

*They Trespass Her Body Like They Trespass This Land*¹
Toward Justice, Remembrance & Healing
for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples²

A special feature of the End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin 2020 Homicide Report

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for advocacy strategies non-Native systems can implement to end MMIWG2S violence, see p. 13

for featured voices from Wisconsin's MMIWG2S movement leadership, see p. 16

and for our grateful Acknowledgments, p. 19

¹ from the 1491s' [To the Indigenous Woman](#)

² This report will reference a variety of acronyms for different facets of the same violence: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), Women, Girls, and Two Spirit (MMIWG2S), Peoples (MMIP), or Relatives (MMIR). Similarly, different ways of referring to Native or Indigenous peoples include terminology adopted by bodies of government (e.g. *American Indian* or *Alaska Native*), autonyms (the name a people use for themselves in their own language, e.g. ᐱᐢᓂᓂᐱᐃᐅᐃᐅ or *Anishinaabeg*), and official tribal titles (e.g. the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians). These linguistic differences are important, historically complex, and incredibly personal. This author accepts responsibility and apologizes for any and all mistakes, misrepresentation, or offenses to this end.

And so, you see, her absence stopped time.

— Louise Erdrich, *The Round House*³
winner of the 2012 National Book Award for Fiction
enrolled member, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians

Rae Elaine Tourtillott - 19 year old daughter of Josephine and Bernard Tourtillott, namesake of Raymond and Elaine, 1984 Menominee Princess, renowned fancy dancer, and mother to seven-week-old Alysse - disappeared into the night on October 15th, 1986, after attending a birthday party with friends on the Menominee Reservation one cool autumn evening.⁴ Those who knew her were immediately alarmed when she did not call to check in the next morning, when she did not attend a relative's wedding, when she did not come home to her beloved newborn daughter. They were alarmed because Rae Elaine was not the kind to disappear. She was, as her auntie referred to her, *my little Rae of sunshine*, known to be a generous caregiver to younger relatives; someone who was devoted and respectful to her elders; a proud Menominee passionate about learning and practicing her culture.

"She was nine months younger than me," says Andrea "Andy" Lemke-Rochon, cousin and member of Wisconsin's MMIW Task Force, "but she grew up on the reservation and I didn't...so in many ways she felt like my elder." Her loved ones describe an attentive, dignified, nurturing young woman. In telling stories about her, they also smile when they remember Rae Elaine as someone who embodied a deep, endearing sense of Native joy and mischief. "She knew the Our Father in Menominee," says Andy, "and she also knew the dirtiest swears."

So when Rae Elaine went missing, the hole she left behind was immeasurable. "It was so painful, not knowing where she was, if she was out somewhere alone," says Andy. "She was so smart and so strong. For months, I prayed she had just been taken - that she would find a way to escape and come back home."

WHEREAS

according to a 2016 report from the National Institute of Justice, 84% of American Indian and Alaskan Native women have experienced violence in their lifetime, more than half of whom experienced sexual violence;

WHEREAS,

according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, homicide is the third leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaskan Native women between 10 and 24 years of age and the fifth leading cause of death for American Indian and Alaskan Native women between 25 and 34 years of age;

WHEREAS,

in 2016, the National Crime Information Center reported nearly 6,000 cases of missing American Indian and Alaskan Native women and girls, yet the U.S. Department of Justice was tracking only 119 cases in the NamUS missing persons database;

and WHEREAS,

no reliable data exists on the actual number of missing Indigenous women and girls in the United States, and instances of violence continue to be directed against Indigenous women, living both on reservations and in urban areas, at high rates...⁵

³ [Review of *The Round House* from the New York Times](#)

⁴ [Remembering Rae Elaine Tourtillott and Preventing Future Violence](#)

⁵ [City of Madison Common Council Resolution #21-00307](#)

What does it really mean to be *Missing*?

So asked Alice Skenadore, founder and Executive Director of Wise Women Gathering Place, Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe tribal member, midwife, advocate, and trusted elder to the anti-violence movement here in Wisconsin. The question arose at the June 2021 Wisconsin MMIW Task Force meeting,⁶ in response to discussion about myriad statistics, paradigms, and approaches the Task Force might consider when attempting to tell the stories of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, and other relatives of Wisconsin's twelve Native nations.⁷ I heard Alice's question as a request for definition, but also as a gentle insistence that we remember: the problem itself inherently *defies* such definition. The problem is *precisely because of* settler colonialist systems, white supremacist policies, and deeply ingrained misogynist attitudes that result in Indigenous relatives dying or disappearing without attention, without accountability, and without hope for the families who are left behind.

"Our relatives go missing three times," insists Jordan Marie Brings Three White Horses Daniel, a Kul Wicasa Oyate/Lower Brule Sioux MMIW activist in the documentary short *No More Stolen Sisters: Real America with Jorge Ramos*. "They go missing in life, they go missing in the media, and they go missing in the data."⁸

Despite being the original inhabitants and stewards of *Turtle Island*, or the lands now known collectively as North America, Native peoples are rarely adequately accounted for in surveys or other Western scientific data metrics. There were more than 590 distinct and sovereign Native nations with a combined population estimated between 10 and 45 million people before first contact, though many Native activists and scholars would argue estimates are likely low. By 1900, the Native population was 237,000 - *less than half a percent* of those who were here first.⁹

Today's Native American people are the literal survivors of multi-generational, ongoing genocide.¹⁰ After more than 500 years of racial and gender-based violence committed against them by the State, the 2020 US Census had 9.7 million respondents identify themselves as *American Indian or Alaska Native* - just 2.9% of the overall populace.¹¹ In Wisconsin, 48,384 people identified as such, though again, tribal leadership caution that COVID-19, accessibility, distrust of government outreach, and other complex factors likely mean this is still an underestimate.¹² More insidious and mathematic still - as their communities have been continually decimated by historic and contemporary policies related to child welfare¹³, state violence and incarceration¹⁴, reproductive rights¹⁵, and overall public health inequities, their numbers often do not constitute a *statistically significant sample* in broad demographics. They are grouped together with other similarly *statistically insignificant* peoples, referred to as *other*, and erased.¹⁶

Data that does exist often only measures those who live on designated reservations; what does it mean when the Urban Indian Health Institute indicates 71% of Native America lives off reservation?¹⁷ Survey outreach approaches also often fail to account for homelessness in their accessibility and logistical metrics; if we know that at least 80% of women and children who experience homelessness have also experienced domestic or sexual violence, and if 67 out of 10,000 Indigenous peoples are experiencing housing insecurity today, how many Indigenous victims or survivors have been made invisible in the data?¹⁸ Indigenous identities are the only category in the United States dependent on the idea of racialized *blood quantum*; how many Indigenous peoples are missing from the data because their qualification as a tribal member is based on settler-

⁶ [MMIW Task Force of Wisconsin](#)

⁷ [Wisconsin First Nations](#)

⁸ [No More Stolen Sisters - Real America with Jorge Ramos](#)

⁹ [Counting the Dead: Estimating the Loss of Life in the Indigenous Holocaust, 1492-Present](#)

