

# Understorey

M A G A Z I N E



**African Nova Scotian Women**  
Issue 12 (2nd Edition)  
June 2020



**Delmore "Buddy" Daye  
Learning Institute**

*Excellence in Africentric  
Education & Research*



# About Our Cover

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**O**ur cover features work by Nova Scotia artist Shreba Quach. Shreba says, “I have been an artist all my life but only in the last five years have I called myself one. Creativity has been a tool for healing and recovery from a traumatic past.” The full painting from which our cover was created is shown here.



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## **Understorey Magazine Issue 12: African Nova Scotian Women**

Lindsay Ruck, Editor

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*Understorey Magazine* Editor-in-Chief: Katherine Barrett

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Delmore "Buddy" Daye  
**Learning Institute**  
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for women, gender  
& social justice



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# From the Editor

## Lindsay Ruck, June 2020

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*I wear it joyfully. I wear it big. I wear it womanly. And I wear it Black. Black. Black. As night, deep and soft and endless with no moon. Just black and perfect splendour in life and in being a woman in this world.*

—from "Mirrors" by Maxine Tynes

I was in Grade 3 when I first realized I didn't look like the other kids in my class. A young boy used a word to describe my skin colour and in that moment I felt so small. I felt ugly. I felt different. All I wanted to do was run home, stay in my room, and never go back to school again. Up until that point I knew I didn't necessarily look like my friends. Sure, my hair had far more volume than most, and I had hit a serious growth spurt that made me taller than most of the other kids at school. But for me, the differences stopped there. I hadn't realized that other children might view my skin colour as a negative. It never occurred to me that my complexion would be something they could mock and point out as a fault. To my recollection, that was my first experience with racism, but it certainly wasn't my last. When something happens over and over again, one can become numb to the action. It's so common that it no longer has the same effect as it once did. But no matter how many times I was called a name or made to feel less than, it never hurt any less. If anything, it hurt more.

What we are seeing right now around the world are people who are saying in one voice that they will no longer let this be the norm. They will no longer accept the title of second-class citizen and, this time, they will ensure their voices are heard. People are starting to make a concerted effort to listen, to learn, and to try to grasp just how deep systemic racism has been rooted into every facet of life.

We've also seen a great many people looking to celebrate the beauty of being Black. And that is exactly what this issue of *Understorey Magazine* has set out to do. When the issue was first released in 2017, I was honoured to act as its guest editor. And once the call went out, I was blown away by the number of submissions we received from the African Nova Scotian community. This province is bursting with incredibly talented and proud Black women who are using their craft to celebrate the beauty of their race, their culture, and their ancestral roots.

Within these pages you will find works of poetry, essay, painting, sculpture, and beautiful quilts. I am grateful to Editor-in-Chief Katherine Barrett for giving these women the space and the platform to highlight their work. I'm also thankful to the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute who funded this issue in 2017 and is now providing the re-print to mark the extraordinary changes happening in our world in 2020.

I wish I had such a publication to show that Grade 3 little girl who was made to feel ashamed of who she was and what she looked like. I wish I could tell her that Black is beautiful and that, one day, in the midst of a civil rights movement, she'll be telling her own daughter to be proud of who she is, to love herself fully, and to not be colour blind, but to be colour conscious.

Let's celebrate our differences. Let's lift each other up. Let's make sure this is a movement, and not just a moment. Black women matter. Black artists matter. Black futures matter. Black dreams matter. Black lives matter.

# A Message from DBDLI

**Susan M. Brigham, Board Member, June 2020**

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**O**n May 25, 2020, in Minneapolis, USA, George Floyd was videoed being brutally asphyxiated by a police officer kneeling on his neck for nearly nine minutes while no one stopped the horror. Two days later in Toronto, Ontario, Regis Korchinski-Paquet was killed falling from a balcony; she had been with police in her apartment after her mother called 911 out of concern for her daughter's health. These are only two of far too many incidences of anti-Black racism that have led many of us to feel overwhelmed with disgust, frustration, despair, trauma, pain, fear, and anger.

Persistent state violence against Black people and systemic anti-Black racism in our workplaces, communities, and institutions here in Canada and around the world underscore the urgent need for change. It also highlights the need for an amplification of Black voices, perspectives, and stories.

In the time of a global pandemic and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, people of all backgrounds are seeking and listening more carefully for Black counter-stories. We are craving the rhythm of poetry, looking for the respite that visual art can offer, and yearning for the familiar sounds of African Nova Scotian voices of every timbre to help us feel we are not alone. In these pages, you will find breathing spaces and resonance. You will be reminded that we are “bound together with threads of compassion” (Wanda Robson), that we can critically hope to “build more capacity to find the courage to give back, despite the adversities we face” (Wanda Thomas Bernard), and that we do indeed “belong to a crowd that would not negate your very existence” (Késa Munroe Anderson).

As a board member of the Delmore “Buddy” Daye Learning Institute (DBDLI) and Chair of the Alexa McDonough Institute for Women, Gender and Social Justice, which partners with *Understorey Magazine*, I thank the talented women featured in this edition. The contributors—young and old, aspiring and seasoned—express their stories through art, poetry, and essays, covering such topics as critical hope, healing, home, racism, exclusion, body-image, family, loss, and beauty.

I also want to express my appreciation for all those who enabled the contributors to share their creativity in a beautiful and accessible way. Thanks to Katherine Barrett, Editor-in-Chief of *Understorey Magazine*, for her unwavering commitment to providing a platform for women and girls to express their stories and for her foresight for this special edition. Thank you Lindsay Ruck for guest-editing this outstanding edition. The DBDLI, which is committed to advancing Africentric education, is proud to have collaborated with *Understorey Magazine* and fund the print edition and the re-issuing of this edition at this critical time.

Please enjoy and share this brilliant “African Nova Scotian Women” publication.

Remember: “Your truth is powerful” (Guyleigh Johnson).

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# A Design for Humankind

## Wanda Robson

---

There it stands—my mother's time-worn loom  
Holding life's sweetness and life's sorrows  
A glorious tapestry of entwined lights and darks!  
Threads of all colours harmonizing.  
Imagine this as a map of the world  
Bound together with threads of compassion  
Fastened firmly with knots of love.

# Four Quilts

## Marlene Dorrington and Myla Borden

---

Picture quilts tell a story. Myla Borden created her first picture quilt, *Passages*, in 1998. The quilt depicted the journey of Africans from the continent through the slavery era in the United States to freedom in the northern free states and Canada. Myla says *Passages* was a “bold representation of quilts as an art form.” Myla and her mother/fellow quiltmaker, Marlene Dorrington, then began creating picture and narrative quilts that drew from stories of African Nova Scotian history and culture.



*The Ecstasy of Amelda Colley*  
by Myla Borden



*Learning to Fly*  
by Marlene Dorrington





*Meeting at the Well*  
by Myla Borden



*A Visit from Mamay*  
by Myla Borden

Myla and Marlene also collaborated with Nova Scotia artist, writer and arts organizer David Woods. During travels throughout Nova Scotia, David recorded community life in pencil sketches, which the quilters used as inspiration. *The Ecstasy of Amelda Colley* (2007) was the first quilt created through this collaboration. In 2010, Myla suggested an exhibition based on David's quilt drawings, resulting in the very successful *The Secret Codes: African Nova Scotian Narrative and Picture Quilts*. The exhibition title references the use of quilts as a subversive medium in times of slavery. Particular quilt patterns indicated safe houses to runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad. The exhibition title also references the "secret experiences" Black women share while making quilts.



# Finding the Courage to Give Back

## Wanda Thomas Bernard

---

I have been a social worker for forty-two years. In this profession, we often work with clients who are living on the margins, who face adversity every day. But I believe most of us face adversities in life and we have someone, or something, that helps us overcome.

In 2011, the Family Service of Support presented me with the Ambassador Award. Through the award, I was recognized as a community leader who had overcome adversity and challenges and had then given back by helping others. For this special edition of *Understorey Magazine*, I wanted to write a story that would inspire, one that would be helpful to someone facing adversity. I decided to share the journey of completing my doctorate degree, a journey that covered very rocky terrain indeed.

In January 1990, I became the first African Nova Scotian hired at Dalhousie University in a tenure track position. I recall someone saying to me at the time, “Wow, they must have lowered the standards to let you teach there.” Such negative comments only served to make me work harder, more diligently and more effectively. However, my contract at Dalhousie stipulated I had to complete course work towards a PhD by year six of the job. The director of my department said, “If you don’t get a PhD, you will be marginalized in the university, so it is not an option.” This meant that I had to apply to a different university to complete a PhD. I was rejected by several institutions, but opportunity knocked unexpectedly in 1993 when I was accepted into the PhD program in sociological studies at the University of Sheffield in England. My research was a participatory study of the factors that helped Black men survive in societies where they were expected to fail. My PhD years became the best of times and the worst of times, all in one package.

