



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

## **Echoes of Tamarack**

**Candace Brunette**

The persistence of memory lies in survival.  
In a moment where stillness and silence  
give voice to warm soft winds blowing  
whispering words that guide craftsman to listen.

Today locals exhibit tiny treasures  
carefully laid out on portable folding tables  
set up in anticipation for the 4 o'clock train.

Across the gravel road  
water taxis transport people  
boarding at the clay banks  
bringing back and forth  
from island to mainland.

The moisture in the air  
releases vapors from its oily pores  
woody musk like scents  
surface in the wind

Aromas persuade us to notice  
its burnt orange and russet brown tones  
highlighted by the rays of the sun.

These swamp babies are gathered seasonally  
when branches shed deciduous pine needles  
revealing scaly egg like cones.

Gummy sap seeps from its bark  
and tastes delicious on our tongues.  
Its roots are used to bind and tie together.  
Inner bark cleanses and purifies  
moving our inner worlds.

These bunches of tamarack branches  
are fused together  
telling stories of survival  
past and present  
forming miniature bird like creatures



---

A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

with no wings to fly.

Across the craft table  
tourists admire them  
imagining the pretend birds  
as decoration in their lavish homes  
soaring from their ceilings  
nestled on their coffee tables.

They imagine them  
even though yesterday  
tamarack birds were used  
as life size decoys to hunt.

Today  
they still feed our families.



---

A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

### **Swamp land**

Murky waters release uncontrollable urges  
Defrost opens thresholds  
Raging swift currents  
Lurk beneath the surface

Porous soils fill up  
I lie across the blackened breadth  
Breeding a warm muddy nesting place  
Bloating bodies form a musky carpet of moss

Sweltering bogs bloom patches of life  
The soggy earth swallows me whole  
Soon mosquitoes buzz bite bother  
Cattail ditches and minnow traps



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

### **Flood's Landing**

It was the fall of 1942 a difficult time for everyone especially for the boys having to leave home right before the fall goose hunt. It was a long summer and the kids spent many a nights around the open crackling fire. But now, the kids were getting ready to leave for residential school. Bill was especially sad he so desperately wanted to stay with his older brother Samuel. By early August the birds are getting chunky, feeding on berries and putting on layers of fat before their travels southbound. 'Ha honk, ha honk, ha honk'. Bill couldn't help it he found himself daydreaming about the geese again. Around this time of year, the geese are joined by thousands of birds who nest north for the summer. ***Winter air bites quickly*** Bill, the second oldest brother of nine still remembers when he caught his first one. The goose was still hanging in the kitchen by the woodstove. While the kids were away at residential school, they always missed their goose feathered pillows and blankets, the warmth they provided was of great comfort to them, as it reminded them of their mother's warm touch. Christiana died during birth. After that Doug had a hard time raising the kids alone. It had been eight years since she died, but time still never took away his pain. ***Frozen still*** The priests didn't allow children to bring personal items with them to school instead they were forced to use what was providing - the itchy wool blankets provided by the military. ***Sending chills up stream*** While at home, Daisy being the eldest daughter naturally took on her mother's responsibilities. Every day she hauled water, chopped wood, skinned animals, and plucked bird to cook for the family. ***Until the cycle happens all over again*** Daisy was born in the middle of the summer in an open field –her grandmother always said that the



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

scent of rosehip flowers drifted in the wind that day. It was the beautiful daisy flower in full bloom, which inspired her name. Her grandmother coached her mother Christiana through the labor - there were no doctors then. Unlike many parents during this time, Doug willingly sent his kids to residential school. In a way, he was relieved to send them to a place with warm roof, food and clothing. He didn't have to worry while he was away in the bush hunting. This year the kids were going down the coast to the Anglican-operated missionary school in Moose Factory. ***Scientific notions of dilution scream I am not pure*** Most of them had been to school before at St. Anne's school in Fort Albany. ***Not a pedigree*** But rumors about a bad box used to punish the children had Doug thinking that maybe the Anglican school was a better way. ***Legislation***