¹⁰ [Canadian Inquiry Calls Killings of Indigenous Women Genocide](#)

¹¹ [2020 U.S. Census: Native population increased by 86.5 percent](#)

¹² [Census Has Struggled to Count American Indians. Some Tribes Fear COVID-19 Made It Worse.](#)

¹³ [Wisconsin Had At Least 10 Native American Boarding Schools. Here's What To Know About Them](#)

¹⁴ [Survey: Wisconsin Led US in American Indian Incarceration Rate in 2013](#)

¹⁵ [A 1970 Law Led to the Mass Sterilization of Native American Women. That History Still Matters](#)

¹⁶ [The Beginning and End of Rape, Sarah Deer \(2\)](#)

¹⁷ [Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls](#)

¹⁸ [Nat'l Alliance to End Homelessness - State of Homelessness: a Look at Race & Ethnicity](#)

colonialist criteria? Because their relatives were raped by white men, their ancestors were stolen as children, or they were otherwise severed from their culture by forced assimilation?¹⁹

Having been forcibly moved and removed from their ancestral lands; having experienced generations of broken treaties, starvation land-rights restrictions, spiritual criminalization, and environmental exploitation; having been literally stolen from their relatives or taken into sexual slavery from the time of first contact²⁰ - what does it really mean to be counted as *American Indian or Alaska Native* by systems that only ever intended to ensure you would someday never exist at all?

**We have had a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples crisis
since Europeans came to this continent in the late 1400's.**

- Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Dept. of the Interior, May 5th, 2021
member of the Pueblo of Laguna, 35th generation New Mexican,
first ever Native American to serve in a US Federal cabinet position

**The river, the town, the village,
The bedroom, our kitchen. They eat everything.
Or burn it.
They kill what they cannot take. They rape. What they cannot kill they take.**

- Joy Harjo, "How to Write a Poem in a Time of War"²¹
U.S. Poet Laureate, member of the Mvskoke/Creek Nation

To be missing

also means reckoning with the reality that Indigenous people, especially young women like Rae Elaine Tourtillott, are both more likely to experience lethal sexual and domestic violence, and more likely to be lost in the systemic darkness that follows: a cacophony of statutory confusion, lack of communication, racist stigma, and compounding trauma. When I ask Andy Lemke-Rochon if systems-level factors might have changed what happened with her dear cousin's case, she says with both a stark and wavering voice, "Rae Elaine was missing for six months. She was alone, in the dark, for six months. It was a jurisdictional nightmare."

For Rae Elaine, a beautiful young woman whose sure, dancing steps skillfully mimicked a butterfly in the Menominee way, who was eager to practice the Indigenous medicines her great-grandmother had taught her, and whose disappearance left her relatives in disbelief at a reality wherein someone could be so cruel as to steal a mother from her infant daughter, this nightmare was a geographic, bureaucratic mess that might necessarily have involved the Menominee tribal police, local non-tribal law enforcement, the Shawano County Sheriff's Department, the Wisconsin Department of Justice, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the FBI. A web of inconsistencies between statutes, protocols, and legal definitions at the tribal, state, and federal levels did not help effectively govern how criminal legal systems responded to her disappearance.

"And I'm sure some people thought '*She's probably out partying!*,'" says Andy, a painful euphemism for both the traumatic impacts of alcohol and drugs in Native communities, as well as the pernicious stigmas non-Native systems often use to justify ignoring or criminalizing Indigenous peoples experiencing harm. "Maybe they thought she'd show up in a few days, and didn't take it seriously. But colonialism was about stamping out Native people," Andy continues. "And still today, that leads to systems not taking Missing and Murdered Indigenous women seriously."

¹⁹ [Some Native Americans Fear Blood Quantum is Formula for 'Paper Genocide'](#)

²⁰ [Colonization, Homelessness, and the Prostitution and Sex Trafficking of Native Women](#)

²¹ ["How to Write a Poem in a Time of War"](#)

By all accounts, Rae Elaine was not *out partying* - but it should not have mattered even if she had been. Her disappearance deserved immediate alarm, coordinated emergency response across all responsible legal jurisdictions, creative investigative strategies, serious media attention at the state and local level, and committed organizational resources. Crime experts continue to assert that an urgent response in the first few days is crucial to solving especially violent incidents. Yet there were reports of unexplainable delays in response to her case; largely volunteer search teams with little or no forensic training; evidence that was gathered and then went missing; communications requested and never sent between jurisdictions.

Six months later, on April 9th, 1987, tribal police and the FBI went searching in a remote, wooded area of the Menominee Reservation, and a small part of Rae Elaine was found.²²

WHEREAS,

Indigenous women experience racism and prejudice through invisibility, driven by a lack of media coverage. Instead of nationwide manhunts, alerts, and round-the-clock news coverage when an affluent, white woman goes missing, news coverage can be minimal to nonexistent when an Indigenous woman or girl goes missing. Many missing and murdered Indigenous women today remain unnamed and their disappearances unknown or unheard of;

and WHEREAS,

local law enforcement in urban areas rarely work with a victim's Tribal Nation, denying that Nation's inherent sovereignty and denying that Nation the chance to access data to protect its own citizens...²³

No one knows how many are missing.

Of the approximately 6,000 MMIWG2S relatives that have been identified by family members, many have gone unreported or misclassified in legal systems. Of the *reported* 2,448 MMIW cases in the United States since 1990, eighty-eight percent remain unsolved according to Sovereign Bodies Institute (SBI), an organization that "builds on Indigenous traditions of data gathering and knowledge transfer to create, disseminate, and put into action research on gender and sexual violence against Indigenous people."²⁴ SBI also reminds us there is no Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples international database - despite the fact that intersections between tribal jurisdictions and systems of local, county, state, and federal United States government should always be considered *international*, given tribes' status as sovereign nations with the right to govern themselves.²⁵

The reality in Rae Elaine Tourtillott's case, and in so many others, is that stigma compounds with ego and ignorance; jurisdictional gaps compound with under-resourced social services; lack of media attention compounds invisibility; and white feminist approaches to anti-violence work compound misogynistic carelessness for an Indigenous woman's one sacred, unique life. Dr. Renee Gralewicz, Brothertown Indian Nation Peacemaker, retired Professor of Anthropology in the UW Systems, and co-chair of the Wisconsin MMIW Task Force Legal/Policy subcommittee, stated it plainly in a Fox 11 News interview from 2019: "When we have people who fall in that stereotype of poverty, drug addiction, prostitution, those people with those characteristics seem less important than this nice middle class family next to them...I'm sure the police force say they deserve to have their time in court, they deserve to have their murder solved, but they just don't seem as a priority."²⁶

Settler-colonial paradigms about power and gender underlie legal systems. These systems determine who deserves protection (Euro-American, cisgender, heterosexual, male and sometimes female²⁷, Christian, wealthy) and who deserves to be ignored, dismissed, or punished (anyone else). These beliefs have been codified in cruel ways that might be breathtaking if they were not also so commonplace in the United States. If you

²² [FBI Most Wanted Seeking Information - Rae Elaine Tourtillott](#)

²³ [City of Madison Common Council Resolution #21-00307](#)

²⁴ [Sovereign Bodies Institute](#)

²⁵ [An Issue of Sovereignty - Nat'l Conference of State Legislatures](#)

²⁶ [Jurisdictional questions a challenge in cases of murdered and missing Indigenous women](#)

²⁷ [White tears, white rage: Victimhood and \(as\) violence in mainstream feminism](#)

consider yourself an advocate in the field of domestic or sexual violence, human trafficking, or other sensitive crimes, please read *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*. According to author Sarah Deer, a 2014 MacArthur Fellow, professor at William Mitchell College of Law in Minnesota, and citizen of the Mvskoke/Creek Nation of Oklahoma, a majority of sexual violence in the United States is intraracial, meaning perpetrators target and harm victims/survivors of their same race. The singular exception to this is Indigenous women, who report a majority - at least 80 and as many as 97% - of those who commit violence against them are non-Native.

