



THIS IS US

Diverse North Shore

Celebration of Poetry

Event Program & Selected Works

March 2020



CENTRE FOR
DIVERSITY AND INNOVATION
Inclusion | Curiosity | Compassion



Funded by:

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Immigration, Refugees
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Celebration of Poetry

If February 2020, we put out a call for the submission of poems about experiences of living or working on the North Shore. We asked members of our community to share their poems about diverse experiences of **belonging or not belonging, being included or not included, feeling connected or disconnected** in the community. This booklet contains a compilation of submissions received from diverse community members.



This Is Us: Diverse North Shore

March 10, 2020

6:30pm - 8:30pm

West Vancouver Memorial Library

Welcome

Poetry Readings

[BE-LONG] – by Anita Movazzafi

Wittingly – by Me-An Laceste

Unrestrictive Covenant – by Don Robertson

RED HANDS– by David MacLean

SONNET – by Paul Birch (read by: Daniela Cohen)

Dreams Come True – by Tara Alavi

emptiness – by Fran Bourassa

Weaving Our Humanity compilation - by Andrew Warner

Questions & Answers

Reflections

Closing

[BE-LONG]

By Anita Movazzafi

I belonged to the mountains
to Damavand with its mighty tip
to the Alborz range and canyons
I belonged to the sea
to the Caspian in all its glory
and the glimmering lakes of Marmaloo
I belonged to a land far away
One that I now can't go back to

When I first arrived I was excited
Everything was new
I could look out the window for hours
And never get tired of the same new view
After a while I started to feel lonely
I started to feel like a bird with no song
I felt like an apple in an orange tree
I did not feel like I belonged

I was confused as to who I was
I dyed my lush raven black hair blond
I threw away all my old clothes
And tried to erase the person i was back home
I stopped speaking the language of my people
And swirled only in my mouth
The soft sounds of a tongue
I grew up without

I had lost myself in so many ways
And the day before I felt like everything would cave

I walked to Cleveland dam
And all throughout the way
I admired the north shore mountains who looked so strong
And seemed like they were begging me to stay

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[BE-LONG] continued

By Anita Movazzafi

I walked to the shore of the pacific ocean
And saw in the reflection of the waves
A me who I had never seen so clearly
A girl with a familiar face

I found comfort in the mountains
When I saw them I knew I was somewhere that was becoming
home
To see them everyday meant that I was growing older and wiser
To see them meant that I was in places I'd know
I found calm in the oceans
To hear the waves crashing on the shore
Was like a breath of fresh air filling me up
Leaving me wanting more

I found happiness in white butterflies
Who showed up in spring on the flowers
Gracefully floating around
For hours upon hours

It was in the nature of Vancouver that I felt like me the most
It invited me in like a giving host
And one day as I sat inhaling in the beauty of it all
I felt like I truly belonged

SONNET

By Paul Birch

As single as the last surviving auk
Or a distant star alone in a dark, dark sky
I look to find an explanation why
No kindred spirit shares my lonely walk.
The echo only answers when I talk
And none but mirrors look me in the eye.
My narrow bed is roomy where I lie
Hearing the tiresome ticking of the clock.
But minutes flow and night leads on to day;
The coldest winter always ends in spring.
Two rivers may run far before they blend
But still they green the lands along the way.
So time may in its hidden wisdom bring
The means to serve before it brings a friend.



emptiness

By Fran Bourassa

Clothes strewn on the bedroom floor
shapeless,
after I desert them

I stare at them

And at the unmade bed
the stack of unread books
and last night's red wine
staining the glass

Loneliness
is like this
It makes you see
the abandonment in everything

On my hike, I keep to the trail
alongside the dry river bed

What was once covered
now bared
just a clutter of rocks, garbage
a graveyard of dead tree limbs
Twigs and branches
wave like hands in the passing breeze
as if they are a crowd keen with questions
I ignore them, I don't ask anymore
Where you are