**These years were also the worst of times because they were bracketed by huge losses in my life and unbelievable trauma.**

It was the best of times because, first, I had incredible family and community support (also known as "pressure to perform"). I had the most amazing PhD supervisor, Dr. Lena Dominelli, an Italian-Canadian mentor who believed in me even when I did not believe in myself. Second, my PhD research made a positive impact on the lives of Black men, both in Canada and in England, and led to many policy and institutional changes in both countries. Professionally, my studies positioned me for a stellar career, which led to my promotion to full professor in 2006.

While there were many positives, my PhD years were also the worst of times because they were bracketed by huge losses in my life and unbelievable trauma that remains difficult to talk

about to this day. In year one of my program in England, my maternal grandmother died after a twenty-four-hour stay in hospital. This was a terrible loss; she was my second mother. In year two, my father-in-law died after two weeks in a coma, following a massive stroke. One month later, my eldest brother (who was like a father to us after Dad died) was diagnosed with cancer and nearly died after his first round of chemotherapy. The worry of this devastating family issue was almost immobilizing. It was difficult to be in England when I wanted to be back in Halifax helping my family cope.

If all of this was not enough, when my spouse, George Bernard, and I finally returned home after I had completed my doctoral program, we became victims of a fraud scheme. The fraud was a complex set of lies and impersonations that were used to commit a number of crimes, including identity theft, embezzlement, emotional abuse, threats, extortion and theft. After some extraordinary police work, including a sting operation, the police arrested the perpetrator, who confessed immediately and also requested to see me. It turned out she was a relative, a young woman whom I had mentored and who was a member of our church family.

**As a leader in the Black community and an advocate for social justice, I was expected to be compassionate and understanding.**

She requested to see me because I was a social worker and she thought I might drop the charges. Her mother also invited me to her house in the hope that I might drop the charges.

The story from both the perpetrator of the crime and her mother was the same: we should not let our Black youth go through the criminal justice system because the system does not, in fact, do them justice. As a social worker, I was expected to understand this and show compassion. The church family did not quite know how to deal with the situation and most people did not feel comfortable talking to me about it. As a victim of the fraud scheme who just happened to be a social worker, I was expected to understand, to forgive, to be lenient, to be more tolerant and more patient. As a leader in the Black community and an advocate for social justice, I was expected by others in the Black community to be compassionate and understanding.

We did not drop the charges. Although the perpetrator had originally confessed, she retained a lawyer and entered a plea of not guilty on her first appearance. The case dragged through the criminal justice system for eighteen months, with many court appearances and delays, all meant to wear us down. Finally, we went to trial by judge only. On the first day of the trial, the perpetrator changed her plea once more, this time to guilty, and her lawyer asked for a non-custodial sentence because she expressed remorse. We spoke to the judge through our victim impact statements and told of the emotional and psychological trauma we experienced both during the crime and during the frequent trips to court. In the end, the perpetrator was given six months in the Halifax Correctional Centre. Our family was vindicated by the outcome of the criminal case. However, we were not vindicated by the community, those who thought: "She is a social worker, a Black woman, an advocate; she should not lay charges."

That was one of the most difficult situations I have ever had to deal with in my life. At the

time, I questioned my ability to continue in social work. I questioned my ability to judge character and to assess an unsafe situation. I became a social work educator because I wanted to influence how social work was practised from a critical perspective. When I became a victim of crime, and people expected me to drop the charges, I questioned my ability to teach and inspire others. In fact, I questioned my entire belief system.

However, this was also a time when my family became stronger and even more united. We depended on each other, believed in each other and supported each other. I knew if I gave in to my depression, fears and anxiety, it would be impossible to go on. I did not want to become that angry, bitter person who lived life without hope. In addition, my eldest brother who faced his own challenge with such amazing grace lost his battle and died in the midst of this journey, two months before my graduation. I needed to be a role model for my daughter who was also victimized by the fraud scheme. If I faltered, she might become re-victimized.

**Most significant for me was that I found strength in my spirituality and, as I grieved the multiple losses, I found the courage to go on.**

Most significant for me was that I found strength in my spirituality and, as I grieved the multiple losses, I found the courage to go on. I completed my PhD and attended graduation in England, surrounded by family and friends. I had some very supportive social work colleagues who helped me through. Today, I thank them for helping me find my passion for social work and social change. I thank them for helping me overcome this adversity with dignity, respect, integrity and tenacity. I now realize that, although I experienced trauma, I also experienced post-traumatic growth.

After over four decades as a social worker, twenty-seven years as an educator, ten years as director of the Dalhousie School of Social Work and now, as a Senator, I still have a passion for social work and social change. I have had many mentors and role models who have helped me along the way. I stand on their shoulders and I am guided by a sense of “critical hope.” As a result, I continue to give back, to lift as I climb, as the writer bell hooks says. We were targets of a vicious crime, but we did not become bitter; we became stronger. And as a result, we have received so many more blessings, including the ability to pay it forward. It is my sincere critical hope that wherever I speak, someone will remember something I say and because of it their life, and the lives of those they touch, will be changed a little. My hope is that we all build more capacity to find the courage to give back, despite the adversities we face.



# I Am Black History

## Donna Paris

---

My name is Donna Paris

And I **am** Black History

The story, I am told, is that my great-great-grandfather came to Nova Scotia from Ireland once slavery was abolished in Great Britain. Despite the many hardships he faced, he managed to send his three sons to university and dream into the future so I can have the life I now live.

I *am* Black History

The story, I am told, is that my white great-grandmother came to Nova Scotia from France. She met and fell in love with a Black man. Her family said, "You can have him or you can have us." Their union produced my grandfather, who produced my mother, who produced me.

I **am** Black History

The story, I am told, is that my paternal grandfather was a member of the No. 2 Construction Battalion—one of over six hundred Black men from Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia who fought for the right to fight alongside their countrymen despite the prevailing sentiment that Canada didn't want a "checkerboard" army.

I **am** Black History

The story, I am told, is that my family was the first Black family to live in the now-closed armed forces base Cornwallis in Nova Scotia. When my father was posted there the commanders of the base went around and asked the families how they would feel about having a Black family live next door to them. Then they called my father in and said, "We don't want any trouble from your children!" The five of us ranged in age from six years to six months.

I **am** Black History

The story, I am telling, is that when my Grade One teacher gave me a piece to sing and I couldn't do it very well she said, "What's wrong with you? Don't you know your people can sing?"

I **am** Black History

The story, I am telling, is that my Grade Five teacher accused me of cheating when I got a ninety-seven percent on a history test because, "How could a little Black girl really be that smart?"

I **am** Black History

And the story, I am telling, is that there was a time and place when Black people were not allowed to learn how to read. And I now teach children how to read.

My name is Donna Paris

And I **am** Black History

# The Crops / The Chattel

Darlene Strong

---



*The Chattel*

These two paintings are part of a series of ten paintings depicting the arrival of an African family to what is now Canada in 1785 and their subsequent contributions to Black history. The paintings were created to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Confederation. The exhibit has travelled to African heritage venues in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick with the support of the Cumberland African Nova Scotian Association, the Town of Amherst, the Nova Scotia government and the Cumberland County Museum. The work has also been disseminated online to help promote a deeper understanding of and respect for African-Canadian history.



*The Crops*



# Dear Ugly Duckling...

## Késa Munroe-Anderson

---

I write to you because you are too familiar.  
Do you not find it strange that I'd seen you,  
read you a hundred times before,  
but never felt the pain that I now feel?  
I did not recognize you then,  
I was blinded by Hans Christian Andersen's pen  
The simple tale that was meant to teach me a lesson.

My lived experience has made me see  
I am much like you  
You are much like me  
And when I look around in my community  
My spirit aches for the countless reflections  
of you  
Who named you so and why?  
Your story made my heart cry  
And how long did you have to wait  
To belong to a crowd that would not negate  
Your very existence?

From whence did your endurance come?  
Waiting between the covers three decades and some  
Patiently, but sometimes in despair  
To find your voice and whisper  
"There is something wrong here!"  
Seize it, retell it, don't let it go!  
You must know, they must know  
that Ugly Ducklings exist  
inside the covers of countless texts,  
between title and credits on movie screens,  
inside the walls of schools, colleges, and universities  
silenced, illegitimately named and dying inside.  
They wander along the margins their true selves to find,  
society's pawns,  
because no one has yet told them  
...they truly are swans.

# Own My Own / That Word

Sylvia D. Hamilton

---

## Own My Own

*For Lucy, mother of us all*

Dinkness: the wonderful, the fabulous, the precious. That's you.

They named you Lucy after the Beatles' song playing  
on the cassette as they celebrated finding you.

Small, 3 & ½ feet, maybe, 60 pounds.

You walked tall, 3.2 million years ago, in Afar, Ethiopia.

What happened when you walked by that riverbank where they found you?

You, the most complete, 40% of your bones intact. You surely surprised them.

You walked upright and made them give you a new title of your own:

*Australopithecus afarensis*. How could you know I would be thinking about you?