"Imagine living in a world in which almost every woman you know has been raped," writes Prof. Deer. "Now imagine living in a world in which four generations of women and their ancestors have been raped. Now imagine that not a single rapist has ever been prosecuted for these crimes. That dynamic is a reality for many Native women - and thus for some survivors, it can be difficult to separate the more immediate experience of their assault from the larger experience that their people have endured through a history of forced removal, displacement, and destruction. All these events are attacks on the human soul..."²⁸

The foundation for normalized, legalized violence against Indigenous women, across the United States and specifically in the Great Lakes region, has entangled, settler-colonial roots, including:

- **Christopher Columbus**, who explicitly sought Indigenous women and girls to buy and sell into sexual slavery, and whose brutality has been intentionally obscured and perversely celebrated in the United States, in every space from kindergarten classrooms and shopping malls to legislative bodies.²⁹
- Othering, racist narratives about Indigenous peoples being "merciless Indian s*****s" are as foundational to the United States as **the Declaration of Independence**.³⁰
- **the Dakota Uprising** and the subsequent day-after-Christmas 1862 executions of 38 Native warriors, who were responding in part to a series of violences committed with impunity by white settlers against Indigenous women.³¹ Condemned to be hanged during a military tribunal on Wahpeton/Oceti Šakowin land now called Mankato, Minnesota, **the Dakota 38** represent the largest mass execution in United States history.³²
- **the Major Crimes Act of 1885** was a federal law passed in white supremacist fear of the successful affirmation of Lakota sovereignty over intratribal matters in US Supreme Court case *Ex Parte Crow Dog*. The MCA thereafter ensured Native defendants could be prosecuted by federal jurisdiction for *major crimes* like rape, murder, and kidnapping. Though it did not divest tribal nations of authority over like crimes committed on tribal land against their citizens (and thus concurrent jurisdiction still exists), "the practical impact...is that few tribes have pursued prosecution...[instead] of a rape case being handled within a community that applies the laws, beliefs, and traditions of its people."³³
- **Public Law 280** of 1953, wherein the federal government's authority to respond to rape was replaced by state authority in six states, including Wisconsin. Yet "[neither] states nor the tribes...were provided with any additional resources with which to enforce crimes in Indian country. As a result, PL-280 has led to widespread criminal justice dysfunction...leaving tribal communities at the mercy of criminals who prey on the vulnerable."³⁴

²⁸ [Deer 12](#)

²⁹ [Colonization, Homelessness, and the Prostitution and Sex Trafficking of Native Women](#)

³⁰ [The Declaration of Independence](#)

³¹ [Deer 33-34](#)

³² [The Traumatic True History and Name List of the Dakota 38](#)

³³ [Deer 35-37](#)

³⁴ [Deer 37-38](#)

- **the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968**, which "is largely a misnomer...in truth, ICRA is a Eurocentric response to challenges that developed in tribal courts due to forced assimilation and hegemony...[which] imposes a limit on the punishment a tribal court can impose...to misdemeanor (minor crimes)... As with the Major Crimes Act and PL-280, however, there was no explicit divestiture of jurisdiction. Therefore, tribes can prosecute rape - but have not been able to imprison the defendant for more than one year."³⁵
- **The 1978 Supreme Court decision in *Oliphant v. Suquamish*** removed tribal court criminal jurisdiction over non-Native perpetrators, effectively signaling to predatory non-Native individuals they could commit intimate violence, sex and labor trafficking offenses, and drug-related crimes on reservations against Indigenous peoples with impunity. "From a survivor's perspective, the *Oliphant* decision means that **non-Native men who rape Native women on tribal lands** completely escape tribal criminal sanctions."³⁶
- Though the "partial Oliphant fix" of **the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010** and the **Violence Against Women (VAWA) reauthorization of 2013** mean that tribes have jurisdiction over non-Native perpetrators of crimes statutorily defined as *domestic violence* on tribal lands, to truly end violence against Indigenous women, "Congress needs to return full jurisdiction to tribal governments *and* support the infrastructure of tribal governments to provide justice for...survivors."³⁷

Until the mid-twentieth century,

a majority of state criminal legal systems only reckoned there had been a crime at all when the victim of such violence was a white woman. Even as that has changed, its disparate legacy lingers in reportage, prosecution, and convictions.³⁸ The likelihood of a state or federal system pursuing charges in an Indigenous woman's case is low; the likelihood of pursuing such justice against a non-Native assailant lower still. Again - if a majority of sexual and domestic violence against Indigenous women is committed by non-Native white men, whether or not a tribe is subject to PL-280, this is a serious jurisdictional gap. In Wisconsin, the only Native nation not subject to PL-280 are the Menominee, meaning they hold jurisdiction over crimes committed on their land...unless the crime involves someone non-Native or someone who is not a member of the Menominee tribe.³⁹ The Oliphant fix that came with VAWA in 2013 applies to acts of domestic violence *recognized* by state law and court systems as crimes - but advocates and survivors well know this is not enough. What of the many situations wherein a survivor's story is dismissed, or they have no proof, or the violent behavior falls outside of statutory definitions? What of the large majority of Indigenous peoples not living on tribal lands?

"It's clear that no system or institution is coming to our rescue," says *Naeqtum Metaemob* Kristin Welch, of the Marten Clan of the Menominee nation, founder and Executive Director of Waking Women Healing Institute, co-chair of the MMIW Task Force Subcommittee on Family & Community Impact, and longtime MMIWG2S activist. "They are fully aware of these acts of violence and intentional destruction of life. Yet they are choosing to do nothing. The solutions they provide are not enough. It's not enough to tell survivors to file a complaint or wait two years for another report to come out that only highlights the problem. We need meaningful actions of change, we need immediate help for our families and survivors now. We need systems and institutions to respond to the issues of MMIWG2S with the urgency and resources as if we are in a crisis...because we are."

³⁵ [Deer 39-40](#) *Sentence restrictions in some cases were lifted by the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2010.

