


## June 21 is NATIONAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY



**cupw•sttp**  
Canadian Union of Postal Workers

### Ganawenda (To Protect)

by Jessica Somers

Art is a way for me to give a voice to my ancestor's connection to the land, their suffering, their pride and beauty as a nation. I lay down my tobacco and ask my ancestors for the guidance, love and support to create. Some of my pieces have bold bright colors reflecting the beauty of nature, others are dark, dramatic and sometimes controversial. The paintings help me connect to the spirits around me and allow me to find some peace and healing within myself. Painting, for me is another way to bring awareness to the dark chapter of Canada's First Nation people.

It is estimated that there are over 4000 Indigenous Women, girls and gender diverse individuals that have been murdered and missing in the last 3 decades.

I can't imagine what it would be like to lose a mother, sister, auntie or loved one. Or when dealing with the police, you're subjected to discrimination and racism. Your loved one is automatically labeled as someone who has lived as "high risk," or it's suggested that they are just partying. You are re-victimized—treated like your loved one's life is not important enough to be a priority. You can never have closure. You will always have

a feeling of hopelessness, and experience a lifetime of unresolved loss and grief. Your loved one is just another faceless statistic.

In this painting, the color Red is dominant. The red dress and shirt symbolize the Indigenous women and gender diverse individuals who have been murdered or are missing. The red hand symbolizes solidarity and that we will be silenced no more.

The bear spirit is the protector. She is a strong source of support in times of difficulty. She guides you to be a leader. Her spirit may ask us to accept an authoritative role, not only directing our own lives but guiding others. Think of the height and weight of the Bear – her presence demands respect; this is not the time to be silent, but rather a time to challenge, to engage, to educate and to inspire! She is feared and admired for her courage. She stands tall facing the threat of harm without fear. She invokes power, inner strength, fearlessness and healing as she holds the woman in the red dress.

May we all be bears in these times of reconciliation.

**NATIONAL INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY JUNE 21, 2022**

**CUPW.CA**

CUPW calls upon its members and society more broadly, to be awakened to the abominable effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples on whose land we live, work and learn. We call upon all to raise awareness of the trauma that settlers have visited upon our first peoples through genocidal practices, discrimination, and continued sweeping aside of their pain and their claims.

It is anticipated that 6,000 children’s graves are yet to be found at the sites of Residential Schools. Thus far, the remains of over 1,200 victims of abuse and murder have been discovered. Indigenous children were captured by the State or otherwise made to leave their homes and communities to be assimilated into settler society, and we know the abuse was pervasive. The last Residential School closed its doors in 1996. This history is still very difficult for Indigenous people to grapple with, and the intergenerational trauma resulting from it still has long-reaching effects on people.

It is estimated well over 4,000 women, girls and gender diverse Indigenous persons have been murdered. It is known that colonial institutions such as the police, corrections and hospitals have mistreated, abused and/or killed our Indigenous brothers, sisters and comrades in numbers that are staggering when examined in relation to white settlers.

Every year, CUPW commissions a work of art to underscore National Indigenous Peoples Day. This year’s poster is of a painting entitled “Ganawenda” which means to protect. Jessica Somers, the artist, describes it as follows:

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Jessica is an Ojibwe and Métis. She uses her artwork as “self-reflection, a way of seeking peace and sharing knowledge...as a way to honour her ancestors.” This artist uses a variety of mediums in her work and is inspired by the teachings of elders in her community.

On National Indigenous Peoples Day, June 21, let us honour Indigenous Peoples by participating in Summer Solstice activities, learning about Indigenous customs and traditions, and remembering the wisdom and the sacrifice of Indigenous peoples.

We all have a stake in decolonizing this country, and each can play a role in helping to protect a sacred way of life and seeking remedy to the ongoing injustice that colonialism continues to mete out on the First peoples of this land.

In Solidarity,



Jan Simpson  
National President

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