

Sisters In Spirit Traveling Quilt

Sisters in Spirit is a five-year research, education and policy initiative that is designed to increase public knowledge and understanding at a national level of the impact of racialized, sexualized violence against Indigenous women often leading to their disappearance and death.

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is pleased to announce the completion of an inspirational Sisters in Spirit quilt. Alice Olsen Williams is an Anishinaabe woman from Curve Lake First Nation, Ontario. She is also one of NWAC's earliest advocates for Sisters in Spirit. A quilter by trade, Alice combines traditional teachings and designs with conventional North American quilting blocks.

In her own words Alice wanted to "provide an avenue" for Indigenous peoples to express their reaction and emotional response to the "unfair treatment and abuses suffered by our People" and, as a result, launched a Call for Quilt Squares. Since that time, Alice has encouraged others to learn about Sisters in Spirit, design their own square and share its story.

All the squares she collected were joined together to form a larger quilt. She has asked that the quilt travel with our staff nationwide. We are thrilled about this idea and are certain that many, many others will be touched by the quilt's



Quilter and advocate Alice Olsen used her creative talents to spread-the-word about Sisters in Spirit.

strong message of healing and hope. Alice and her quilt project are a testament to how raising awareness can fulfill both our creative and humanitarian desires.

**Alice Olsen
Williams
Curve Lake
First Nation,
ON**

**"Grandmother
Moon"**

This Grandmother Moon design is the official logo of the Sisters in



Spirit (SIS) initiative. It is a powerful teaching about Aboriginal women's special connection to our Grand-

mothers who have passed into the Spirit world. Grandmother Moon provides us direction, strength, knowledge and wisdom in taking our sacred place in our families, communities and beyond. She teaches us about our sacred role as the life-givers and the heart of our nations—for without women our nations cannot go on. We need Grandmother Moon's presence in our lives now more than ever, especially for our young women who live in the dark and struggle to live in the light.

Artist Dick Baker designed the Kwakwilt Moon for the front of the poster, as well as carving a memorial that now stands in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. Dick has been carving for many years and uses Squamish and Kwakwilt styles, taught to him by Chief Mathias and Ellen Neel respectively. Of Kwakwilt and Coast Salish descent, Dick currently lives on the Capilano Reserve.

This quilt square was created by master quilter, Alice Olsen Williams. Alice was the life-force behind the creation of this quilt and it is very fitting that she be responsible for transmitting the spirit and beauty of our SIS Grandmother Moon logo onto the quilt.



Grandmother Moon

You know all women from
 birth to death
 We seek your knowledge
 We seek your strength
 Some are STARS up there with
 you
 Some are STARS on Mother
 Earth
 Grandmother, lighten our path
 in the dark
 Creator, keep our sisters safe
 from harm.

Maa duu? Mussi Cho
 —Kukdookaa

What do the other quilt squares represent?

“To the Women Who have Gone Before Us”

**Sarah Keesic Olsen
 Trout Lake, ON**

The dress is the style that older Anishinaabe women used to wear. From them come the “newer” generations of women—never ending. These women who have gone before us, I honour, for they lay the groundwork for us: those strong medicines, teachings and good way of life. Those teachings and medicines, songs and dances, they passed on to us were meant



that we have a good life. It is not our ways, our doings, that are the cause of the sufferings we now live thru. Always we remember the gifts of Creation that those Kichi-Anishinaabe women passed over to us. To them we say, Kichi-Miikwech.



**“For the Healing of All
Aboriginal Women”**

Mary Peggy Ross (nee Green)
Kitamaat Village, BC

I am of Haisla Descent, located in Kitamaat Village, BC. I have always been interested in doing arts and crafts, particularly doing beading, sewing, basically working with my hands.

I was fortunate enough to submit a quilt block in the, “Invitation, the Quilt of Belonging.” It was a great honour to have my artwork featured, among many other artists, and allowing me for the time to travel, experiencing an extraordinary event for myself.

I was inspired to continue to submit my artwork to other projects, particularly this project which is dedicated to the Healing of Aboriginal Women. To the women who have survived any suffering, abuse, etc., and to those that do not yet have the strength to leave a relationship that is emotionally, spiritually, or physically draining and in memory of those who passed on before us.