³⁶ [Deer 7](#)

³⁷ [Deer 41-42, 100-106](#)

³⁸ [Deer 24](#)

³⁹ [Tribal Relationships with State and Federal Governments Prove Complicated](#). For more, see [the Tribal Court Clearinghouse on PL-280](#).

**The abuse of women is well known in history,
and tells you a lot about what is happening to our earth.**

- Tamakawastewin LaDonna Brave Bull Allard, water protector, tribal historian,
citizen of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, founder of Sacred Stone Camp

They trespass her body like they trespass this land.⁴⁰

- from *To the Indigenous Woman*, by the 1491s
Dallas Goldtooth (Mdewakanton Dakota/Diné), Sterlin Harjo (Seminole/Mvskoke),
Migizi Pensoneau (Ponca/Ojibwe), Ryan Red Corn (Osage Nation),
and Bobby Dues (Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota)

When Rae Elaine Tourtillott was murdered,

it was also the connections she held with her parents and siblings, her elders, her relatives, and their homelands that were lost; it was her Menominee ancestors, whose language, medicines, memories, stories, and spirits she carried with her who were in danger of going missing, too; it is Alysse, Rae Elaine's beloved daughter, and the future generations who will carry her good heart and her mischievous spirit forward.

Alysse Arce is now a thirty-five year old mother herself. Andy says she sees Rae Elaine in the way Alysse throws her head back and laughs, and in the joyful life of Rae Elaine's grandson, Colton. Alysse herself speaks beautifully of her mother and of her memory in *No More Stolen Sisters*.⁴¹ She also advocates for other MMIWG2S families with a passion born, terribly, of deep grief. In June of 2020, 22-year-old mother Katelyn Kelley went missing from the same Menominee Reservation community where Rae Elaine was stolen, and Alysse called systems to account. "It baffles me," she says, "that *in 34 years* we haven't learned anything about how to manage and solve these cases." Instead, Rae Elaine's case is still cold. No one has ever been charged. And Katelyn Kelley's body was found in March of 2021; she too is mourned by her family, her relatives, her community, and her young child.⁴²

"There's another young Indigenous daughter not coming home," says Dr. Renee Gralewicz, the Brothertown Indian Nation peacemaker who was also one of two original authors of 2019 Wisconsin Assembly Bill 548,⁴³ bipartisan legislation that would have created the MMIW Task Force, but which legislators failed to even bring before committee. "It's nice that we will know where she will rest for the rest of her life. Where her soul will be. But it would be so much nicer if she wasn't stolen in the first place...If our elected leaders would really care about all of their constituents, about all of us, there would be more action than words."⁴⁴

WHEREAS,

Wisconsin has been ranked as sixth in the nation in sexual trafficking, according to the Human Trafficking Institute, with urban centers being the hubs in the I-90/94 corridor, which has led to many Native women, girls, and two spirits being open to exploitation by traffickers; and...⁴⁵

⁴⁰ [the 1491s](#)

⁴¹ [No More Stolen Sisters - Real America with Jorge Ramos](#)

⁴² [Investigation continues one year after disappearance of Menominee tribal member](#)

⁴³ [2019 Wisconsin Assembly Bill 548](#)

⁴⁴ [Human remains found on reservation belong to missing woman](#)

⁴⁵ [City of Madison Common Council Resolution #21-00307](#)

Stolen land and stolen water

have long been correlated with stolen Indigenous relatives, beginning with first contact and continuing on into present-day resource extraction. Oil and gas pipeline projects like the Dakota Access Pipeline, Keystone XL, Line 3, and Line 5, known for their likelihood to cause damage to delicate ecosystems, poison water systems, and exacerbate climate change, are also often mapped through or very near tribal lands that should be protected by treaty rights.⁴⁶ As goes historic precedent, those Indigenous rights to hunt, gather, practice ceremony, and protect the land and water are usually trampled by the rights of multinational conglomerates to make money.

Extraction projects come with permanent disruption of land and water systems, but they also come with a temporary influx of "work camp modular housing," more commonly known as man-camps. The pattern that follows is horrifically predictable: hundreds of itinerant, mostly male, mostly non-Native crews populate short-term housing settlements in rural, under-resourced areas while they are employed to build pipeline infrastructure by energy corporations like Enbridge and TransCanada. Again, as these men are usually not tribal members, tribal jurisdiction over their behavior is limited at best. Domestic and sexual violence increases. Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit relatives go missing, are found murdered. "Violence against our earth and water is perpetrated on a daily basis," says Patina Park, Executive Director of the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center. "Against those things absolutely vital to our very existence. We can't be surprised that people who would rape our land are also raping our people."⁴⁷

Opponents of Enbridge Line 3 have long warned both environmental damage and Missing and Murdered Indigenous peoples would be of consequence if the pipeline were allowed to be completed.⁴⁸ The transnational Canadian tar sands pipeline would traverse through Anishinaabeg lands of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe and the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians, cross the headwaters of the Mississippi River, and terminate in Lake Superior - the largest body of fresh water in North America. Spills have already occurred as construction has continued, and in June of 2021, a sting operation arrested six men suspected of human sex trafficking.⁴⁹ "As experts and Indigenous women predicted, this pipeline project has brought men into our communities who have chosen to prey on our women," says Winona LaDuke, a member of the White Earth Nation, longtime environmental activist, and Executive Director of Honor the Earth. Two of the men arrested in June worked for Enbridge. Two other workers had already been charged earlier this year in a separate trafficking ring associated with the same pipeline.

Lake Superior - and its *twin ports*, Duluth, MN and Superior, WI - is the third largest hub for human trafficking in North America. If a Missing or Murdered Indigenous person were found on a shipping boat docked or in transit on the lake, for example, jurisdictional challenges to the case might also include international maritime laws, inter-state policies, and complex naval protocol regarding search and seizure.⁵⁰ When completed, Line 3 will only add additional shipping business to the port. MMIWG2S advocates in Wisconsin and Michigan have warned the same dangers follow other environmental exploitation projects like Enbridge Line 5,^{51,52} which threatens the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and for the Back Forty Mine at the mouth of the Menominee River.⁵³

Enbridge claims to have offered anti-trafficking training to their employees; they have also given at least two million dollars (to date) to more than 40 local law enforcement jurisdictions to brutalize peaceful water protectors, many while in ceremony as per their treaty rights.⁵⁴ Legal challenges to these extraction projects mire in myriad courts, sometimes for years, all the while construction, destruction, and violence continue.⁵⁵ Tribal legal experts like the White Earth Band of Ojibwe's Attorney Frank Bibeau are asserting protections

⁴⁶ [The Connection Between Pipelines and Sexual Violence](#)

⁴⁷ [Sexual violence in extraction zones](#)

⁴⁸ [Protestors against Line 3 tar sands pipeline face arrests and rubber bullets](#)

⁴⁹ [Six men, including two Line 3 workers, arrested in human trafficking sting](#)

⁵⁰ [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of General Counsel: The Great Lakes](#)

⁵¹ [Line 5 - Sierra Club](#)

⁵² [Tribes worry Line 5 tunnel construction could bring sex trafficking, violence to Native communities](#)

⁵³ [Michigan Judge Denies Permit for Back Forty Mine on the Banks of the Menominee River](#)

⁵⁴ [An Oil Company Paid Police \\$2 Million to Defend Its Pipeline from Protests](#)

⁵⁵ [As Line 3 nears completion, pipeline battles are far from over](#)

based on tribal laws regarding the Rights of Nature, including those of *manoomin* (wild rice).⁵⁶ But which party to the case is likely to have more resources? Much like an abusive partner draining their survivor's financial ability to combat them in family or civil legal proceedings, so go petrochemical companies against Indigenous communities.

