

One Wingspan at a Time



WHO WE ARE : NANAIMO DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOL

Cover Art: *Cedar Talking Feathers*, created with heart and soul to encapsulate the student's current identity and personality.

Cover photo by Shauna Debodt.

The title is taken from the poem "Paige LaFrance," written by Melanie Devjayanth.

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ISBN 978-1-7751596-2-9

Published by the Federation of British Columbia Writers
#412 – 1641 Lonsdale Avenue
North Vancouver BC V7M 2J5

Graphic Design by Ursula Vaira
Photography by Kate Walker

Printed in Canada by Printorium Bookworks

This *Who We Are* project was generously supported by



INTRODUCTION

The *Who We Are* project visited Nanaimo District Secondary School in December of 2017. This project gave our students a chance to come together, to share a day, to connect, to inspire, to work and to learn about themselves and each other. This project gave students a chance to glow, to shine and to think deeply about who they are and where they have come from, and to take pride in the beauty of their individuality. I take away the memory of the students' smiles, the students' connections and happiness, excitement and energy that they brought to the day. This day was filled with authentic learning, and will be remembered fondly by all who participated.

Thanks to the Federation of BC Writers for supporting this project, thanks to the BC Arts Council for their funding, thanks to Ann Graham Walker and Shaleeta Harper for their help in planning and guiding us, thanks to Kate Walker for her beautiful photography and a special thanks to Wendy Morton who carries light, strength, generosity and wisdom with her in all of her projects.

Qwuisaltinot – Michelle Sokolowski, Aboriginal Enhancement Coordinator, Nanaimo Ladysmith School District



TANISHA DOBOS

Raised by my mother, who worked hard for me.
She took care of my sister, that's the way it used to be.
My father's open-ended promises left me wary of the world.
I dreamed of making lives better,
in any way I could.
I was taught by my mother to advocate for what is right,
remember to respect others always,
and to keep an open mind.
Dancing with depression, it was hard to see the end.
I reached out for support,
my life has turned around.
I like to capture memories
through the camera lens:
an eternity in a moment,
something with no end.
I want to be a social worker,
help people, as they helped me.
I strive to see a better world.
Everyone at peace.

BY ERIN BURNLEY

ERIN BURNLEY

My mom and dad raised me with good morals:
“Never silence your opinion.”
I believe that girls around the world
shouldn’t have to fight to get an education.
Women deserve equal opportunities to men.
The value of hard work.

One day, I want to be a medical researcher,
but anything to do with sciences would make me happy.
Travelling has opened up the world to me:
Vietnam, India, Uganda, New Zealand.
Places I’ve seen, people I’ve met
have changed my life,
made me look at the world differently.
But home is here, on the West Coast.
Being near the ocean relaxes me.
I want to go to Antarctica one day.
I want to see more of the world.
Make it a better place.

BY TANISHA DOBOS



NORA RAINBOTH

I was born in a bubble.
I found it hard to fit in: alone, shy.
I experienced depression without knowing what it really was.
I've lived in the same house forever.
I was raised by my mom and dad.
I was taught to be respectful to others,
to help people who need the help, to work in women's shelters,
to become all right with who I am.

BY KAITLYN MCMAHON-WHITE



KAITLYN MCMAHON-WHITE

The day I came into the world,
an umbilical cord was wrapped around my neck.
I saw my death before I took my first step.
I've seen addiction with my own eyes.
I was ripped away from my parents.
Social workers tried to control my life.
I ran away from their rules.
I saw my dad sleeping on the streets, nowhere to go.
I love spending time with my little sister Gracie.
Her eyes shine and light up my world.

When I had no one, grandma and papa
were always there for me. Warm hugs.
They empowered me and taught me traditions
and my people's past.

I am blessed to have such a loving family.
I am a thunderbird soaring through the sky.
I will heal the troubled children.
I will make a difference in this world.

BY NORA RAINBOTH



CHRISTINE GOOD

A wind stirs and whispers
like a storyteller weaving a story around a fire.
This one is titled “Memories”
and tells tales of a childhood
filled with stories like Robin Hood.

Narratives of happiness and simplicity,
devoid of shadows,
but for one which was cast
by the judgements of my classmates.

Lectures of lessons learned
from a small family with love:
tradition, honesty, respect,
and most importantly,
always be there for one another.

Ballads of making a difference in the world:
make a couplet with fairy tales of dogs sleeping curled.

This is my story.
A story of a Nanaimo girl who will always be here.

BY HANXI MACILQUHAM





HANXI MACILQUHAM

I was born in Toronto.
Nobody really knows that about me.
I moved to Nanaimo when I was very young.
I had a good childhood, although I was shy.

All the little things: honesty, respect, self discipline.
These are the important things I learned from my parents.

I would like to be a priest,
maybe even a scientist.
I'm keeping my options open.
Maybe see the world.
Be happy.