## That Word

A boat named *No Justice* floats in the bay.  
Gleams of gentle light peek at the horizon.  
I hear the incessant juddering of the grass cutter.  
The dull hum, an unruly crowd—a thousand terns  
descending. Their outcry fades, that word rises.

Spewed by the Amherst councilman.  
Tattooed where the children watch—  
at the base of Glace Bay's skateboard park.  
Overheard at the Toronto York School Board.

Like a knife scraped over my old wound  
still tender to the touch.



# Old Whitney Pier

## Robyn Martelly

---

Don't cross those tracks,  
Stay on that side of the overpass.

Whitney Pier?  
A place some people feared.

A diverse community with lots of culture.  
A Canadian heritage site like no other.

Welcome to the Pier Dear,  
That was something you'd always hear.

Like many families that settled in Cape Breton,  
Parents came to work, and then sent for their children.

They worked at the Steel Plant, Coke Ovens and the Coal Mines.  
West Indians in the blast furnace: they could take the heat high.

Steel Plant, Tar Ponds, Canada's toxic playground.  
Now it's a park with tracks, trails and sporting grounds.

Grandparents sitting back, reminiscing about the good old times.  
Church every Sunday, mama baking bread and pies.

Some families didn't have much.  
But they invited you in, shared stories and fed you lunch.

I remember in my day, my mom would always say, for a dollar  
You can get a bag of chips, soda and chocolate bar, with change left over.

You can always count on people from the Pier.  
You get a smile, hello, how are you, and who's your mother and father dear?

The Pier had businesses on every corner.  
Barber shops, bakeries, grocery stores and plenty more.

We built churches, schools and community halls, so we would have a place to go.  
Immigrants built the Pier from the ground up, many years ago.

You could visit Arties & Fred Tommie's to get your daily cup of tea.  
Men and women dancing around, jiving, doing the swing.

The Kabana Club, Clipper, and the Thistle were also places to be.  
Putting hard-earned money, ching, ching in the slot machines.

We raised artists, athletes, cops, doctors, and lawyers.  
Teachers, musicians, politicians and so much more.

A time when neighbours knew each other.  
Welcomed everyone with open arms, and built friendships forever.

When I was young I had so much fun.  
There was one-cent candy, and five-cent bubble gum.

Who remembers picking berries on blueberry hill?  
Picked all day, ate until we were ill.

Lemonade stands, selling blueberries door to door.  
Running errands for the elders, to the local corner store.

Children playing outside until the street lights came on.  
You would hear parents yelling: Wanda, Marie, Jack, Noreen! It's time to come home.

Street Chase and Nicky Nicky 9 Doors, games kids loved to play.  
Everyone enrolled in 587 Air Cadets, they're still running today.

The Pier Day Care, United Mission and Whitney Pier Youth Club  
Were a part of every child's childhood.

Community Hall field trips, coming back all muddy.  
The looks on our parents' faces were frightening, but funny.

Running to Pier Video so we can throw quarters in the gumball machine.  
Praying we would win free popcorn and movies.

Kids from all over Sydney would come to the Pier for the Menelik Hall dances.  
Everyone got along, no one focused on our differences.

Christmas parades, Mission picnics, and lots of festivals.  
Open loaders, pierogies, chicken and rice, hot sauce, and souse.

Want to learn some history?  
Head to the Whitney Pier Historical Museum.

Sydney-Toronto Reunion, Action Week and sports.  
Fun-run, baseball games, street dances, and the Tupper Street courts.

You could look out your door or walk down the street.  
See adults and children talking and laughing, the sounds were sweet.

Oh, the things I would give to live in Old Whitney Pier.

# In My Skin

## Cherrie Amour

---

In my caramel-coloured  
Five foot, six inch frame  
In my thick thighs  
And high round buttocks  
Toned arms  
Large forehead  
Large face  
Almond-shaped eyes  
Full lips  
Laugh lines  
Large hands  
And high in-stepped feet

Resides a finally grown woman  
No more looking outside for guidance  
But looking inside and upward for strength  
Slowly and intentionally  
I have blossomed into a middle-aged  
Non-blues wearing or carrying fireball  
Who conquers her own demons  
And fills her own voids

In my caramel-coloured  
Aging face and frame  
I have less time  
For looking back and ahead  
No more letting my empty parts dictate my actions  
I live in the now  
Deal with the real  
Learn how silence can be as powerful as words  
And how to sashay out of a space  
That no longer fits  
And sit comfortably elsewhere  
In my skin.

# We Are Not Made For You

## Shalese Makeda Jordan

---

This piece was created for an exhibition in February, 2016. It is a visual representation of the idea that we are so much more than what we are given credit for and that words can only define us if we let them.

Art is my way of expressing my creativity. I feel it speaks louder than words. It is my belief that we, as a people, all have value; we can pull from the strength of our ancestors as we continue on life's journey.

When I sit down with charcoal in my hand, I never know what the end result will be.

I proudly embrace my heritage and am a descendant of generations of creative individuals. My grandfather has been making one-of-a-kind, heritage wooden walking canes, expertly hand-carved, for over sixty years. My brother Terrence uses his profession as a videographer to express his energetic, passionate, creative flow. My mother has roots in the late Africville community here in Nova Scotia. She has made numerous pieces of Afrocentric clothing which we wore with pride during cultural celebrations when I was younger.

I am doing what comes so naturally to me. Please enjoy my progression as I continue to grow.

—Shalese Makeda Jordan





# Beauty

## NAT chantel

---

Beauty your nigger-knots are  
unmanageable  
we'll have to comb them down  
s t r a i g h t  
but they're tricky with  
resilience, they'd rather hang loose  
curling up from their roots.

What about braids with pretty beads?

Nappy twists won't do  
Let's straighten it flat.

It will undo.

No, it will take the kink away from you.

I love how it curls—

But you have such a pretty-pale face Beauty,  
It's hard to see you through this pile of bush.

... But I see me.

Shh hush now.  
R e l a x as I permanently  
take away the ack from your  
blackness  
and leave you  
BLACK LESS

sit.

stay.

wait.

The white will  
burn me away.

You have good hair now Beauty  
The ugly is pressed down  
If only we could do something about your tongue.

# Heart of Africville / Pieces of a Woman

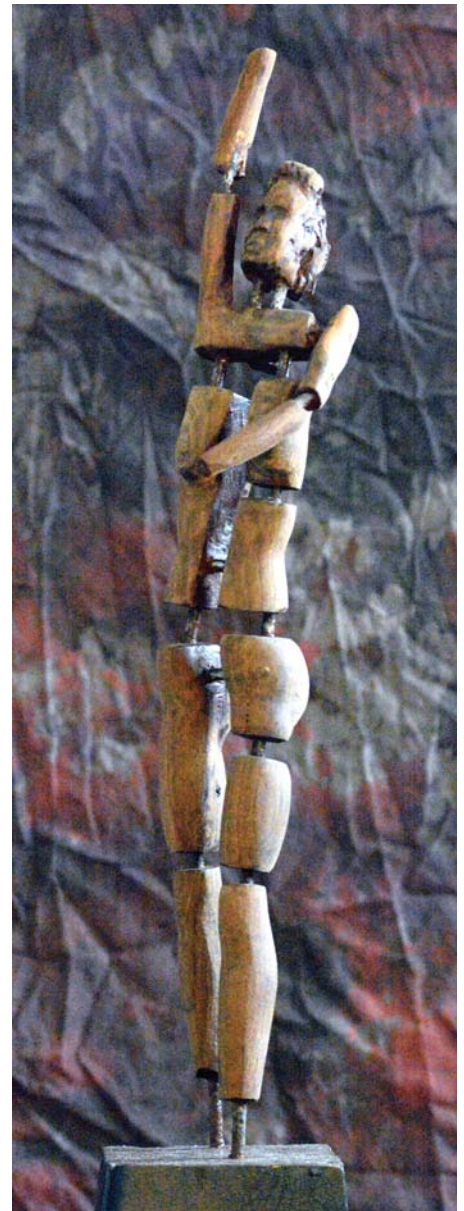
**Angel Bonita Gannon**

---

**A**ngel Bonita Gannon is the daughter of a former Africville resident and activist. Her creative interpretations of Africville are dedicated to her family history. She aims to inscribe a new discourse of art that will foster discussion and generate solutions.



*Heart of Africville*



*Pieces of a Woman*

# The Unforgettable Journey

## Abshiro Abdille

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### *Dadaab Refugee Camp*

**M**y name is Abshiro Abdille. I grew up in the Dadaab refugee camps in Kenya after my family fled Somalia during the civil war in 1991. Growing up in Dadaab was hard. The temperature sometimes reached forty Celsius and we walked more than five kilometres to and from school, passing burning dumpsters that reeked of goat manure and then through the public market that smelled of fresh mangoes and bananas, which only made us more hungry. At times it was unbearable. But my parents were hard-working and resilient people. They put up with many difficulties to send me and my three older sisters and brother to school because education was what kept us busy and eventually paved our way out of the camps.