There are so many of us, some of us face our past alone, some have support of loving people. I believe that we all face trying times and a

quilt such as this one shows that there are people out there who empathize.

My quilt block is green in colour, with angel print. I have chosen the green for the theme colour of my quilt block, as green is the colour of healing. I have also chosen that colour because it is my maiden name, Green, and this piece of artwork is to honour my mother as well.

The angel print is to symbolize that we are never alone, that each of us has an angel or two backing us, however, it is up to us to recognize it.

I have made a beaded “Forget-Me-Not” which is the shape of a heart, this symbolized that we never forget those who have passed before us, that we may never forget those who are important to us in the present and for those who are our future, to never forget the past.

I have also included a beaded butterfly, which sits lightly on the beaded “Forget-Me-Not” heart; this is to symbolize the delicate spirit that is within each of us. I feel that the butterfly is a perfect symbol of how light and beautiful our spirit should be.

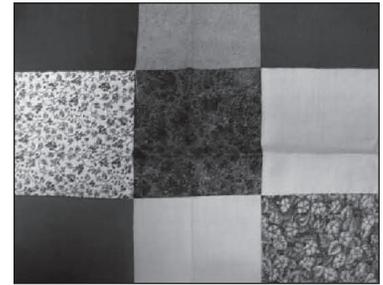
I dedicate this quilt block to ALL of the First Nations Women who have endured this life time, in good times and bad, to those who have

survived and to those who have passed on, to my grandmothers, to my loving Mother, my sisters, my nieces, my cousins, my friends, my daughters and to myself.

“Good People Box Me In”

Mary Nemigwans
Wikwemikon, ON

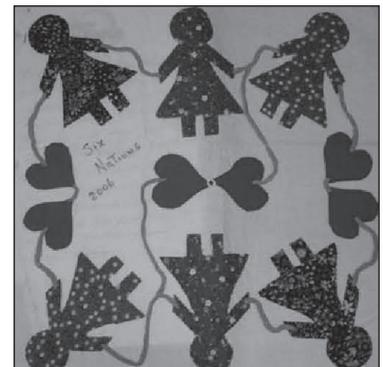
I’m now feeling a lot better surrounded by good people who box me in—but in a good way, not that other way.



“Sharing Hope and Inspiration”

Niae Burahome
Ohsweken, ON

The white background represents purity and freedom from violence, oppression, poverty and discrimination. The six native women in ceremonial native prints represent the Iroquois of Six Nations. Their arms outstretched, to share their hope for inspiration from victimization to other Nations. The red hearts represent tear drops and that we share, and care for the love of one another. The deer leather entwined represents strength and our connection to Mother Earth.





“Thunderbird Totem: Phoenix Rising”

**Niae Burahome
Ohsweken, ON**

This paper-pieced block represents a Thunderbird totem, created in the four Lakota colours. Red for the sun in the East and new beginnings; Yellow for the South and growth/maturity; Black from the West, where the thunderbird sits and offers healing power; White for the north and the old ones, the ancestors who direct us upon our path. These same four colours represent the four races.

The block is plain and simple until you look within the Thunderbird and see the complexity—the fire, the anger, the violence that can come with a storm. First the tension, then the rumblings, then an increase in intensity, then the explosion leading to an eventual release. So it is with the storms of violence rent against women.

The white border that surrounds the Thunderbird represents the “Wakan,” the sacred, the spiritual that we can tap into for the inner healing that needs to come as individual women. From there we can join together united and strong, speak out, reclaim the power that was once ours and become like the

Phoenix arising from the ashes of violence! (The Thunderbird is found in many cultures and is often portrayed as a Phoenix).

The block was created by Marlee Ritchie, Saskatoon, SK, who has worked with the end result of violence towards women within the Psychiatric and Correctional systems and in more recently Third World Countries. In her senior years she has been called to follow the Sioux traditions and is working at learning the beautiful language. Mitakuye Oyasin!