If Indigenous women near resource extraction projects know they are more vulnerable to trafficking, sexual assault, domestic abuse, and murder, particularly by men who are not subject to tribal jurisdiction; if their communities are chronically underfunded, and one of the only available safety resources they have is to call police officers paid by the very company that employs their attackers; if they are not legally protected from harm even on the reservation lands where their tribes were forcibly moved - where on Turtle Island are Native women safe?

WHEREAS,

the Wisconsin State Department of Justice formed the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force in 2020 to collect and study data and identify solutions; and

WHEREAS,

Department of Interior Secretary Deb Haaland created the Missing and Murdered Unit within the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Office of Justice Services to collect and analyze data, and to collaborate with different law enforcement and governmental agencies...

WHEREAS,

Indigenous women often hesitate or are unable to access help and needed services after experiences of gender-based violence because their unique needs are often not understood or met by mainstream agencies. Structural factors such as racism, stigma, and criminalization of substance use and mental health issues, culturally incongruent shelter policies, siloed programming, and gender inequality interact in complex ways, resulting in gaps, and inefficient and inadequate services for women who identify as Indigenous...⁵⁷

Though leadership in the Wisconsin legislature have shown no serious commitment

to ending violence against Indigenous peoples, the WI Department of Justice did support the formation of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force, an Indigenous-led body charged with examining social systems' factors and responses that exacerbate domestic, sexual, and trafficking violence against Native peoples in Wisconsin, and in making recommendations about improving data collection and systems' responses. Yet the Task Force is only funded with \$600,000, mostly to collect and report on information that Native communities have long been begging non-Native systems to acknowledge. Justine Rufus, MMIW Task Force co-chair, member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, resident of the Red Cliff Band, and Rural Coordinator for the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, demands we must do more. "We [Native communities] already knew this was a problem - writing a report will only tell us what we already know. We need serious investment at every level."

Wisconsin's twelve tribal nations and its approximately 50,000 Native citizens need systems change and jurisdictional sovereignty. Their communities are also long-deserving of financial and proprietary reparations for the theft of their lands and the legal and financial impacts of generations of broken treaties - if you've not heard of the Land Back movement, please consider learning more from organizations like NDN Collective.⁵⁸ More specifically, Missing and Murdered Indigenous peoples and their families, relatives, and communities deserve equitable investment in culturally-specific, Indigenous-led healing initiatives to end violence, and to address the complex impacts of generational traumas like residential school abuses, spiritual and religious persecution, and environmental genocide.

⁵⁶ [First "Rights of Nature" enforcement case filed in tribal court to enforce treaty guarantees](#)

⁵⁷ [City of Madison Common Council Resolution #21-00307](#)

⁵⁸ [NDN Collective - Dedicated to Building Indigenous Power](#)

There are state, national and international-level MMIW initiatives. Canada's National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls produced hundreds of pages of research and a series of recommendations, including those implemented in the Yukon Territories.^{59,60} In 2021, the historic appointment of Pueblo of Laguna and 35th generation New Mexican Deb Haaland as Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior was followed by a series of federal level (re-)commitments to MMIWG2S issues, including Operation Lady Justice.⁶¹ As part of Minnesota's COVID-19 Recovery Budget, in July of 2021 the State of Minnesota established a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives office with a one million dollar biennium budget. Minnesota Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan, White Earth Band of Ojibwe member, survivor, and mother to an eight-year-old daughter, "[I] don't want her to experience the same things I've experienced...I'm hell-bent on changing the current conditions so that she and [other] Native children will not have to experience that in their lifetime."⁶² Wisconsin's Indigenous leadership and domestic and sexual violence advocates have requested similar financial and administrative investment from Gov. Tony Evers and Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, the latter himself a member of the Wisconsin MMIW Task Force. **As of this publishing, no such commitment has been made.**

Many of Wisconsin's MMIW Task Force members are also Indigenous domestic or sexual violence advocates for tribal programs or culturally-specific organizations.⁶³ They highlight inequitable funding opportunities, chronically under-funded community resources, and burdensome grant requirements as huge barriers to their ability to offer meaningful services to their Indigenous relatives. In 2018, the federal government recognized its own failure, admitting in the United States Commission on Civil Rights (USCCR) report *Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans* that "[f]ederal funding...across the government remains grossly inadequate to meet the most basic needs the federal government is obligated to provide."⁶⁴ Issues of transportation, cell service or internet access, and other accessibility barriers are even more rampant for Native survivors in Wisconsin - in fact, there are only *two* tribal domestic violence shelters in the entire state. Thus, mainstream domestic and sexual violence organizations have often been the only available option for Native survivors - and *if/when* they are accessible at all, might also cause more harm when programs perpetuate racialized stigmas against clientele or use approaches not centered in an Indigenous survivor's cultural and spiritual values.

But really -- all of this aside - even if the criminal legal systems that do exist were to communicate decisively and without territorial clamor; even if they were to apply jurisprudence equally and without bias; and all of these courts and systems of social service were fully resourced and able to offer effective support to victims, families, and harm-doers alike - some advocates in Indigenous communities argue that a solely criminal legal response to violence does not offer healing to survivors or those who have harmed them; that these systems offer more violence in the paradigm of whiteness and settler-colonialism.

**not so much redemption
as the law of moon and season
calls for justice**

**one day, the lawmakers must
exit their echoing halls, fall in
with the grandmothers dancing
carry it cry it clean**

⁵⁹ [Nat'l Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#)

⁶⁰ [Changing the Story to Upholding Dignity & Justice: Yukon's Missing and Murdered Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit+ People strategy](#)

⁶¹ [Operation Lady Justice: the Presidential Task Force on Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives](#)

⁶² [Minnesota's First MMIW Office to Open](#)

⁶³ [MMIW Task Force Membership](#)

⁶⁴ [Written testimony of Sarah Deer to the Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States, 14 Mar 2019](#)

*until they're home, until they are all home*⁶⁵

- Anna Marie Sewell, from "Washing the World"
Poet and performer, Mi'gmaq, Anishinaabe, and Polish

"Red is the color that spirit still sees,"

Andy Lemke-Rochon tells me when she shares the jacket she wears in memory of Rae Elaine. Embroidered on the back is the image of a Native woman in a red dress, facing away, toward the moon with one arm raised and one held, invisibly, in front of her body. Andy explains the importance of each detail - Grandmother, the moon, is also the light that held Rae Elaine while she was missing those six months, alone in the darkness of the Menominee Reservation forest; the arm we cannot see holds an eagle feather fan in front of her womb, one sacred and powerful element protecting another; the woman's dress is red, making the image visible to Rae Elaine's spirit, as well as reflecting the most common symbol for the MMIR movement across Turtle Island.