**These students  
had hopes higher  
than the mountains  
and so did I.**

One year after my high school graduation, I applied for a scholarship through the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), a Canadian non-profit organization that sponsors a number of high school graduates from Dadaab each year. In the camps, it was common to visit the notice board, which was the main news post, to see who was accepted for this scholarship or other resettlement opportunities. Students in their blue and white school uniforms would line up to check for any opportunity posted. These students had hopes higher than the mountains and so did I. The scholarship application would take eighteen months and acceptance would depend on grades, an exam and a series of interviews. I prepared myself for a process that would determine my fate in the refugee camp.

During that time, I worked at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees centre as a Somali-English interpreter, helping people access the necessary legal procedures to register as refugees. In the evenings after work, I taught young girls English and mathematics. I have always been ambitious!

One morning, while I was sleeping, my father came into my room.

"Wake up, my dear," he said, gently rubbing my head.

"It is Saturday father, I have no work." I turned to the other side of the bed.

"It is not about work. I have good news for you."

I uncovered my face and turned to my father. "What is it? You look so excited!"

"I am sending you to Nairobi to stay with your sister," my father explained. "You are going to study for your scholarship interviews and exams. You must promise me that you will study hard and do well in those classes. I am not sending you to have fun. Remember that!"

"Yes, Father. I will do as you say," I replied in a quiet, calm voice.

"Okay, now get up and help your mother with the chores," he said.

I gave him the biggest hug I could and said, "Thank you, Father. You are the best."

Later that day, I planned my trip to Nairobi and made a to-do list. I also told the news to my best friend, Deqo. It was a dream come true; my first journey out of the camps in nearly twenty years. No one seemed happier than me that day. My brother booked my bus ticket and I was set to leave for Nairobi the next morning.

That evening, I sat down under the shade of the neem tree. The beauty of summer was in full bloom and I enjoyed the sweet scents of the sedge. I looked at the sun setting and the few clouds across the horizon, my mind lost in deep thoughts of appreciation. And yet, I felt as if I were saying goodbye. When I heard footsteps approaching, I turned to see Deqo.

"What are you doing here?" Deqo asked as she sat beside me.

"Just watching the sunset," I replied.

**"What if I fail in those classes and never get to leave this camp?"**

"Manka, I know you. What's the matter?" She called me Manka, which later became my nickname.

"I am not feeling good about this trip," I told her. "What if I fail in those classes and never get to leave this camp? What if my father falls ill and I am in the middle of exams?" I said.

"This is a trip of a lifetime, Manka, and I am not going to let your negative thoughts question that," she said. "Now let's go inside and have dinner. It is also prayer time." We held hands and exchanged glances as we walked together towards the compound.

### *Nairobi*

**A**fter a few months, I became used to life in the city with my sister, Ardo. I was studying hard and no longer worried about failing. But one morning, I woke early to make coffee. With my mug in hand, I stepped out onto the balcony to inhale the fresh morning air. It was a cold autumn day and between the high-rise buildings I could see aeroplanes landing and taking off at Jomo Kenyatta Airport. I thought about what my journey to Canada would be like if I got accepted into the scholarship program. I was lost in that



thought when I heard the phone ring. Through the balcony doors, I saw my sister pick it up.

"Salaam Hooyo," she said. (*Hooyo* means Mom or mother in Somali.)

Suddenly, everything moved in slow motion. I saw coffee splash as the cup dropped out of Ardo's hand. Tears rolled down her cheeks. Her mouth opened wide and she began to scream. I rushed into the kitchen as the phone also fell from my sister's hand.

"What did Hooyo say?" I asked her.

I picked up the phone. "Hooyo, Hooyo, are you there?" No reply. In a panic, I turned to my sister and grabbed her by the shoulders. "What did Hooyo tell you? What happened?"

In a very low, soft voice, she said, "Dad is in the hospital. He is in a coma."

The realization that we were a twelve-hour drive from the camp hit me like a hard punch in the belly. We had only one hour to catch the next bus to Garissa, the nearest town to Dadaab, yet ninety kilometres from our camp. Ardo and I grabbed a few belongings and rushed to the bus station. We bought our tickets and started the most memorable journey of my life. We reached Garissa at four o'clock but still had no way to get to Dadaab. Ardo said we would have to spend the night in Garissa.

"We have no other option," she said. "There are no buses leaving for the camps until tomorrow morning."

"We must find a way," I told her. With my father's health worsening by the minute, I could not stop the thought of losing him.

After five hours of waiting, we saw two lorries on the other side of the bus station. We decided to ask the drivers to take us to the camps.

"Hello? Where are you heading? Are you going to the camps?" asked my sister.

"I am leaving in twenty minutes," said one of the drivers. "But this is not a passenger vehicle."

"Our father is ill and we are not sure if we have enough time to see him again. Please help us," Ardo pleaded.

Finally, after a long negotiation, he agreed and we set off late in the evening. Three hours later, the truck got stuck in a mud hole. Due to poor road conditions, travelling in the rainy season is always hard. As we struggled to get the truck free, we heard a roar in the distance.

"Ladies, that is a lion," said Ali, our driver.

Luckily, we were soon pulled out of the mud hole by another truck. As we continued our

**Two nights later, I  
lost my father to  
cancer and my life was  
never the same.**



journey, the gigantic animal stood in the middle of the road. Ali quickly turned the headlights off and on until the lion fled.

Within an hour we reached home safely. It was a great relief to see my father but deep down, I felt guilty for being away. Two nights later, I lost my father to cancer and my life was never the same. I began to work even harder to get the scholarship and to honour my father's hope of sending me to university abroad. Five months after that memorable journey back to the camps, I was accepted into the WUSC program and began making plans for a new journey to Canada.

I recently graduated from Mount Saint Vincent University with a Bachelor of Arts and have a job in a field that I am passionate about: immigrant programs with the YMCA. With all of my family now living in Canada, life is much better. What I have accomplished has been with the help of my family, especially my parents. Life has tested me in so many ways I cannot even count, but I'm thankful that, for me, it has turned out well. My hope and prayers are with those who still live in the camps, either in Dadaab or elsewhere in the world.

# Daughter of the Sun

Kim Cain

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This is a very personal piece for me. As a woman living with fibroids, I have researched the overwhelming statistics on the complications fibroids can create for Black women, not only in the childrearing years but also through the pain and heavy bleeding that plagues us into menopause. I created *Daughter of the Sun* as a pilot project for this research.

One of the theories I have encountered is that, as African-Canadians, our ancestors came from America and survived for centuries eating the cast-off parts of animals, which were salted for curing and preservation. Our “slave diets” have created health issues for both Black men and women.

In creating *Daughter of the Sun*, I wanted to imagine my bulky womb. I used red clay to form the womb and the conceptual fibroids. The small bust is a portrait of a woman, but it also represents me. The pieces were fired separately and assembled later. The wooden flowers and dried leaves were added at the end of the process to represent how I feel about living with fibroids.

This topic is important to me because the main treatment for fibroids is usually a hysterectomy or treatment that stops the period for intervals of time. I have discussed fibroids and the discomfort they create for me with my gynaecologists. My decision to forgo any treatment is one I can live with. The heavy bleeding is cumbersome and there have been some embarrassing situations. However, I would only go under the knife if the fibroids became cancerous. So I will continue living with fibroids and continue to conceptualize how these foreign growths exist within me.

—Kim Cain



# Granny

## Kilah Rolle

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I am an old woman made of deposited salt  
My bloodline runs authentically hot  
I hail from perpetual sunrise  
Where battle is real and peace treaties are lies  
Spent decades on my feet and kept my house clean  
Raised chickens and children under rule of British Queen  
Voyaged across the Atlantic through treacherous middle passage reef  
Found rocky shores of New Scotland, Tancook cabbage, and bully beef  
Built a home away from home using scraps of knotted lumber  
Felled trees of hard knocks and hard won my short slumber  
A product of survival and scarcity  
Grandmother of plenty rude pickney  
Like dis pretty likkle one here, just turn 23, Say she goes to uni-ver-sity  
Schooled in critical feminism & fancy race theory  
I was never taught to be critical of my history  
Had no time to figure out philosophy, found maths a bit too 'calculacy  
So I took a slow minute to count one to 'tree  
Summed up my children on hands and knee  
While she waxes her big people degree, tongue wagging 'bout colonial austerity  
Says my folklore Fante faith is a practice of fu-ti-lity  
That my cataract vision lacks clarity  
But I can still clearly see and feel the scars of hypocrisy  
My Ashanti people pioneered absent terrains of de-territory  
Withstood no vacancies and no jobs here sorry  
The mystery of my history she breaks down for me  
The metalanguage of race she translates haughtily for equality  
Granny she says with strong chin  
interpreting for me Code Noir of French and British imperialism  
She gestures cut eye and kiss teeth how us Caribbean folk behave:  
Old woman you are so much more now than a glorified nurse maid  
You were recruited for academic merit and skilled employability  
Visas are no longer denied based on race and nationality.  
One thing I do know from the years of looking back  
If I ever fixed my mouth to talk to grown woman like 'dat

