd joke about it.

"Oh, I see you and your old man were making love again last night. Yeah, we sure were. So hard I banged my face on the wall."

No kidding, those kinds of comments were common among women of my generation. We'd laugh and make jokes about it as we cleaned each other up or helped each other hide out till things cooled down.

Why? Because that was the only way we could bear it. Sure, sometimes we'd vent, be angry and threaten all sorts of things but we never talked about why we went back. We never talked about the hope we had that this time if we went back and tried again, it would be different.

And we never talked about the incredible shame we felt, not among each other or with the men we loved and who loved us.

I know it sounds crazy to say the men we loved or who loved us, but I know I loved my late husband and I know he loved me but both of us grew up in horrific violence and we didn't know how to live a different way. We didn't have the tools.

We had traditional teachings because both of us grew up with them and again that sounds crazy. If there was violence how can I say we grew up traditionally?

But we did, as again did many people of my generation. We had old people who taught us, talked to us and tried to help us through the chaos, trauma and fear. Traditional teachings were the only thing they had to give us, and their love, but it wasn't enough because times were changing so fast and we needed additional tools to understand what was happening.

Displacement, dispossession, alcohol, there is nothing I can think of that didn't arrive in our community once the road and radio came in.

And then there was the shame. That was, I believe, the most powerful Witiko of all. I hate it, even today I know what it feels like, smells like and looks like. It was for half of my life, the gasoline that fueled all the anger and hurt of childhood, because I knew as a child, that what was happening was not our fault, I didn't know why, but I knew, and for that I felt shame.

Shame because our parents didn't fight it, shame because our fathers didn't work, couldn't speak English "properly".

As a child, the list that made "humans" seemed endless. Do you know that by the age of eight I believed a toothbrush and an orange made you human? I remember sitting around with a group of people a few years ago reminiscing about childhood, and one of the men said how much he hated Dick and Jane and just wanted to beat the crap out of them when he was in Grade 2 because they had everything.

They were human, we were savage. We all laughed but I don't think there was one of us who did not feel the same way at one time or another in our young lives.

The Penfield Children's Centre in Milwaukee does amazing work with kids who have been traumatized by domestic violence. They write that children who are or have been raised in violence are (a) more alert, have higher adrenaline levels and are more easily triggered; (b) That they exhibit impulsivity and hyperactivity and are often diagnosed ADAD; (c) they have delayed speech or areas of development because they are constantly trying to keep themselves or other family members safe and are therefore not able to develop typically; (d) they self-blame and withdraw, act timid or are frightened even when violence is not happening; (e) That they have stomach aches, feel nauseas when they sense tension. Does any of that sound familiar? Was, is that you? Is that your child? I said we were given traditional teachings, and love by our old people, but no tools to help us deal with the violence. Today very few of our children have that. They are in government care, being raised in homes where there is very little if any, love, teachings, life tools, anything.

So, we need to do something, anything. So, come on, please, write something, anything. We have to talk about it.

It's time. Hiy hiy, Maarsi