Connie Fife

Originally from Saskatchewan, Connie Fife is a Cree writer and editor. She was the recipient of the Prince and Princess Edward Price for Aboriginal Literature in 1999. The author of Beneath the Nake Sun and Speaking Through Jagged Rock, she is the editor of The Colour of Resistance: A Contemporary Collection of Native Women’s Writings and several other publications. Her work has also appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals around the world. She lives in British Columbia.

Author’s Statement: “Dear Webster”

“’Dear Webster’” is a piece born after my having dug into the dictionary for the definition of ‘savage’. Each line represents a person who is either a friend or someone I encountered who offered me their stories or their secrets. It is also my own way of breaking down or challenging stereotypes of who I am considered to be, of how history has tried to confine or restrain the truth of our reality as Native people. This poem is my attempt to honour those whose lives shaped this particular piece and is a reflection of the impact they have made my own life”.

**Dear Webster** by Connie Fife

author’s note before the poem:

***savage*** *(sav’ij) adj. without civilization; primitive; barbarous*

*(a savage tribe) n. a member of a preliterate society having a primitive*

*way of life; a fierce, brutal person.*

i am the one who talks with the mountains

when i am not sliding down the stream of its face/

i am the one who walks the streets late a

night despite the danger

believing this land is mine to roam freely/

i am the one who carved a mask from a thick tree

then wore it/

i am the one who raises her arms to the sun

then takes flight on winds from the east/

i am the one who says “no more”

then leaves the man whose fists have reconstructed

my bones/

i am the one who defies the narrow definition of love

and loves another woman

and heals a nation in doing so/

i am the one who meeting after meeting turns

away when men misconstrue my words

and goes on/

i am the one whose stories take our collective

pasts into the future

and guarantees that not one day is left behind/

i am the one sleeping on the sidewalks

who speaks to all my elations as the masses

hear only their own silence/

i am the one cradles close to her breasts

small children

and women who were old before they were young/

I am the one who shoots fire into the veins of those

who cannot re-ignite their own sparks

then gives them the responsibility of stocking

the wood/

i am the one who talks to herself and hears

others answer

then writes it down so that the words remain in

my throat/

i am the one who demonstrates against forced

relocation

and uses a shotgun to carry the message clean home/

i am the one who watched as my children’s hair was cut

and cried and wept then screamed “return them”/

i am the one struggling to find her way back

i am the one who uses brushes to paint my resistance

on a canvas

then hangs my tapestry across the horizon/

i am the one whose son died of AIDS while a piece

of myself died each day and couldn’t halt either

then buried my child/

i am the one who was raped by father then

my uncle

and spent years hiding then decided to change it all

and used all my rage to castrate my memory of them

and healed myself with love/

i am the one who late at night screams and howls

and hears voices answer/

i am the one whose death was intended

and didn’t die

\*taken from Sundog Highway: Writing from Saskatchewan