

MMIWG2S + Red Dress Day.

I want to tell you about three people.

The first is Jesus. He's more or less 30 years old. He's the son of a fiery woman named Mary, and adoptive father is a carpenter named Joseph. Strangely, Jesus doesn't believe in the whole nuclear family thing. He believes all who do God's will are brothers and sisters to each other. And what is God's will? To love God, love each other, and love ourselves.

The second is Stephen. He's more or less 20 years old. He's Jewish, like Jesus is, but he's also Greek. He's been asked to do the important job of distributing food to the Greek-speaking Jewish widows of his city. He's one of 7 people who have the job of making sure the vulnerable are protected and fed by the disciples of Jesus.

The third is Delaine Copenance. She is more or less 16 years old. She's the twin sister of Dana. Delaine is into Pokémon cards and teenage music. She loves to wear plaid and band t-shirts. She is in school, a bit shy, but loves to hang out with her twin and big sisters and friends.

Our first person, Jesus, is captured at night by his own fellows and given to those with religious and political authority. He is given a kangaroo court - a court that is without justice that already has a foregone conclusion. His teachings are disrupting the status quo. And so, the religious leaders and government leaders murders him. The police do as they are paid, kill Jesus, and stand by to be sure no one else thinks to question those with power.

Our second person, Stephen, is brought before the religious authorities to explain himself. He tells them about how he follows the dead Jesus, and how Jesus didn't overturn the rules of Moses - he fulfilled them. Stephen is given no trial. Without debate, the religious authorities murder Stephen. A young man named Saul, who you likely know as Paul, guards the authority figures' coats while they murder Stephen.

Our third person, Delaine, goes out around dinner time for a walk. But she doesn't return by dark. Her mother begins to worry. Usually, her daughter is never gone for longer than a movie. The mother doesn't panic, because the daughters all take care of one another. Surely Delaine is with her big sister Darian or walking with her twin Dana. The mother tries contacting them through their phones... Dana says Delaine did go for a walk and should be home. But there is nothing from the other two daughters. The mother drives around looking... nothing. Her worry is rising. It is now 11 pm. She rings the hospital, but her daughters-- plural, two now missing-- are not there. She rings the Treaty police, who tell her to ring the OPP. The OPP, just 5 minutes from her house, says, "Oh yes. We have Delaine. She's drunk and you can't pick her up until 2 a.m." The mother exclaimed her daughter is only 16! At which point the OPP permit the mother to pick up Delaine.

But when the mother arrives, it isn't Delaine. It is her older sister Darian. Away from the cops, Darian apologizes. She took on her younger sister's identity so that the cops would release her right away. She didn't know her little sister has gone missing. Darian joins the search for Delaine.

All night long the mother and sisters search. They speak to the teen friends who all say Delaine went home after her walk around dinner time. At 2 in the morning, they report her missing to the OPP of Kenora. But the police do not mount a search. At 3 pm the next day, an officer tells the mother that Delaine was "probably just drunk," and still no cops searched for the missing 16-year-old.

The mother turns to social media, putting Delaine's photo out, begging people for information, "If anyone knows anything or where we can find her, any leads or info, please notify the police or contact anyone of her family members. I just want my baby to be home." 33 hours have now passed.

Door to door, sisters and mother, friends and strangers, knock and carry a photo of Delaine. "What broke my heart," Delaine's mother said, "is seeing that her grandpa looked through garbage bins. I tried hard not to -- I was so scared. It really hurt not knowing where she was. But I kept, we kept, going, we kept looking. Really hurts not knowing where your baby was."

3 days have passed. The cops now arrange search crews and sniffing dogs. A headquarters is set up in Knox United Church. It was the first time the settler church and Indigenous neighbours interacted. Across donated sandwiches, settlers learned about smudging. Across drumming, allies were made. Now settler descended people joined the search for missing indigenous girl.

"We searched back alleys. We searched the bush. The shores... all the back roads of Kenora... back and forth... over and over and over -- we'd even peek into abandoned houses." They searched with teams of police and volunteers through snow thigh-deep and across 100-foot ravines and across lakes. "I didn't get much sleep, two hours a night maybe. There were times I'd be up 44 hours straight. Where I wasn't eating. I wasn't taking care of myself. I didn't eat because I didn't know if she was eating. Even when I slept on a bed, or tried to sleep, I didn't want to be warm because I didn't know if she was warm. I felt guilty drinking water because I didn't know if she had any. every night I -- after the search parties would be done, I'd walk outside... I'd scream her name. Every night I did this. I yelled for her."

On the 11th day, an Elder did a ceremony and meditated. He determined Delaine is still alive - but time is running out.

The relationship between the Indigenous people and the OPP continued to be contentious. Neither group trusted the other. Neither group wanted to share information. The mother approached them with tobacco, "This is your daughter now... please help me find" Delaine. An uneasy trust was developed. The mother told them, "You have to listen. Don't make assumptions" and the OPP did listen, and drop assumptions.

Diving crews searched the water.

But on day 14 - the search was called off.