my mouth and 'ma tail would have get slap  
I would have felt the rod on my seat of my education  
What 'dis girl know 'bout involuntary disciplinary participation?  
I tell her: no matter how biggity you feel in that self-labeled identity  
Or turn up your wide nose to capitalist prosperity  
how hard you kick the gift horse of liberty  
Sweet girl I'll still give you one lesson for free  
One you can take very personally  
Ole Granny can still bend you over her knee  
Look chile there in the dark hollow of yonder tree  
the ship gallow where they stacked and chained whole villages quite legally  
Little Black Sambos for the new community  
refused us education spare needlework and carpentry  
See there where that resilient little Birch tree bends  
And the pristine whiteness that lies where the treetop descends  
The trail of broken canoes in the shallow pockets of promised land  
The broken spirits on soil that cyaan grow banana and yam  
Where at the promised treetop is the place for we?  
From the frozen North we will never pick mango or sweet dilly  
This short summer can never warm to Linton's dub poetry  
Shaded by the cursed penmanship of dead poet society  
You and all your education  
Come from the humanities of feeder school segregation  
The backs of many Jamaicans laboured and toiled that great hill  
For your high and mighty city view from the Citadel  
Sweet girl you can't hypothesize centuries of genocide  
Millions enslaved and severed from land and family ties  
Gold Coast of golden plantain plundered for plantation crops  
Tribal nations reduced to concubines and sweatshops  
Our history isn't something you can feel from a newly written book  
Cuz you don't know the real story until all your facts gets took  
You think I'm subservient because I'm so neat and quiet  
What you know about the necessity of riot?  
18th century Nova Scotia kept thousands residentially and mentally enslaved  
Parliament sowed sloppy seeds wherever it forcefully laid  
You're the light skinned reminders insidious attention paid  
Book of Negroes and church obits the only clue to how most of us were made  
And even those can't be fully trusted  
Language preserved in code to allude Colonel Mustard  
We didn't have material resources  
Faith and education were not at all easy choices

But if we learned anything from 140 years of Trelawney Maroon strategy  
Even more than the hard lesson of coerced policy  
It's that we were free before the bondage of subsidy  
Daughters of mountaineers and Dahomey warrior brides  
Revolts of British colony and evangelical Baptist scribes  
"Come-from away" culture passed on through artistic oral history  
Social work and scientific achievements are buried in mystery  
So before you try to wrinkle my starched Sunday wear  
Just know I ironed my burdens with care  
Laid them down with righteous song and tearful prayer  
Weaved my worries into baskets from scraps of birch tree  
Carried life and love for all of you pickney  
Now you come with plaited weave to tell me 'bout my history  
But what do I know? I'm just an old woman of deposited salt  
Whose bloodline runs authentically hot  
Hail from the lifted head to the perpetual sunrise  
Where the battle is real and peace treaties are lies



# Dear Daughter

## Guyleigh Johnson

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*Open Letter to my future daughter:*

### **Burden Versus Blessings**

What if I told you this world is dark, cold and ugly?  
What if I told you your whole life they'll try and convince, blame and force you into believing it's you?  
What if I told you you'll be confused and some parts you'll believe are true?  
What if I told you that they'll downplay your features, assets and accomplishments, never being recognized or acknowledged as qualified?  
Even the ones that look the same will try and tarnish your name  
In the hierarchy of life you will be labelled lower than men less than women  
They'll criticize before they copy  
They'll laugh and be envious  
They'll take with no apologies  
You'll cry  
And cry  
And cry  
Until there's enough tears to drown in  
You'll question your purpose  
The more you crave the need to be saved  
They'll remind you you're worthless  
You'll pray to be different  
Not realizing you're already unique  
Weak  
You'll fall victim but you'll never be allowed to call yourself that  
They'll disguise forgiveness as forgetting  
They'll hate you  
To the point you hate yourself  
You'll break  
And break  
Until it feels like there's too many pieces to fix  
But what if I told you this  
World wouldn't be the same without your existence?  
What if I told you you're stronger than the weapons formed against you?

What if I told you on your back those aren't burdens but the spirit of your sisters?  
Step by step as your saviours  
What if I told you, you are smart, beautiful and warm?  
What if I didn't warn  
You about the world  
I warned the world about you?  
The fearless, force and fighter you are  
The roots of richness you reach from  
Dear Daughter, you are special  
And as much as I love you I want you to love yourself  
That's how you shield yourself  
From the darkness to get light  
The cold to be warm  
And the ugly to remain beautiful  
Not hiding but protecting  
Your soul  
You're not just a Queen  
You are a Black Queen  
Carry your crown with pride  
Never lie  
Because your truth is powerful

# The Doll

Letitia Fraser

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Letitia Fraser is a proud descendant of North Preston and comes from a long line of artists. About *The Doll*, Letitia says: “I wanted to use things that have a connection to my community and my childhood, both of which are a great source of inspiration for me.”



# Imagine

## René Boudreau

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Imagine walking into a space where you automatically feel out of place because nobody's face is identifiable with your race and

Imagine walking into a store and being watched like a hawk, or getting pulled over by the cops for simply wanting to "talk" and

Can you imagine having the ambition to apply for a job position, only to later find out that your surname is under suspicion?

Now,

Imagine being called a racist name, all because your pigmentation isn't the same, and when you finally get the courage to go to a teacher to explain, you're the one who is blamed and

Imagine having a waste dump in your backyard or feeling anxious every time you see a security guard, or how about being suspended for having too much "attitude" on the school yard

To be Black in Nova Scotia means to work twice as hard, because no matter where you are, you'll be wearing your identity card.

# Her Flower

Shantelle Vanterpool

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The moment the colours touched my palette, I knew this was going to be a very special canvas. Tribute is paid to the late Pablo Picasso with a re-imaging of his piece *Jacqueline with Flowers*, 1954. I used an overall lighter palette to suggest feelings of happiness, enlightenment and optimism. Picasso's cubism method was captured to depict multiple points of view unified through geometric shapes. I wanted to create a painting that expressed the confidence and perseverance of beautiful Black women everywhere!

—Shantelle Vanterpool



# Grace and Roberta

## Louise Delisle

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*When Black Loyalists came to settle in Birchtown, Nova Scotia, in the late 1700s, most arrived as “free blacks.” They were former slaves who fought for the British in the American Revolutionary War in exchange for land and freedom. When they arrived in Birchtown, however, they found themselves still indentured to wealthy white Loyalists in order to survive the harsh conditions. For many, promises of land, food and lodgings never materialized. Birchtown residents did the best they could to take care of each other, but many starved or died from disease. This so-called paradise was a living hell, but it was better than slavery and a master’s whip.*

*“Grace and Roberta” tells of two such settlers and the night of the Shelburne Riots, the first recorded race riot in Canada.*

Sisters Grace and Roberta escaped from a plantation in southeastern United States. They travelled through the Underground Railroad to New York and then by ship to Port Roseway in Nova Scotia. Slave hunters were on the lookout for two women, but Grace and Roberta were able to go undetected. You see, Roberta was no delicate flower. She dressed like a man. Everyone she met thought she was a man.

When Roberta and Grace arrived in Birchtown during the middle of the winter, nobody questioned this young couple who had come to settle like all the rest. Many of those already living there showed the sisters how to stay warm and how to protect themselves from the harsh, unknown elements.

Roberta was a terrific axe-woman. She helped split firewood and build shelters. She was also a hunter of wildlife, so she was able to feed herself and Grace with small game, rabbits and birds, and gave what she could to others. Most people didn't worry about “Robert” and how famished he looked. They were just happy to have another pair of helping hands. Roberta found it easier to let people believe she was a man; easier than trying to explain the horror of her experiences as a woman and a slave. She did what she had to do and never complained. No one questioned her gender.

Grace, on the other hand, was so much more the lady of the two. Grace was a teacher and Birchtown needed teachers, not only for the children but also for adults who could not read or write. So Grace taught children during the day and adults in the evenings after they finished work in town.

Roberta and Grace went about their daily lives until one day in 1784 when they had to defend themselves from disbanded British soldiers. These soldiers came to Birchtown with a promise

to kill every Black man there. They were unable to find work, couldn't care for their families and thought the Blacks were taking the food off their table. Truth be told, the Blacks had very little too—but they were not about to lose it. So the fight began.

Roberta was in a bad spot because the community leaders demanded that every capable man carry a gun and use it against the soldiers. She followed this order out of fear of people finding out she was a woman. But what frightened her most was shooting at another person.

The fighting became fierce. Many on both sides were wounded. Later, they would call it a race riot, but on that night it was a war and people fought for their lives and their loved ones. Roberta joined a group called the Black Pioneers. She helped gather guns and she set up a post at the end of the road that led from their settlement. No one knew Roberta had picked that spot—the most dangerous spot of all because she would be the first to encounter the soldiers coming toward the settlement. She chose this place because she would be alone. She did not realize the fate of all of Birchtown would lay in her hands.