"When I was younger, I certainly had a sense of anger," Andy continues. "And I've still never been able to wrap my head around how someone could take a beautiful life. It was a fundamental shift for me - a loss of faith. But I have to think, you have to be so badly damaged as a soul, so disconnected from spirit, to take a mother away from her baby. We don't heal with anger, by Othering. There's no sense of belonging there. And we are connected to every living thing. Rae Elaine was so nurturing, so connected and loving, with such a deep heart...so my advocacy doesn't come from a place of anger anymore."

Stereotypes that dehumanize and sexualize Native women make it easier for individual perpetrators to harm them; for systems to devalue their lives and dismiss the violence they experience as expected or even deserved; for media to ignore them entirely, or to portray them as ghosts undone by addiction and trauma. Having had the opportunity to share space with Indigenous leaders and survivors in anti-violence and environmental advocacy, I would describe them as brilliant, insightful, persistent, creative, hopeful. Powerful. Sometimes angry, yes, and rightfully so. Resilient in the face of a society hell-bent on erasing them in body, mind, spirit, and memory - but I hesitate to celebrate resiliency when it so often comes as the cost of such intentional, institutional violence. I hesitate to celebrate resiliency when it is praised in lieu of transformative change.

"What has happened to us as human beings where we've become so careless with life?" asks Waking Women Healing Institute's Kristin Welch in the *No More Stolen Sisters* documentary. "These are our sisters, these are our children...and sometimes it feels like it doesn't end. I'm tired of hearing the stories."

WHEREAS,

I did not desire in childhood to be a part of this but desired most of all to be a part. A piece combined with others to make up a whole. Some but not all of something...the comfort of being together. I think of Plains winds snow drifts ice and limbs the exposure and when I slide my arms into a wool coat and put my hand to the door knob, ready to brave the sub-zero dark, someone says be careful out there always consider the snow your friend. Think badly of it, snow will burn you. I walk out remembering that for millenia we have called ourselves Lakota meaning friend or ally. This relationship to the other. Some but not all, still our piece to everything...

WHEREAS,

speaking, itself, is *defiance* - the closest I can come to *différance*. Whereas I confess these are numbered hours spent responding to a national apology which concerns us, my family. These hours alone to think, without. My hope: my daughter understands wholeness for what it is, not for what it's not, all of it the pieces;⁶⁶

⁶⁵ ["Washing the World"](#)

⁶⁶ [Whereas, Poems by Layli Long Soldier \(p. 64, 75-76\)](#)

"We are reclaiming our minds, bodies, and spirit

as Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit, and providing choice as to how we decide to heal, tend to our beings, develop community," says *Naeqtum Metaemob* Kristin Welch, Waking Women Healing Institute's founder and Executive Director. "If we provide spaces of learning and re-connecting to indigenous identity, we see healing, creation of accessible and equitable healthcare, and liberation from oppressive structures."

Namaēwkuḱim Rachel Fernandez, member of the Menominee Nation, founder and Executive Director of *Maqtekuabkibḱim Metaemobsak* Woodland Women, member of American Indians Against Abuse and co-chair of the Data Subcommittee of the MMIW Task Force, agrees. "We need to call people in and call people out. The table is ours and we need to be acknowledged, hold systems accountable, and demand responsibility and justice for our genocide. We do not compromise on our traumas. We need safety, justice, and healing. Our stories. Our truth. What we do now will be the legacy we leave for our future generations."

So lies the way forward. Native communities hold the answers that will end the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, Two Spirit crisis. Their youth and their elders, their medicines, their ceremony and environmental ethic, their cultural paradigms, their approach to healing and justice, and their knowledge. Not to be assimilated into mainstream programs, or appropriated by funding frameworks, but to exist and flourish in their sovereign nations, held within Indigenous-led programs and organizations that receive equitable and sustainable resources at the local, tribal, state, and federal levels. **For featured voices from Wisconsin's Indigenous MMIWG2S leadership, and to learn more about how you can support their work,** see page 16.

How can non-Native advocates & systems help to end violence against Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples?

- ***What She Say It Be Law.***⁶⁷ Advocate that full and complete jurisdiction be restored to sovereign tribal nations. Remind lawmakers that in order for this to be successful, jurisdiction must come with meaningful, equitable financial investment for tribal legal systems and Indigenous-led anti-violence healing services. Demand non-Native perpetrators of harm be held accountable for violence against MMIP. Encourage your senators **to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)**, especially provisions that strengthen and expand tribal sovereignty.
- **MMIWG2SR have been invisible long enough.** Do your multi-disciplinary teams include Native partners? Regardless of whether you live in an urban or a rural area, connect with your local partners in law enforcement, child welfare, health care, education, housing, and AODA services, and make sure they are aware of MMIW advocacy. Are their data collection practices inclusive of Indigenous communities? What barriers to support might exist for Indigenous survivors? Learn more from the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center.⁶⁸
- **Environmental exploitation and gender-based violence are connected.** Refuse to silo advocacy efforts - that division only serves to foster white supremacist, settler-colonialist, and capitalist power structures. Ask your local leadership in politics, finance, business, and education to honor the treaties, respect Indigenous sovereignty, and advocate for the end of violent environmental exploitation.

⁶⁷ [Deer 16-17](#), from one of the first written Mvskoke laws clearly addressing gendered violence, "And be it farther enacted if any person or persons should undertake to force a woman and did it by force, it shall be left to woman what punishment she should satisfied with to whip or pay what she say it be law."

⁶⁸ [National Indigenous Women's Resource Center Jurisdiction and Crime Victims' Rights, MMIW Toolkit](#)

- **No one is illegal on stolen land.** And no one can be homeless in meaningful community. Demand local, state, and federal governments cease to criminalize trauma and poverty, and ensure that every human has access to safe, affordable, accessible housing. Advocate for humane immigration policies. How are your local housing coalitions supporting Indigenous survivors in accessing culturally-centered services?
- **Settler-colonial genocidal policies stole children from their families,** and many of those children and their descendants are still here. Remember and demand justice for the children who were killed. Advocate for holistic, transformative juvenile justice, healing-centered services, non-carceral responses to non-violent "crime," and keeping vulnerable Indigenous children in community. We need to reform the colonial system to hold those institutions which killed those missing children accountable.
- **Story-telling is advocacy.** Do you have connections to news, print, visual, or social media? Are you elevating the voices of Indigenous communities? Are you doing so with care and respect for the MMIW families and their beauty, their grief? Share MMIW alerts, and support search efforts. Share celebrations of culture, joy, and humor. Elevate Indigenous story-tellers.
- **Systems perpetuate power in the micro and the macrocosm.** If you are an advocate, how are you leveraging privilege in your organization or with community partners to support Indigenous survivors? If you are a grant funder, how do your requirements restrict Native communities from accessing your money or actualizing programs centered around their own Ways of Knowing?⁶⁹ If you are a local or a state political leader, how does settler-colonialism impact voting laws, municipal code, statutory definition? How can you involve Indigenous leadership to change that?