What mother can stop seeking their missing youngest child? She kept searching. But a chill filled her - physically. On the 24th day, police arrived in the early dawn to say a body had been found at the docks, where family and volunteers and police had searched dozens of times. The docks - directly before the OPP station.

They took the mother to the docks, to the station, to the stretcher, and there was Delaine, dead.

Jesus' body was broken and bruised from his murder. He was taken down and laid out. Friends buried him.

Stephen's body was broken and crushed. Could the disciples gather it and bury him?

Delaine looked like she was sleeping. Her mother wanted her to rise, "It's so hard seeing your child dead. I wanted her to wake up. My world's not the same anymore." She traced the bruises on her daughter's face.

Within a day, Jesus was in a tomb. We don't know what happened to Stephen's body. We do know the apostles scattered then across the region. For Delaine, within a day, the media and police reported there was no foul play. Nothing suspicious. Delaine was drunk and fell into the water and drown.

Jesus' murderers go free. The law justifies them. They had the right to murder anyone found guilty in the courts they themselves controlled. But - God won't let us lose hope. On day 3, God raises Jesus, affirms to us that we know the way through life and death and into the world to come. Assures us that

collectively we do not have to lose all hope the world cannot be better - because Jesus is with us, still, collectively.

Stephen's murderers go free. The religious institutions justified them. He is the first Christian martyr and his death before Saul may be what plants the first seeds of doubts in the man who will encounter the risen Christ and become Saint Paul.

The coroner proclaims there are no murderers in Delaine's death. But nor can they explain how she died, or the inconsistencies of her injuries with drowning, or why there was the assumption Delaine was drunk. Ontario's chief coroner refused an inquest. But this was later overturned by a regional coroner. Since then, the case was reopened but no movement has been made. The case remains unsolved. "Right now, there's still no justice for my daughter. My poor daughter lies in a grave and our family's suffering -- still grieving -- everyone, for her. Especially her twin sister. Her twin sister is taking it the hardest."

This mother's name is Anita Ross. She testified in Thunder Bay for the National Inquiry into Murder and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls.

She begged us to not jump to conclusions; make assumptions about Indigenous people; and asks us to value indigenous lives as non-indigenous lives are valued.

It is our job, those of us here today, to be allies. Settler allies and Indigenous allies - allies of all kinds - with "the least of these." Everyone who is vulnerable and more at risk of violence.

Everyone who faces fake courts, mob mentality, and systemic injustice.

Moosehide was born out of a girl who wanted a way to remind us all to stand against gender-based violence every day of the year. "When Raven Lacerte went on an annual visit with her father to Carrier territory to reconnect with her roots and hunt moose, she noticed several things. First was her community's proximity to the Highway of Tears and how many women and children in Canada feel unsafe. Second was how powerful the medicine of the land is. Finally, she was struck by the importance of love, connection, pride, culture, and ceremony in leading a happy and healthy life.

“We were talking about what our family could do,” Lacerte said, “as our contribution to helping to end that violence against women and children.” As she cleaned out a moose they shot on that trip, she wondered, could they use this hide as medicine?

“I was very aware that my Indigenous background makes me six times more likely to be a target of violence. It’s really a hard thing, constantly living in fear because of the colour of my skin and who my ancestors are. I always saw that injustice in the world and I really wanted to do something about it. I come from a healthy family that is rooted in culture and I can see the positive effect that has on people. I really just wanted to share the love that I have and wanted to help bring people into that space of healing, making sure that our women are loved and protected at all times...

A few of our family members have been murdered. Most recently, one of my cousins in 2018. [This violence] very much affects me and how I see the world and what I want for the world. The MMIWG inquiry: People don’t know what to do with it. This is one tangible thing that folks can grab onto and really use to help any further healing...

We call The Moose Hide Campaign an Indigenous innovation for all Canadians. I think lots of people can get turned off by an Indigenous innovation and not know where their place is in it. But this is an issue that affects us all. It’s ending violence towards women and children, all women and children, and with a special focus on Indigenous women. And we’re calling on all men and all people. Not just Indigenous men. We’re calling on all people to join them. It’s not just an Indigenous issue, it’s an everyone issue and we all have a place in this and we can all take this stance. I think it’s good to just make sure people feel like there’s space for them in this and that they can see themselves in this campaign and know they are welcome always.”

She told her father we need a daily reminder. Now, 10 years later, Raven is a mother herself to a little girl. It feels so very important that she does everything she can to have this child grow up in a world without violence.

REDress was born out of a woman who proclaimed "no more missing sisters!" Moosehide from a girl who wanted boys and men especially, but all Canadians, to daily remind themselves of their commitment to end violence.

Please, don't turn away - don't turn away from the crucifixion, the stoning, the murdered and missing - our silence is cover for the violence to continue. Men, call one another out. Women, stand with your sisters. All of us - align with the gender-diverse. All of us - teach our kids to not raise their fists, to see the image of God in all people, and to teach each person as the incarnation of Christ.

For they are.

Jesus says he is among us. And what we do to each other, we do to him.

May God strengthen us for this work.

Amen.

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