I can't bear to look up over the scarred bank
A blue sky sets a line for happiness
There's the green pride of spring bursting on the trees
an ovation of blossoms
Red wing blackbirds, chickadees, flutter so effortlessly on the wind

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emptiness continued

By Fran Bourassa

and lovers on the walking path, arms around each other, so close
their shadows marry them
I once believed something more would become of me
That somewhere, I would stumble upon you

At home
I climb into the unmade bed
Pour another

Moonlight falls broken into my room through the tangle of trees
Stars streak a black sky
Something wild runs across the cut grass tonight
I shut the curtain



Unrestrictive Covenant

By Don Robertson

Restrictive covenant on the title of the property
Imprint on paper and on mind
whose in, whose out
skin color counts
Whiteness the currency for social propriety

Blurred now restricted on the title of the property
imprint on the mind grandfathered in
what neighbor? What next?
A fence will work
high not porous protection against social sobriety

Entitlement fenced in the furrows of the brain
secure in the comfort of sameness
impervious to variation
Mind set
against the profusion of color and neighbours with a name

A child bursts happily through the front door
school out a friend brought home
colors don't match
friendship an unrestricted covenant
The future has arrived with sameness ignored.

A child shall lead us it has been said
Get ready
Get set
Go to the door of the day that is here
Fall into line we are going to be led

Dreams Come True

By Tara Alavi

You don't need wings to fly;
 When you think,
 You imagine,
 You design,
That's time you can touch the sky.

You don't need a lot of things to move;
 When you start,
 You stand up,
 You fight,
That's time you can say: I'm improved!

You don't need to be born from a land;
 When you're welcomed,
 You're beloved,
 You feel proud,
That's time the world see your smile,
 'cause:
 Here's Canada!
 Your home and native land!



RED HANDS

By David MacLean

Listen to me listen to me

These hands my red hands

In the air we pray no sing no die

My black hands waving

Right and left pushed into the earth

Cry red cry white we could count

At two it's over yes done

No time no time just digits thrashing

Yes afraid of the ocean the wave

Listen to me listen to me

So beautiful this air this wind

Red hands waving

Silent

Wittingly

By Me-An Laceste

I was a foreign overseas nanny
who came under the caregiver program
to look after the precious little ones
that was in nineteen ninety, my blessed year indeed
I was quite young myself and very naïve
but full of hopes and dreams to achieve
with heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity
the Great Canada has conferred upon me
one fine day-off I ventured in a big mall
I stood at a window to admire the display
of the assortment of clothing, mannequins in fine array
thought to enter, to get closer, to see better
dare to try some on, perhaps feel the quality
curiosity must have registered on my yokelish face
to someone, looking from the inside out, towards me
excitedly, I got ready, my feet to enter in
not even four steps from where I started
I was greeted, or blocked shall I say, by a lady
sophisticated as she looked, I was surprised to see
how high her eyebrows arched looking down at me
her aristocratic, sculptured, chiselled nose
towered over my signature flat, unflattering holes
she made me feel unwelcome, in no uncertain terms
with her arms tightly crossed, nicely paired with insolence
told me outright, using no words at all
there's nothing here you can afford
so you better scoot back out the door
in this split-second of a muted exchange
I was not able to utter a thing, not even a silent grumble
too dumbfounded to open my mouth to say
the rush of thoughts that flooded my offended head
instead, me and the antiquated rubber shoes I wore
swiftly turned around to timidly join
with the pride I seemed to have left