The cold winds along the shores of the James Bay were fierce that day. The boat was waiting and there was no more time to say goodbye. ***Servers my maternal genealogy*** The kids grabbed their bags and headed for the bay. They all knew that they wouldn't see their father again until spring. Doug made a point to hold back his tears. He was told that the kids would adjust better if he didn't say anything. Baby Rebecca's tears poured down her face. Her arms were stiff as she reached for her dad. Doug turned away. ***Removing me from my earthly connection*** He couldn't bear to look anymore. Daisy grabbed her baby sister and started walking for the boat. Rebecca sobbed on her sister's shoulder. Daisy just kept telling her 'everything will be okay'.

Once the boat arrived at Moose Factory, the kids were brought in, cleaned up, and given new clothes to wear. Daisy loved wearing her new dress, but she didn't like her new hair cut. She learned how to speak English in residential school, and was not



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

permitted to speak her Cree language. Daisy also learned how to clean 'properly', turn butter, do laundry, and most importantly how to pray, which might I add, she still holds very close to her heart today. The children prayed four times a day - before each meal, before bed every night, and every Sunday for mass. The hallways were clean, orderly and quiet, and although children were everywhere, laughter was not. ***They dictate*** The school housed 152 boys and girls from ages 4 to 16. The kids were well behaved, and if they didn't realize the consequences of not behaving they soon discovered them. Daisy was a quiet and obedient child unlike others who weren't afraid to retaliate, Daisy learned to be quiet. At the end of the day, she didn't like getting the strap. She still vividly re-members the one beating it happened when she was finishing up her chores she accidentally spilt a pail of cleaning water, and before she had a chance to clean it up, the priest came along and slipped falling down the stairs. Daisy was severely punished strapped so badly her wrists, hands and arms were swollen blue with cuts that took weeks to heal. That time her wounds got infected. Ultimately, punishment was an inevitable way of life within the walls of the residential school.

Sadly, Aboriginal children in residential schools died at alarming rates. ***Pendulums penetrate my womb*** Nokum still remembers the children's cemetery beside the school. ***Frozen bodies in time*** It was full of tiny white crosses line by line. And nokum still can't shake the empty feelings that came along when a friend's bed was cleaned up and turned upside down. Of course, a new child would inevitably fill the bed, but the void from the previous spirit, never left.

One day in early spring, Daisy awoke from her lumpy bed in the sleeping quarters



A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE

to a big loud noise and the gushing sounds of water. There was immediate chaos and disorder, as the priests ran about frantically trying to stop the water from pouring in. This was an unusual sight since priests always walked quietly, slowly with dignity, but today they were fighting nature. It appeared that the school was flooding. It rained hard the night before and the snow from the winter was melting quickly. The kids were lined up and soon standing up to their ankles in cold water. *And rational mind* The flood that year caused irreversible damages to the school property, which were never repaired properly. Classes were cancelled for weeks, but children were put to work immediately. The wooden pews in the church steeple absorbed the water and warped its manmade structure. But all, Daisy remembers is that the children's cemetery did not flood at all. She still says 'those kids must have been good praying Indians.'

*Disenfranchised sister*  
*Rise up from the land*

*Be still*  
*Listen*  
*Hear*  
*Know*

### **Biography:**

Candace Brunette is a 29-year old woman of Omushkego Cree and French Canadian ancestry. She was born and raised in northern Ontario - a place where the stories of her ancestors continue to live beneath the landscape she calls home. Candace is an emerging Indigenous female artist - poet and playwright who aims to privilege the body in her writing process. Candace recently presented her second play a work-in-progress entitled 'Old Truck' at the Weesageechuk Festival in Toronto. She is also a graduate student at the University of Toronto where she is currently enrolled in the Masters of Arts program in the Faculty of Education. Candace wishes to conduct her research in Aboriginal context focusing on decolonizing the body and somatic education (learning through the body).



---

A PROJECT OF THE DOMINION INSTITUTE