We breathe and speak and sing for survival. We carve out in lines; we write — *I know joy I know pain I know love*

***I know love I know*— lessons we've carried throughout time. Should I go missing: don't stop searching; drag every river until it turns red and the waters of our names**

stretch a flood so wide it catches everything. And we find each other whole and sacred, alive and breathing and breathing and breathing.

- Tanaya Winder⁷⁰ from "Love Lessons in a Time of Settler Colonialism"
Poet, writer, and educator, enrolled member of the Duckwater Shoshone Tribe,
descendant of the Southern Ute, Pyramid Lake Paiute, Navajo, and Black tribes

"Rae Elaine always had sure, straight steps,"

says Andy, "and maybe that's why she was such a beautiful dancer." She shares another piece of art with me, a painting of a Native woman in motion with a bright, golden glow around her. "She died in darkness, but this is how I think of her, fancy dancing surrounded by light. You know, she tried to teach me to dance, but I have duck feet - she'd laugh, tell me *try to walk in my tracks*. Sometimes now, I still try to walk in her tracks. I go out in my yard and lay down in the prairie flowers with the butterflies in the sun - and there she is."

⁶⁹ from [Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants](#) by Robin Wall Kimmerer, mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation

⁷⁰ [Love Lessons in a Time of Settler Colonialism](#)

WHEREAS,

we commemorate the lives of missing and murdered American Indian and Alaskan Native women and girls whose cases are documented and undocumented in public records and media and demonstrate solidarity with the families of the victims

and **WHEREAS,**

some of the Wisconsin Indigenous women we know about include: Bad River Ojibwe members Angeline Whitebird-Sweet, murdered in 1989, Charlene Couture, missing since 2009, Sheila St. Clair, missing since 2015, and Tess White, murdered in 2016; Lac du Flambeau Ojibwe members Susan Poupart, murdered in 1990, LaVonne Frank, murdered 1997, Donna (LaBarge) Peterson, murdered in 2004, and Emily Anne Marie Wayman, murdered in 2010; Ho-Chunk members Jennifer Wesho, murdered in 1989, Jacinda Muir, murdered in 2015, and Kozee Decorah, murdered in May 2020; Menominee members Lisa Ninham, missing since 1990, Rae Elaine Tourtillott, murdered in 1986, Ingrid Washinawatok, murdered in 1999, Katelyn Kelley, murdered in July 2020, and Stephanie Greenspon, murdered in August 2020; and Oneida member Lorraine Brown Bear, murdered in 2016...⁷¹

Say their names.

**If you have information about Rae Elaine Tourtillott or Katelyn Kelley,
please call the Menominee Tribal Police tip line at 715-994-1307 or 715-799-3881**

**If you have information about another Missing or Murdered Indigenous person,
please connect with their tribal police or a member of the MMIW Task Force.**

⁷¹ [City of Madison Common Council Resolution #21-00307](#)

Native Voices of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit Movement in Wisconsin

LoVina Louie of the Native Wellness Institute says, "Speak life into your water, into your people, into your children, into yourself....Bring our people to ceremony. Culture is the answer to healing."⁷² There are many Indigenous activists and programs doing amazing, culturally-specific healing and justice work here in Wisconsin. See below for more information.

[**American Indians Against Abuse**](#) - a Tribal Coalition providing support to Wisconsin's tribes and Domestic & Sexual Assault Programs. Call (715) 634-9980.

[**HIR Wellness**](#) - intergenerational, communal, and culturally rooted mental health services and wellness programming, and trainings. It is our belief that we heal in relationships, alongside culture, and within community." [Support their work here.](#)

[**Maeqtekuahkihiw Metaemohsak: Woodland Women**](#) - a group whose mission is to promote healing and spiritual growth through traditional teachings and unity. We support community outreach, prevention and education of community based issues. [Support their work here.](#) See below for more.

[**Menikānaehkem: Menominee Rebuilders**](#) - a grassroots community organization based on the Menominee Reservation, working to rebuild our communities by relying on our traditional organizing roots and striving for Community Wellness. [Support them here.](#)

[**Native Lives Matter Coalition**](#) - a collective to bring about awareness and advocate for change to address the Social & Environmental Injustice occurring to Native & Indigenous people, Treaty Rights and Environment Protection ~working towards solutions. to Inspire and support the activist movement of Native Lives Matter, to be the catalyst of change and create longstanding solutions within law enforcement & judicial systems. Standing in solidarity to address Police Brutality and Justice! Standing in support and advocate for the families and victims of violence. Standing in support and advocate for Tribal Treaty Rights & Environmental Rights.

[**Waking Women Healing Institute**](#) - Waking Women Healing Institute (WWHI) recognizes that we as indigenous peoples are the solutions to these issues and institutional violence that has attempted to remove us from identity, land, and language. As a survivors led organization we felt we must create a place of learning and healing through re-building kinships amongst indigenous women to our land, original ways of being, and languages. [Support their work here.](#) See below for more.

[**Wise Women Gathering Place**](#) - an independent non-profit organization that provides Native American culturally-specific services to any person harmed by violence. [Support their work here.](#)

Maeqtekuahkihiw Metaemohsak Woodland Women

My name is Rachel Fernandez. I am from the Menominee Nation and my Menominee name is *Namāēwkihiw*, which means Sturgeon Woman. I am an advocate and a survivor.

I am founder and Executive Director of *Maeqtekuahkihiw Metaemohsak* Woodland Women, where we are reclaiming traditional knowledge and awakening our blood memory. Woodland Women has evolved in the teachings from our elders to promote healing and wellness. This group was started by incredible and resilient

⁷² [Native Wellness Institute](#)

women 8 years ago. We recognized the need of support for our women who experienced violence and all the layers associated with that violence.

Woodland Women provide cultural advocacy and cultural care, with the guidance and love of our elders, to undo the harm that assimilation, oppression, and genocide have caused to our communities. We encourage connection as life givers. Learning where we come from, where we are at now, and where we are going. We do this in circle where we bead, we sew, we weave, and are told those oral histories that are not written in books. We learn the stories of our ancestors. We heal. As we connect and learn to heal in the present, we look back to our ancestors and we can heal them also. Through that connection we acknowledge and validate all they went through to bring us here. We can look forward to the next seven generations and how we want to leave a better world, our first mother, to them. Through this connection we can heal, grow, and thrive. This is Woodland Women.

Our connection centers us and grounds us deep in our roots. This meaning brings me comfort in knowing that our sisters and brothers who have been missing and murdered are never forgotten because we will always fight for them, advocate for them, and remember them in a good way through connection.

Hope is waiting. Action is needed now. Our ancestors, our relatives have suffered enough.

As long as I am on this earth I will never stop speaking my truth to power and fighting against gender based violence. I've been sexually assaulted as a child, I survived a suicide attempt, I am a domestic and sexual violence survivor, I was taken and missing for a month in my 20's and survived, I used drugs to numb my pain. Through it all I came out stronger and overcame so much. So I will NEVER stop this fight as long as Creator sees for me. There's so many more like me out there that needs help, love, guidance, support, and justice. There's more. Thank you.

