

## Letter from the Indigenous Guest Editor

Chokma, Readers,

I write this letter of introduction while in my community, the Chickasaw Nation, in what is now southcentral Oklahoma, US. I begin by acknowledging my connection to place in my ancestral language of Chikashshanompa': Aba'Binni'li'at yaakni'yappa ikbittook. Yakkookay imanhili. I am the Indigenous Guest Editor for this issue of *The Arbutus Review* and a postdoctoral fellow for the NEȚOLŃEW “one mind, one people” Indigenous Language Research Project at the University of Victoria. I join with *The Arbutus Review* and the Indigenous Mentorship Network of the Pacific Northwest (IMN-PN) in acknowledging with respect the Lckwungen peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. I invite you to acknowledge the lands and territories on which you live and work.

This special interdisciplinary issue, focused on Indigenous wellness, is the result of a partnership between *The Arbutus Review* and the IMN PN. We welcomed submissions from Indigenous undergraduates at post-secondary institutions in BC. A guiding principle of this issue was Indigenous mentorship. Undergraduate writers received feedback from graduate student peer reviewers and also worked closely with me, as the Indigenous Guest Editor, and Editor Gillian Saunders from *The Arbutus Review* team.

This Indigenous-led issue is itself unprecedented, and has also come together under unprecedented circumstances. Our undergraduate authors completed their submissions during an ongoing global pandemic and urgent Black Lives Matter movement, white supremacy, and colonization. We stand with the Indigenous Nations and communities of colour that are being impacted by COVID-19 and with our Black relatives, including the families of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others who have lost their lives to police violence. As we collectively work toward justice, the writers' theme of wellness is all the more timely.

We open this issue with a personal narrative by ŒELÁSTENOT (Bonnie Seward) entitled “The Journey of ŒELÁSTENOT.” From WSÁNEĆ Territory and a student in the W,SENĆOFEN IST Language Revitalization Program at the University of Victoria, ŒELÁSTENOT shares a personal account of reconnecting to her Indigenous heritage language of SENĆOFEN. She writes of her family, which is continuing to heal intergenerational pain inflicted by English-only residential and day schools: “I want each of them to take back their power through the language.” As this narrative reminds us, learning one's Indigenous language is a foundational step toward wellness.

Olivia Ryan-Schmidt, who is of Métis, Irish, Russian, and German ancestry and a social work student at the University of Victoria, asks university students in helping fields to consider the place of trauma in their wellness journeys. “The Trauma within Our Knowledge Bundles: Indigenous Helpers Navigating Trauma within Social Work” suggests that a decolonizing framework positions trauma as an integral component of a knowledge bundle, which holds medicines, teachings, and what has been learned from lived experience. Ryan-Schmidt writes, “The more I learn from my trauma, the more I am able to reach for its teachings within my bundle.”

In the next essay, “The Healing Power of Storytelling: Finding Identity through Narrative,” Seren Friskie, a student at Douglas College whose relations are Sts'Ailes, Stó:lō, and Cree, explores storytelling as integral to Indigenous wellness. Friskie recounts the creation of an Indigenous Youth Storytelling Circle

on Coast Salish territories. Through the Storytelling Circle, youth found community and healing. Friskie writes of the power of gathering youth: “We all shared a journey of gaining knowledge and strengthening our identities through story.”

Also critical to Indigenous wellbeing is rematriating the power of those who identify as women, girls, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQIA+. Madeline Burns, a Métis person from The Red River Settlement and a student at University of Victoria, explores how the work of an Indigenous burlesque group to reclaim Indigenous sexuality is an expression of sovereignty and decolonizing practice. The essay entitled, “Reclaiming Indigenous Sexual Being: Sovereignty and Decolonization Through Sexuality in Vancouver, B.C.” draws on examples from how performers in the group Virago Nation disrupt damaging stereotypes. In doing so, Burns writes, Indigenous peoples “are representing our sexualities ...in order to heal through the embodiment of sovereignty.”

In “Let the Land Heal You,” Charlene Menacho also addresses gendered experiences of colonization and calls for support for those who identify as men in their healing journeys as well. As a Dene woman, Menacho writes a personal letter to her brothers, addressing experiences of intergenerational trauma for Dene men in Denendeh, a name meaning “Land of the People” and referring to the Northwest Territories in the Dene language. Menacho exposes the damaging legacies of colonization on her home community of Tulita while also offering an inspiring message of resiliency: “Indigenous Peoples ...are not the pain we carry. We are hope, love, resistance, strength, and joy neatly sewn together, like the floral designs on our moccasins.”

The theme of wellness as intricately connected to relationship to land is carried through the final essay, “An Urban Cree Finding Place at x<sup>w</sup>cičəsəm.” Hailey Bird Matheson, a Cree social work student at the University of British Columbia (UBC), reflects on experiences of learning and strengthening identity at UBC’s Indigenous Health Research and Education Garden, which is called x<sup>w</sup>cičəsəm (the place where we grow) in hənq̄omihəñ, the language of Musqueam people. Matheson writes, “I have discovered that a personal sense of self and ceremony in my life is facilitated by the interactions I have with ancestral medicine and spending time with Elders.”

Also included in this special issue are two poems. In “living in the in-betweens,” Madeline Burns explores the tensions that arise when one’s identity does not conform to others’ expectations. Similarly, in “Native enough,” Hailey Bird Matheson questions what it means to be enough as an Indigenous person, to one’s own people and mainstream society.

The student authors remind us that our healing and wellness journeys are both individual and collective and entail work to reclaim our ancestral identities, tell our stories, speak our languages, and strengthen our relationships to land and one another.

Hachinchokma'ni sabanna. I hope you all are well.

Kari A. B. Chew