**Later, they would call it a race riot, but on that night it was a war and people fought for their lives and their loved ones.**

Roberta waited for the soldiers in the damp, dark woods. When she heard a shot, she knew she'd been hit in the arm. She fell to the ground and felt tremendous fear. But it was not the fighting that scared Roberta. She could not shake the thought that slavery was at her door again. Still, she kept fighting and eventually fought off the soldiers. She stopped them from entering the settlement and they turned away in defeat.

While Roberta fought, Grace wandered around Birchtown looking for her sister. She knew Roberta would never give herself away; that she would fight like a man (or a woman). Grace began to cry and told everyone she met about her sister, Roberta. One of the men heard Grace's story and said this man, or woman, as Grace explained, acted in great bravery. She came forward before anyone else to defend the most dangerous position. The man explained that she was wounded, but that she was now by the fire being treated by some of the women.

Grace made her way to the huge fire that burned at the edge of the brook. There were many men wounded and in pain. Grace looked up along the brook and found Roberta sitting with her hair down, talking to the women who were caring for her.

“Here I am, Grace!” Roberta called. “We don’t have to worry. We don’t have to hide. We are truly free.” Grace put her arms around her sister and cried.

Roberta and Grace stayed in Birchtown even after many had left. Grace taught in the one-room school and Roberta helped however she could. They married brothers and had many children whose descendants still live in Birchtown today.

# Conversation with Elizabeth Cromwell

Sophia Wedderburn

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The Black Loyalist Heritage Centre in Birchtown, Nova Scotia, opened in 2015.  
Photo: Len Wagg

I had the pleasure of interviewing Elizabeth Cromwell to hear, in her own words, about the birth of Birchtown’s Black Loyalist Heritage Centre. It was remarkable to learn just how much Ms. Cromwell has put into the development and ongoing success of the Centre. It all began with a school genealogy assignment in the mid 1980s. With the tireless work of Ms. Cromwell and many others, the Centre has evolved into a tangible representation of our black community—a part of our history and our future that is accessible to all. A history that needs to be seen, heard, recognized and remembered.

Here is a summary of my conversation with Elizabeth Cromwell.

**Sophia Wedderburn: What was the seed of inspiration that grew into the Centre?**

Elizabeth Cromwell: The roots of the heritage organization began in the 1980s. A couple of families had kids with school assignments about the genealogy of their own family. But these children didn't know where to look for information on their ancestors. They didn't know anything about their ancestors except for close family such as their grandparents.

This is where the idea for a heritage society began: How were we going to help each other—our families and our children—in doing these assignments? How could we help these young people trace their family trees? Finding the information was a journey in itself; searching through old church records, going through archives, joining the local genealogy society and learning from what they had learned. We had to put all these things together. Eleanor Smith, who ran the Genealogy Society in Shelburne, agreed to help put together a program to teach those in the Black community how to become genealogists.

Out of this work grew the organization, which evolved into the idea for the Centre. Along the way, we discovered new information and experiences, which led to the fact that we needed a museum to talk about our history. We basically became our own heritage society.

**SW: What has been your role in the development and success of the Centre?**

EC: With any kind of project, there is always a need to have people who are really passionate about it. It keeps the ball rolling when things get rough.

Creating the Centre was something that we felt we needed to do, and when you start something like that and you have the vision for it, you can't stop. You can't let it go. Sometimes you may have to take a different route (and we encountered that), but it all led back to where we wanted to be.

It helped that I was able to do the long-range research, like finding funding for different projects and figuring out how to write those project proposals. We were able to bring in people like Sharon Oliver. She was Vice-President of the Black Loyalist Heritage Society, Vice-President of the Valley African Nova Scotian Development Association and Executive Member of the Progressive Conservative Party of Nova Scotia and she helped us organize and make connections with other Black heritage groups who were doing similar things.

**SW: How much planning went into creating the Centre itself as well as all of the amazing exhibits?**

EC: Oh the planning! It took years of calling people from around the province to get things organized. And then there were questions: "Was this sustainable? Was it viable? How do you do this in Nova Scotia?" We worked hard to get funds to draft a business plan, and it wasn't until we got the business plan done that we could show that the museum could survive, that people coming in

would translate into dollars.

We had to call the architects, get a design, and that alone took a couple of years. Everything took time. But we had good people through it all. People from the Nova Scotia Museum came to help build the Centre along with people who were training to work within the Centre. We also had individuals like Beverly Cox who really helped to push the project along. It took us almost 25 years from the time we started. It all evolved and it took time.

**SW: What obstacles, if any, came into play with opening the Centre?**

EC: We ran into the obstacle of people thinking that another museum wasn't necessary. "You've got a museum in Shelburne County, shouldn't that be enough?" Well, no. The museum in Shelburne mainly talks about the Loyalists as white people, with some (but not enough) Black history. The late Finn Bauer, who was curating the Shelburne museum at the time, was very helpful to us in uncovering the differences between Shelburne's museum and the proposed Birchtown museum. There was also the developing of our coat of arms, dealing with the Governor General's office in Ottawa and, of course, raising funds to get all the things done.

**SW: I read an article about the Centre in the *Chronicle Herald* and what really resonated with me is that one of the main benefits of the Centre is educating youth on the history of Black Loyalists—as I am in that age group and of Black heritage. Have you found that the Centre has been successful in informing youth?**

EC: We're doing it! This past year we were able to hire Vanessa Fells as our program manager. She has a Master of Education degree and is contributing greatly to the education aspect of the Centre. Young people come here from all over. It's interesting how diverse the range of children is. These children, no matter what their skin colour, can all identify as having a connection to or being descendants of Black Loyalists. We've encountered that from the very beginning. It's like all of a sudden, "I have a connection here. My great-grandmother...."

**SW: What other roles do you believe the Centre plays?**

EC: It's a centre for people to become aware of all the cultures that make up our community. We have to be aware of the fact that our people worked hard before they left the Thirteen Colonies. They "voted with their feet," so to speak, to make sure that they didn't have to go back to slavery. They didn't give up, even when they got to Nova Scotia. They tried their best to build a community. You can look across Nova Scotia today and see the remnants of those families. They did build community here and even beyond Nova Scotia.



**SW: Are there any personal connections you draw from the Centre, or the various exhibits within it?**

EC: Within the Centre lies many names: the Stevens family, the Berry family, my husband's family—the Cromwells. There are lots of connections.

**SW: From what I've deduced, *The Book of Negroes* has played a vital role in the Centre, as it is focused on Black Loyalists. To what extent did it shape and influence the Centre?**

EC: Lawrence Hill was coming here before we even had a Centre. He came to research our rich history. We were so excited every time he came to Birchtown to visit. It was always kind of an event when Lawrence Hill showed up. One of the things that we were very aware of as we were trying to build the story for the Centre was that no one knew our people. We had many interesting people in our community like Boston King, but no one knew our faces. We were kind of invisible. It became important to put these people in a place where you could recognize them as members of a community. *The Book of Negroes* does that. It tells that story about what happened to the Loyalists when they came to America and their journey through to Birchtown. It was known as “the place where you could be free.” The novel portrays the struggle very well.

Reading *The Black Loyalists* by James Walker, unless you're at university-level reading, may not be the easiest. But you can look to Walker's book for the proof, the records and the research: all important. But *The Book of Negroes* tells you the story. I remember a friend of mine was reading the first part of the book and he called me and said, “I've been reading about Aminata and her father and it was as though I was right there in the forest walking with them.” That's what Lawrence was able to do. He was able to transport us back to that time and, in a way, bring us right to the shores of Birchtown.

**SW: What kind of feedback have you received from the public on the Centre?**

EC: The feedback has been wonderful. At our opening we had a great turnout of people show up and celebrate—in the pouring rain! They danced on the turret and in and around the Centre. It was a wonderful, wonderful time. We have the Birchtown day programs in the summer and people come from all over the province to learn and experience. We are also going to become part of the family of Nova Scotia museums, which is really important for us. Having gained that is an amazing feat.

**SW: What sort of legacy do you want the Centre to leave for Nova Scotia as a whole?**

EC: The legacy of course, is the legacy of our people—that they had a life here, that they built community here, that this was their home. We have generations of people who are the descendants of Black Loyalists who have been and will continue to be raised in Nova Scotia.

# Birchtown

## Carol Farmer

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*To the staff at the centre  
Bev, Shari, Vanessa, Kaitlyn and Jason.  
For all their hard work.*

To the future generations  
If they take time to look  
At the magnificent Centre

The Anglican Church  
With its beautiful steeple  
The stone wall and the brook

For it was God's plan  
To give that extra hand  
To develop our Promised Land

People now come from near and far  
By bus, by boat, plane, car.  
To visit this site: Birchtown, Nova Scotia

With God's help the project succeeded  
For it was you, Elizabeth,  
Who was chosen and needed

So give yourself a pat on the back  
It was God's intention to see this done  
For all to see, not just some.