“Women Walking Together”

**Dr. Rose Roberts,
University of Saskatchewan
Acting Chair of
“Iskewuk E-wichiwitochik”
Saskatoon, SK**

A healing Grandmother moon sits on a background of the medicine wheel surrounded by the logo of Iskewuk E-wichiwitochik which has four-fold significance. The leather beaded shapes represent:

- the buffalo who encircle us for protection;
- the tears that have been shed for our missing Aboriginal women and the violence that has been rent upon women;
- the 13 moons of womanhood
- the Grandmothers who surround and protect us.

Within the circle is a red stop sign upon the hand indicating it is time to ‘stop the violence—the colour of the hand, a mottled green, signifies that healing is trying to break through.

At the bottom of the block four women walk in hand again signifying the group name “Women walking together.” The women were





appreciated. My quilt square depicts a highway in the shape of the number 500 and a plus sign reminding us that there are over 500 missing women and there is a highway out west referred to as the “Highway of Tears.” The tears are for our sisters. The four figures with gems are the missing and abused—who are gems to the ones who love and miss them.

“Invincible Woman”

Annie Ross
Coquitlam, BC

I was thinking of the turtles, somewhere in the world, how they are caught to be eaten by the locals. They have to travel to shore to lay their nest of eggs, and there, they are vulnerable to all sorts of predators such as seagulls, all sorts of folks who come by. The turtle mothers are bothered, sometimes killed, predators/hungry folks take the eggs, and eat the young hatchlings. And yet turtles survive.

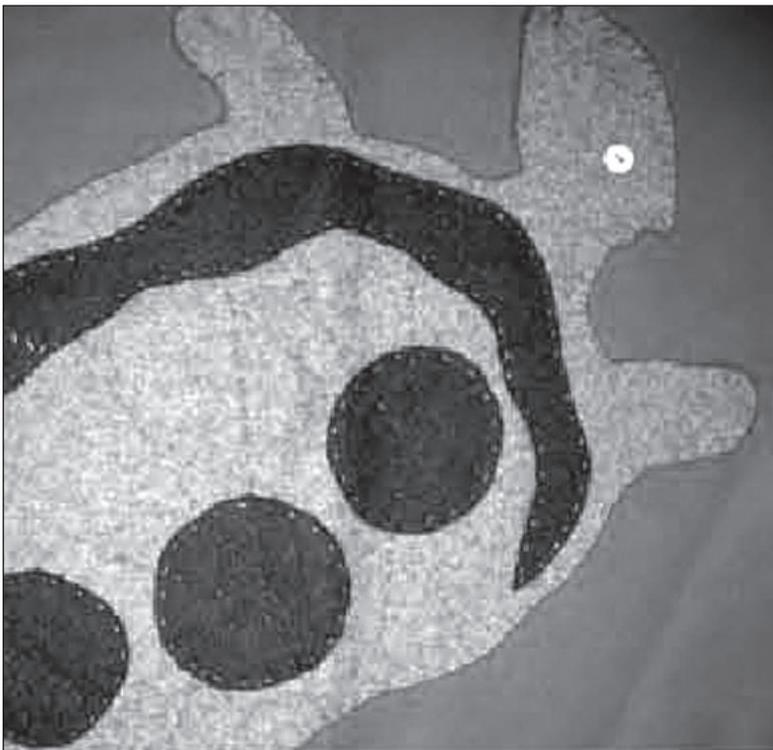
But there is a big difference in the Turtle story, their hardships are from natural living, the give and take, the way of life has always been. The violence Aboriginal women face is from un-natural living, from man-made choices such as discrimination, apathy, domestic violence, oppression and hate.

This fabric quilt square is saying that women are invincible. No matter what, we live for another day, we as a Being, as an archetype—woman, female, mother, childless, whatever, we give life, support lives and are life. We have and do ensure the circle of First Nations people continue. This turtle is a prayer for all women, for peace, for justice, for healthy lives, for courage.