Waking Women Healing Institute

from *Naeqtum Metaemoh* Kristin Welch, of the Marten Clan of the Menominee nation, founder and Executive Director of Waking Women Healing Institute:

When we think about why we do this work, we do it because too many of us are survivors of sexual violence, and have been impacted by MMIWG2. We do it because we must, we can't allow our relatives to navigate these systems alone and continually watch them be ignored. We do this so that our daughters, nieces, and mothers don't have to experience the violence that we have, and have had no justice provided to us.

We are in it, every single day the future of our nations are threatened as we continue to lose more relatives to violence and resource extraction. And this is intentional, it is intentional when we are silenced in data, it is intentional when the ability to self-determine is eroded, and it is intentional that nothing is being done. We can continue to hope that one day the very structures that were put in place to destroy us will wake up and decide to suddenly address the violations of UNDRIP, the racist and biased responses, and the compliance through their deafening silence. Or, we can realize that we, the people, are the solution; and then get to work. Work to reconnect to language, land, and our true ways of being. This is where the both our liberation of patriarchal oppressions lay, and this is where we find the tools to build a place for the 7th generation that is free of violence and strong in mind, body, and spirit.

Our organization currently works to RESTORE the Matriarchy, UPLIFT survivor voice, and IGNITE spaces of healing. We serve families of MMIWG2S and survivors of sexual violence using decolonized approaches to healing trauma and developing mind, body, spirit, and emotion across the life span. We restore traditional matriarchal roles within our organization and communities by 1) ensuring leadership and decision-making roles are primarily indigenous women led 2) connecting to land, language, and oral history for healing through our WE ARE BRAVE group 3) utilize traditional governance structures including grandmothers' council 4) regrow connection to our women's teachings. The WE ARE BRAVE group provides access to women's teachings from pre-birthing through elderhood and beyond and creates spaces of empowerment through connecting to identity, while decolonizing approaches to learning, healing, health care, birth work, and leadership development.

We also work to decolonize systems approaches to survivors of sexual violence and MMIWG2S in terms of response and prevention through UPLIFTING survivor voices in spaces of decision making. We work with our survivors first on healing, and when able, sharing of their stories to create policy and systems change. Currently we provide consultation and education to systems such as Universities, Foster Care, DV/SA shelters, and homeless shelters. The education consists of root causes and intersecting issues of MMIWG2S, honoring tribal sovereignty, on how current systems uphold racist/bias and cause harm, and solutions for change with examples of best practices.

At the center of this work are our survivors and families of MMIWG2s who provide not only lived experience examples but calls for action. Our goal for this work is to create visibility in spaces where our stories are not heard or often ignored, and empowering both survivors and community through using voice. We also have formed a MMIWG2S Care and Response team that is composed of advocates, legal experts, community organizers, healer/traditional knowledge holders, MMIWG2S family members, and trauma/body workers. Our team's responsibility is to be the example of indigenous and culturally founded responses to our relatives of MMIWG2S from first meeting through ongoing supports. We provide access to expert systems consults, advocacy, financial resources, media exposure, rally/vigil organizing, and ongoing healing as we help them seek justice for their loved ones.

Finally, we IGNITE spaces of healing through our Great Lakes collaborative work in protecting land, water, and indigenous women/girls/two spirit. Our collaborative consists of both indigenous and allied partners dedicated to land and water protection from MN, WI, MI, and Chicago. We have participated in Water Walks and created public awareness on Line 3, Line 5, NO BACK 40 through rallies across WI. This Great Lakes collaborative also works to provide direct supports to MMIWG2S families and is focused on prevention of further violence through eliminating resource extraction. Our collaborative recently implemented the MMIW Billboards for Change campaign across MI and WI to 1) raise awareness 2) increase visibility 3) challenge calls for change. In this collaborative we are reclaiming our rights to self-determine and asserting Rights of Nature to protect relatives and creation now, and 7 generations from now.

We are reclaiming our minds, bodies, and spirit as indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and providing choice as to how we decide to heal, tend to our beings, develop community. If we provide spaces of learning and re-connecting to indigenous identity we see healing, creation of accessible and equitable healthcare, and liberation from oppressive structures. In addition to provide spaces of healing and learning, we must work to hold accountable colonized structures, policy, and acts of destruction that threaten and impede our ability to self-determine. Our MMIWG2S Care and Response team utilizes connection to identity for healing, as well as community organizing to create visibility and pursue justice for and with our relatives. Team provides access to just responses in cases of missing and murdered relatives through advocacy, direct action, and healing work.

We must include land and water protection into our work, in fact, for our organization it's integrated in all we do. Land and water protection is our prevention work against MMIWG2S and sexual violence, and ensure our future has access to clean water and healthy lands; and so we are vigilant of Line 3, Line 5, and NOBACK 40 efforts of resource extraction here in WI. We define our solutions as reclaiming of true self without shame, fear, or judgment. This means there is a reconnection to understanding who we are, where we come from, so we can define where it is we are going. We recognize that the ability to self-determine and reclaiming of our inherent rights of sovereignty over self is a process of learning combined with love and determination. Our solutions, reclaiming patriarchy, uplifting survivor voice, and igniting places of healing are both an unlearning of colonial ways of being, and a picking up of our creation stories to strengthen and heal mind, body, and spirit. We look at this work as protecting the present and future through raising up warriors of the heart, by bringing past knowledge forward.

Acknowledgments

to the Missing and Murdered Women, Girls, Two Spirit and other relatives, named and unnamed. You are not forgotten.

to the families, those who offer their time and their stories, and those who choose to keep their energy and their grief private.

to Alysse Arce, Andy Lemke-Rochon, and the Tourtillott family especially, for sharing your hearts and your memories of Rae Elaine with me.

to the twelve Indigenous nations of Wisconsin:

- [Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#)
- [Brothertown Indian Nation](#)
- [Forest County Potawatomi](#)
- [Ho-Chunk Nation](#)
- [Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#)
- [Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#)
- [Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin](#)
- [Mole Lake \(Sokaogon Chippewa Community\) Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#)
- [Oneida Nation](#)
- [Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa](#)
- [Saint Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin](#)
- [Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians](#)

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to *Namaewkukin* Rachel Fernandez, Sturgeon Woman of the Menominee nation, founder and Executive Director of *Maqtekuahkibkin Metaemohsak* Woodland Women, co-chair of the Data Subcommittee for the MMIW Task Force

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to the Hon. Gwendolyn Topping, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Associate Judge of the Wisconsin Tribal Judges Association, and co-chair of the Legal/Policy Subcommittee for the MMIW Task Force

to Skye Alloway, co-chair of the MMIW Task Force and Forest County Potawatomi representative

to Rene Ann Goodrich, MMIW family member and tribal member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, co-chair of the Community and Family Impact Subcommittee of the MMIW Task Force, elder and leader at Native Lives Matter Coalition

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