With His help, we give thanks  
To you, Elizabeth,  
Thank you.

# On the Hunt for Diverse Stories

## Wanda Lauren Taylor

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Since grade school, I have had a passion for books and reading. This must have been evident to my teacher during elementary school because, on the last day before summer break, she gave me a gift. It was a collection of hardcover Dr. Seuss books. It came with its own bright blue, hard plastic book rack in the shape of the hat-wearing feline. While other kids on my street ran through the fields, climbed trees and collected bugs, I spent most of that summer inside, sucking my thumb and reading the shiny new books from cover to cover, over and over again.

But as my interest in reading grew, so did my awareness of what was missing in the books I read: Me. None of the characters looked like me, acted like me or spoke to my experience. So, when a book came along that did, I clung to it. I somehow stumbled onto a book called *Harriet's Daughter* by M. NourbeSe Philip, and it was probably the first time I'd seen Black people in books outside of the bit of history we learned in school. I immediately wanted more. As a teen, I took an interest in novels like *Women of Brewster Place* by Gloria Naylor and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. Those stories reassured me that my experiences were just as valid, important and worth reading about as all the others. But the shelves in which those books lived always seemed to be the slimmest section of the entire library.

This is the cry of many educators, youth and other readers: Where are the diverse stories? My recent entry into the publishing business as an Acquisitions Editor puts me in a unique position to contribute to positive change. I enjoy sitting around the boardroom table and engaging in those deep and meaningful conversations about culture, race, identity and the ways in which we can expand how we share our perspectives with the world. It's vital to have diverse viewpoints and experiences included in conversations about the types of stories we should be publishing.

In a recent media interview about my latest book, *Ride or Die* (Lorimer, 2017), I was asked whether I was the first Black acquisitions editor at a Nova Scotia book publishing company. It was a good question, but one that I couldn't answer. I did some digging afterwards but came up empty. I'm curious to know which others walked this path. First Nations people? African Nova Scotians? Muslims? And if I am the first, now is the perfect time, as diversity in the stories we read and in those who tell them is slowly and steadily becoming a permanent fixture on the literary landscape.

**As my interest in reading grew, so did my awareness of what was missing in the books I read: Me. None of the characters looked like me, acted like me or spoke to my experience.**

As an African-Canadian female writer, I am also exceptionally positioned to create those stories with diverse characters and inclusive themes. I have several manuscripts still yet to be published that focus on everything from a Muslim teen as main character to the mobilization of a stigmatized group of friends. However, as minority authors, we often face the threat of being pigeonholed. There is a belief that we are only good at writing about diversity and

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minority issues, or that our characters are not mainstream folks with everyday challenges but instead must be defined by their “diverseness.” Yet our race, class, gender or ethnicity are not the only stories we can tell. As humans and as individuals, we are not one single story and minority writers continue to demonstrate that they are not only equipped to write minority stories but are just as skilled in writing mainstream ones as well. I feel that an incredible storyteller is a gift to the world. She has the ability to make us see things in ways we might never have seen, were it not for her artistic gifts leaping back from the page.

The publishing industry is slowly changing to broaden the diversity of stories told and authors published. Readers are finding increased opportunities to connect with different kinds of characters, themes and stories. Bookshelves are beginning to look more representative of the world we live in. I am excited to be a very small part of that momentum.

# Conversation with Jade Brooks

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Jade Brooks' memoir *The Teen Sex Trade: My Story* (Formac 2017) is a no-holds-barred account of human trafficking in Canada. Now 25, Jade was born in Toronto and grew up in Halifax. At age 11, she was put into foster care and by age 17 found herself lured into the sex trade. While her memoir tells her own harrowing tale, Jade says far too many young women can relate to her experiences.

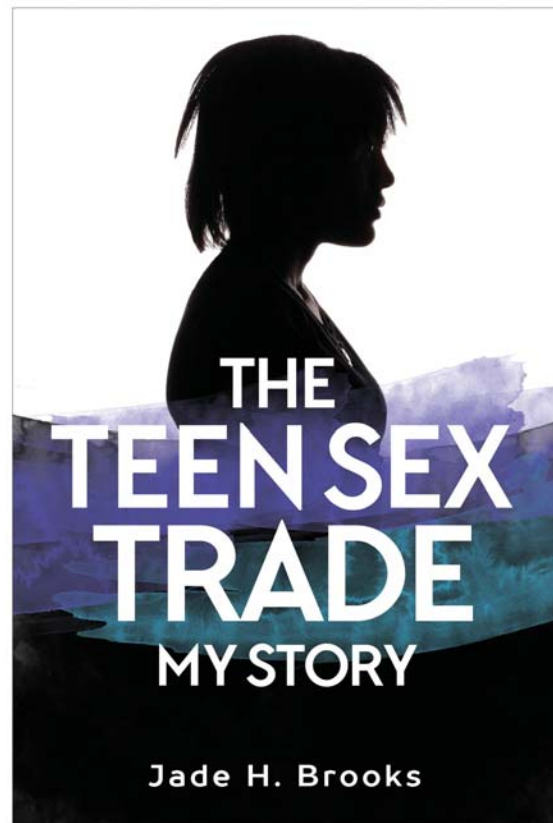
*Understorey Magazine* had the chance to speak with Jade about her story and the process of writing her first book.

**Understorey Magazine: Were you hesitant to be so open and vulnerable when telling your story?**

Jade Brooks: Vulnerable is something I have always been and will always be to some extent. I wasn't hesitant to be vulnerable and open in sharing my story. Although it was challenging (and embarrassing) at times, I knew that the truth was bigger than those feelings and that it had to get out there.

**UM: How long did it take to write the manuscript?**

JB: The first draft of the book took approximately six months. Once I signed my contract with the publisher, the editing process took another year or so until it was officially finished and ready for print. There was a period of about six months between finishing the first draft and signing on with the publisher.





**UM: What (or who) inspired you to write the book?**

JB: A friend of mine was the initial inspiration for the book. In telling him a bit of what I'd been through, he suggested I write a book. He said that I may save someone's life. Once I really dove into my writing, it was healing.

**UM: You're also a poet. Is writing a form of therapy for you?**

JB: Poetry and writing are not only therapy for me, they are peace of mind. They are how I solve problems. Writing enables me to express myself freely, helping me to understand myself and the world around me.

**UM: You recently gave birth to twins. How do you feel about them reading your book once they are older?**

JB: I feel having them read the book is crucial to their development as young people, as humans. I feel that they need to know that this happens. What better way to discuss it with them than to have been through it myself.

**UM: What is the one message you want readers to take from the book?**

JB: One message, among many, is that abuse is not normal, no matter the ways in which it manifests itself.

**UM: What is your message to other girls going through the same thing?**

JB: I want young girls to know that what they are experiencing is not their fault. Guilt is a very heavy burden to carry and I know because I've carried it. I want to let them know that their love (for their pimp) is valid, but the things they have to sacrifice proves that his love is not reciprocated. Love isn't supposed to hurt; it doesn't require you to sell any part of yourself. Also, when they are ready to leave, they will find a way. The female spirit is resilient and can only be held down for so long before it rises.

**UM: In the book, you mention the sex trade is a common part of people's lives in the community where you lived. Why do you think this is and how do we break this cycle?**

JB: I think it is in response to intentional systemic barriers that Black people have faced over many generations. I've learned from a therapist that I used to work with that when a human

being is denied its power for so long, it will do just about anything to regain that power, even things that are harmful or unethical. The male and female roles in this crime/lifestyle are attempts to get out of poverty, to seek love where there once was none, to feel some sort of freedom and autonomy over oneself.

There is more to be said about why this is normal, but that is some of what I've observed. We break the cycle by allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, as I have done in my book, and educating ourselves as well as our children and our peers. We must first admit that it's a problem, be open about our experiences and make a conscious decision to live better, to treat our male and female counterparts with more respect. This has to be dealt with on a human level because a lot of perpetrators and victims don't even look at themselves or others as worthy of basic respect. Once we come together with that type of foundation, then we can look at breaking down systemic barriers that keep us in poverty, both locally and globally.

**UM: In the epilogue, you mention a second book. What will it be about?**

JB: My second book will detail how I came to a place of peace within myself, the experiences I had along the way and the lessons I learned that allowed me to understand myself and trust my intuition. It will likely be less of a story and structured more as a guide book. That's the vision I have right now. It could change.

# About the Contributors

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**Abshiro Ahmed Abdille** was born in Somalia and moved to Kenya in the 1990s where she lived in the Dadaab refugee camp. When Abshiro finished her secondary education, she received a scholarship to come to Canada. She studied at Mount Saint Vincent University and recently graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. Abshiro says that her parents encouraged her to excel in her education. She sees her family as the backbone of her success.