“Wolf”

Sharon George
Saiigeen (South Hampton), ON

Once hunted until near extinction, wolves are now making a comeback



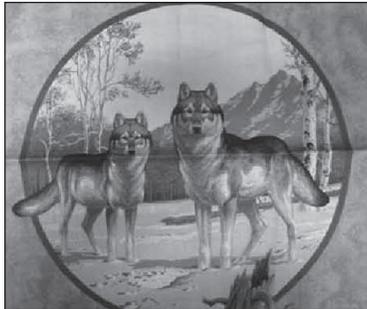
created from a Grandmother print, the background colour blue signifies the Grandmothers are above and watching over us—the flowers on the fabric again signify the four colours of the medicine wheel or of man (blue is used here to represent black), and overall indicating the Grandmothers walk with us on our journey together.

“Highway 500+”

Judy Couchie
North Bay, ON

I am a member of Nipissing First Nation and I would like to thank you for allowing me to express my sadness and anger than in 2006 our people still struggle to be valued and

and thriving. This has resulted from people becoming more educated about their plight and seeing the value and the place that they occupy in nature's cycle of life. Every person is like the wolf, they too have a value and place in society.



“Crazy-patch”

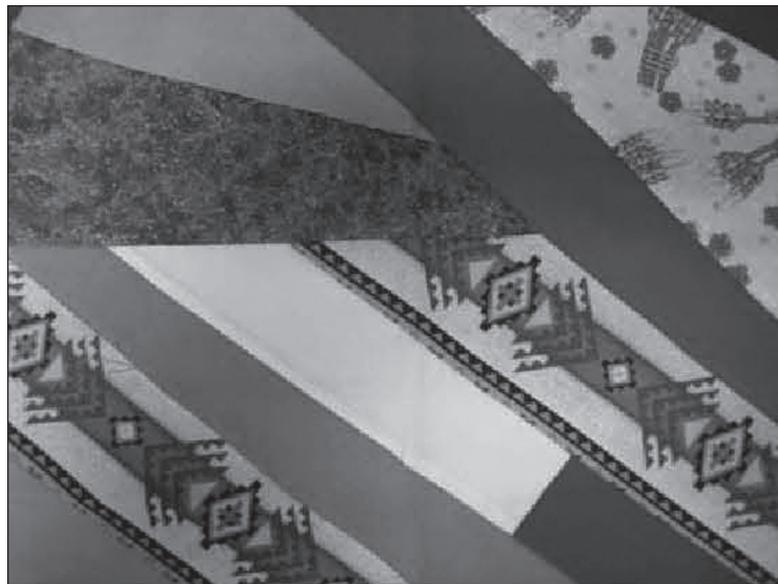
Mary Wemigwans
Wikwemikon, ON

Life does not go in a straight line. It gets crazy sometimes.

“In Honour of 3 Mi’gmaq Women”

Carmel Isaac
Listuguj, QC

I have enclosed a square that I made in honour of the three Mi’gmaq women who are cycling across Canada to bring awareness of violence against Aboriginal women. I also enclosed a post card and a bookmark that will explain a little bit more of their cause and they have a lot of information on their website. Another reason I made this square is that Sheila Swaason is also the supervisor of Haven House and I have worked with her for the past fifteen years. She has helped a lot of Aboriginal women who walked through our door at the shelter. I’m sure she would be proud if we display a piece of their dream. In my square Sheila is in the centre. Chi Metallic-Larocque is on your right she is the mother of three and a Social worker. Donna Martin-Metallic is on your left and she is a mother of two, also Chi’s mother. They are a mother-daughter team. I am a personal friend of the mi’gmaq



women and I was happy to do this square. I used the four colours of man and the mi’gmaq star. I am sure when people see this picture they will recognize who they are, maybe they even cycled through their community.

Sisters In Spirit is a research, education and policy initiative of Native Women’s Association of Canada. NWAC is founded on the collective goal to enhance,

promote, and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations and Métis women within Aboriginal and Canadian societies. . Much like a “Grandmothers Lodge”, we as Aunties, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers, and Relatives collectively recognize, respect, promote, defend, and enhance our Native ancestral laws, spiritual beliefs, language, and traditions given to us by the Creator. Visit our website <www.nwac-hq.org>.