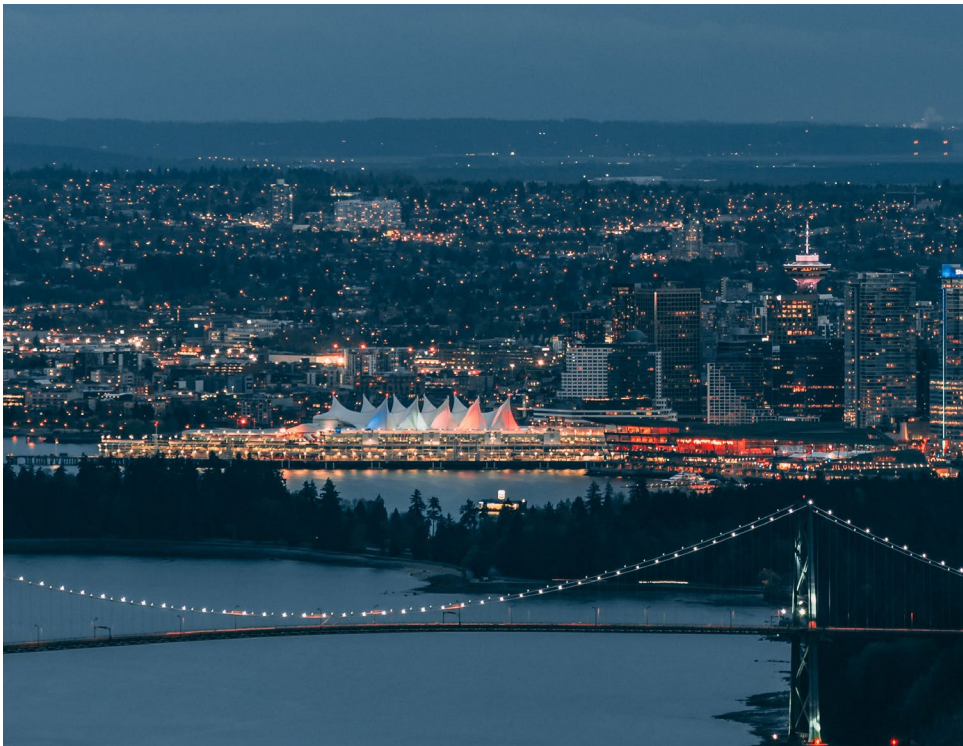
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Wittingly continued

By Me-An Laceste

at the entrance to this posh snobbish place
where you can say beauty and ugly
in one short breath, no effort at all
where you can see elegance and crudeness
exist in the same space, truly, a grandstand play
I felt so little in my already small, skinny frame
Belittled, looked down, frowned upon, judged
was it my nose, the telltale sign?
was it my unpolished look?
was it the way I carried myself?
was it the clothes I wore that weren't up to her taste?
Should any of it make a difference? Did any of it matter?
whatever she saw in me that ill-fated day
was what made her behave in that condescending way
how she displayed her reaction to me
was what she wittingly showed me about her



Weaving Our Humanity

By Andrew Warner

Story, Journey, Open-Minded Learning
Powerful, Courageous, Beautiful, Radical Kindness

Here, I feel timeless
We're in the spotlight on stage
In an open-mic-like audience
I'm in awe of us.

All of us are human
Beneath our hair and clothes
We're just skin and bones
Or meat sacks...

We all smile
Like gardens on rainy days
With teeth like trellises for laughter to climb
As it blooms.

I smile like the cartoon Grinch
I giggle like a strobe light and
I laugh like I just got pinched.

Your smile might make the mould at a dentist's office. It's beautiful!
Your laugh might make the mountains move it's so loud – I love it!
Your giggle, unlike the Guggenheim, is free!

Our culture is our humanity
Sharing stories is What Makes Me Happy, so
Thanks in advance for telling me your tapestry.



CENTRE FOR DIVERSITY AND INNOVATION

Inclusion | Curiosity | Compassion

We envision communities where everyone feels they
can thrive, belong and be included.

Our mission is to educate and empower the public,
communities, businesses, organizations and workplaces
about diversity and inclusion so that everyone feels safe
and included.

theCDI.ca | cdi@nsms.ca



NSIIP is a coalition of community agencies and
institutions focused on improving the settlement
outcomes of new immigrants. We work collaboratively
to support North Shore residents and organizations,
and ensure all immigrants have opportunities to fully
participate economically, socially, and civically.

www.nsiip.ca



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