**Cherrie Amour** (aka Cherrie Woods) is an award-winning Canadian poet/author based in the US who writes about love, life and relationships. She has a book, *Free to Be Me, Poems on Life, Love and Relationships* and two CDs, *Love's Journey* and *ilovemesome words*, all published under her pen name, Cherrie Amour. Her poems have been published in *Poet's Ink* and the *Paterson Literary Review*. See more of Cherrie's work at [cherrieamour.com](http://cherrieamour.com).

**Wanda Thomas Bernard** is a social worker, educator, researcher, community activist and advocate of social change. In 2016, she was appointed to both the Senate of Canada and as Special Advisor, Diversity and Inclusiveness at Dalhousie University. Senator Bernard is also a founding member of the Association of Black Social Workers and has received many honours for her work, including the Order of Nova Scotia and the Order of Canada.

**Myla Borden** began quilting in 1993 and was president of the Northumberland Quilt Guild from 2004 to 2005. She is also a co-founder and the first president of both the African Nova Scotian Quilters Association and the Vale Quilters Association. Her quilts have been exhibited widely, including at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, the Museum of Industry in Stellarton and the Textile Museum of Canada in Toronto.

**René Boudreau** graduated from Dalhousie University with a major in Sociology and a minor in Law and Society. She currently works as a Program Coordinator at a family resource centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She has been writing since a young age, using poetry as an outlet for healing and self-expression. "Imagine" is her first published poem. It captures the reality of racism in Nova Scotia, using both personal experiences and experiences shared by others.

**Jade Brooks** lives in Toronto. She graduated from a college program in child and youth work in 2015. She has given presentations on human trafficking and shared her life experiences with many audiences of young people in the Toronto area and in Nova Scotia.

**Kim Cain** explores the African Canadian existence here in Canada and how it relates to the larger global African diaspora. After relocating to Nova Scotia from Ontario in 1995, Kim began using art as a means of constructing and collaging new experiences, techniques and materials. Since graduating from the Art Education program at NSCAD in 2001, Kim has been teaching art, exhibiting and curating art experiences.

**NAT chantel** is an emerging African Nova Scotian artist and writer whose work reflects “home” and the human condition as it relates to the appropriation of culture, body and tongue. Her literary focus on patterns of silence and being silenced seeks to disrupt societal structures that shape one’s identity and sense of belonging. NAT has a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and currently develops recreation-, art- and literacy-based programs for children.

**Louise Delisle** was born in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, and has lived there most of her life. She is a playwright and has published one book titled *Back Talk*. She is also a painter and likes to create pictures of family life in the Black community.

**Marlene Dorrington** began quilting in 1993 and joined the Northumberland Quilt Guild in 1994. Her quilts were exhibited in *When Black Women Useta Fly* (2002) and *Our Ancestor’s Garden* (2007) and she is also a member of the Black Artists Network of Nova Scotia and the Vale Quilters Association. Like her daughter, Myla Borden, she was taught the basics of quilting by Frances Dorrington (her sister).

**Carol Farmer** lives in Shelburne, Nova Scotia. Although she did not complete high school, Carol did complete a two-year course in cosmetology at Middleton Regional Vocational School and also obtained her Nova Scotia Hair Dressers’ License. Carol enjoys working with seniors and was inspired to write about the Black Loyalist Heritage Centre while working with its founder, Elizabeth Cromwell. Carol also found inspiration after a creative writing day at her GED course. She is currently employed in housekeeping.

**Letitia Fraser** was born and raised in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She is a proud descendant of North Preston and comes from a long line of artists. Her work has been featured in exhibits at the Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, the Freedom Festival Art Exhibit and several exhibits coordinated by the Black Artists Network of Nova Scotia. In 2012, she had the opportunity to illustrate images for *The Journey Continues: An Atlantic Canadian Black Experience*.

**Angel Bonita Gannon** is the daughter of a former Africville resident and activist. Born in Montreal, she studied Art History at John Abbott College and at LaSalle College and moved to Halifax in 1999. In 2000, she became a member of the Black Artists Network of Nova Scotia and has participated in several exhibitions around the province. She is an all-medium visual artist with expertise in oil, wood carving and clay sculpture.

**Sylvia D. Hamilton** is an award-winning Nova Scotian filmmaker, writer, artist and educator. Her writing has appeared in a variety of Canadian journals and anthologies and her poetry collection *And I Alone Escaped to Tell You* was short-listed for several awards. Her recognitions include honorary degrees and a Gemini Award. She has taught at Mount Saint Vincent University and Acadia University and currently holds the Roger's Chair in Communications at the University of King's College in Halifax.

**Guyleigh Johnson** is a poet/spoken-word artist from North End, Dartmouth. Her poetry focuses on the needs of inner city youth and the challenges they face on a daily basis. Guyleigh believes "hurt people help people" and a common connection we all share is pain. In October 2016, she released her first collection of poetry entitled *Expect the Unexpected*. She is currently enrolled at Dalhousie University with the hopes of obtaining a degree in journalism.

**Shalese Makeda Jordan** is 17 years old and in eleventh grade at Appleby College in Oakville, Ontario. She has aspirations of becoming a physician.

**Robyn Martelly** is from Cape Breton Island, born and raised in the diverse community of Whitney Pier, a Canadian Heritage site. She is a self-taught artist, her skills ranging from painting to poetry, and she has been creating art and writing poetry for over 15 years. She combines her training in Therapeutic Recreation with her love for art to create therapeutic activities, programs, poetry and short stories that keep children and youth engaged and empowered.

**Késa Munroe-Anderson** holds a Bachelor of Arts in English with Honours (1999) and a Master of Arts in English (2000), as well as a Master of Education in Lifelong Learning with a focus in Africentric Leadership. Currently, Késa is a candidate in the inter-university Doctorate in Educational Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University and her research explores the role of spirituality as an anti-oppressive agent in the formal education of African Nova Scotian learners.

**Donna Paris** is a multigenerational African Canadian, born and raised in Nova Scotia but has called Toronto home for the past 30 years. Donna is one of three African Canadian women who started the collective called “In the Black: Canada.” Through the collective, they have produced a series of videos entitled *In the Black: Canada—The Web Chronicles* (2015) and *The Windsor Project* (2017), both of which chronicle the history and experiences of African Canadians growing up and living in Canada.

**Shreba Quach** grew up in North End, Halifax, and currently lives in Alberta. She has recently opened her own studio, Healing Ground Studio, which will provide a safe place for people to discover their own creative voice and perhaps find wholeness as well.

**Wanda Robson** was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1926 and moved to North Sydney, Cape Breton, in 1975. Wanda enrolled in the University College of Cape Breton in 2000 and earned a BA in English. While at CBU, Wanda began speaking about her sister, Viola Desmond. In 2010, Wanda accepted the Royal Prerogative of Mercy pardon for Viola on behalf of the family. Wanda is the author of *Sister to Courage* (Breton Books, 2010).

**Kilah Rolle** is a strategic communications practitioner and an amateur creative writer living in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

**Lindsay Ruck** is an author and editor from Halifax, Nova Scotia. She is a graduate of Carleton University’s School of Journalism. Her first book, *Winds of Change: The Life and Legacy of Calvin W. Ruck*, chronicles her grandfather’s life as a social worker, human rights activist and Canadian senator. She has contributed to several print and digital literary works. Lindsay lives in Dartmouth with her husband and daughter.



**Darlene Strong** is a Nova Scotian artist and a professional counsellor, as well as a published author, musician and singer. Her preferred medium is acrylic on canvas and much of her work reflects rural settings with a spiritual overtone that connects viewers to her personal philosophy. A 15-year retrospective of Darlene's work was shown at the Cumberland County Museum in 2017. See more of Darlene's work on Flickr at [strongartwork](#).

**Wanda Lauren Taylor** is an author, social worker and educator. She has a Master of Education degree from Mount Saint Vincent University, and Bachelors degrees in Journalism, Social Work, and Early Childhood Education. She is currently in acquisitions at Formac Publishing and serves as Executive Director of the Stepping Stone Association. Wanda's latest book is *Ride or Die* (2017).

**Shantelle Vanterpool** is a self-taught artist, born in Nova Scotia and now living in Washington, DC. Drawing inspiration from her fashion design background, Shantelle is intrigued by structure versus deconstruction and how reality is perceived through the eyes of others. Her abstract use of bold colours and geometric shapes depict her optimistic point of view. Asymmetrical lines, circles and a signature yellow "diddle flower" are commonly repeated in her work.

**Sophia Wedderburn** is 16 years old. She writes: "From the time I could jot words onto a page, writing has always been a part of me, whether it was concocting fairy tales about heroines slaying dragons or composing poetry inspired by my surroundings. I live in Halifax, Nova Scotia, with my mom, dad, younger sister, Eve, and my beautiful puppy, Jesse."



**Stories, Art & Conversation from:**

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**Cherrie Amour**

**Wanda Thomas Bernard**

**Myla Borden**

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**Edited by Lindsay Ruck**