BY CHRISTINE GOOD



JOAN HUBERT

A three-hour drive from hospital to home.
Growing up in Queen's Cove,
a secluded place in the middle of nowhere.
I lived leisurely, playing often:
swimming, picking berries, playing Nintendo 64.
All the while, moving around lots,
as my parents were divorced.

I was raised by my mom and older siblings.
They taught me to be nice to everyone,
also, how to cook.

I dream of going to university:
McGill, University of BC, University of Toronto.
These are all the places I strive to get into.
I'd like a job in medicine,
and to buy a house near friends.
I want a big, bright future.

BY KATRIN HANNESSON



KATRIN HANNESSON

Young me bounced around a lot.
I was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
After that I lived in five different places by the time I was five.
My mom and dad took me, and later,
my two siblings, along on a journey.
Other than a park and a best friend,
I don't remember anything of where I lived before Nanaimo.
My life was hectic, but it has since settled.
My family taught me to do my best in everything:
be motivated and focussed in all tasks;
form good relationships with as many people as possible.
These lessons have given my life good shape.

I have met many friends in Nanaimo.
I plan to graduate high school, go to university,
get a job, help people.
My goal is McGill University,
then medical school there too.
I want to be a pediatric neurologist.
I want to make a difference in kids' lives.

BY JOAN HUBERT

IAN MCMAHON-POINT

I awoke in this world
before anyone was ready.
I was another burden in their world of struggles.
But the joy of my life came from those of age:
my grandparents taught me that life could be fun.
They filled my life with laughter and love.
As I grew, I found my own passions:
video games and sports, to name a few.
My parents are doing better than before.

To be an engineer is my goal
and to travel somewhere warm,
maybe to stay there.
When I return, I want to marry, build a house,
have kids and raise them well.
Live happily.

BY DOMINICK MCLEOD





DOMINICK MCLEOD

House to house,
back and forth.
My parents split up when I was two.
But I managed to get through.
Pokemon and Smash Bros filled my spare time.
I've learned the value of money, working hard, responsibility
on my journey so far.
But still indecisive: going with the flow,
as if I were a log floating downstream.
I'm looking forward to the freedom that comes with age.

BY IAN MCMAHON-POINT

PAIGE LAFRANCE

I was an old book
Sitting on a dark, dusky shelf.
The book is tightly packed
with mountain walls from other books trapping it,
making it difficult to breathe.
Inside the book are carefully written words,
made with a brush in gentle strokes,
the book never believing that it will escape.

I am now a dove
lifting my wings in flight,
ready to change the world,
one wingspan at a time.

BY MELANIE DEVJAYANTH



MELANIE DEVJAYANTH

I was born in Bern, Switzerland.
The lines of the mountains highlight from early morning;
sun-framed like a portrait above the farms.
Life was rich in family, the safe of my head flooded
with their knowledge and values:
compassion, openness, approachability, respect, understanding.
In order to make an impact on the world around me,
I'll heal the minds of those in need,
help them accomplish their goals and dreams
as a neurosurgeon.

BY PAIGE LAFRANCE





JAYDIN CHARLESON

Nanaimo born and raised.
I was a fishboat cleaner from five years old.
My father went to jail.
I went to counselling so he wouldn't hurt me.
The Island is my home from one end to the other.
There is no place I don't know that I once called home.
Family gatherings kept occurring.
I learned to appreciate what I get and what I don't have.

My dad returned and it was weird.
Changes happened in my family.
I can say it ended happily.

I wish to help others when I'm older,
to help those who aren't as privileged as others.

BY KENNY BAUMEL

KENNY BAUMEL

I was born in Victoria,
lived with my sister and my mom.
I moved around a lot.
I was baby sat most of the time.
My mom bounced around from boyfriend to boyfriend,
she had a lot of trust issues.
My mom raised me with help from my aunt.
I was bullied all though elementary school.
I was taught to treat others with kindness.
I want to see the beautiful world we live in
before it goes to crap.

BY JAYDIN CHARLESON



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Who We Are exists because the Federation of BC Writers and the BC Arts Council believe that it is a worthy project. When First Nations students sit with non-First Nations students and ask each other questions so that they can learn about each other and write poems for each other, a kind of magic happens. The magic of connection, the magic of understanding. And it is in “one wingspan at a time” that these poems appear and the book takes flight into our minds, into our hearts.

I would like to thank Anne Tenning for her enthusiasm for this project and Michelle Sokoloski for organizing this event and making sure everything went smoothly: the eager students, the superb food, the joy. And the ABED staff at Nanaimo District Secondary School who helped make this project such a success.

Thanks to Ann Graham Walker for her support, to Kate Walker for her superb photographs. And thanks to Ursula Vaira of Leaf Press for her design.

Wendy Morton

A poem is the shortest distance between two hearts.

—Wendy Morton

