



# Shall we gather at the river?

by MARJORIE BEAUCAGE

*Les rencontres qui rassemblèrent toutes les participantes, le soir, au début des matinées et le dimanche matin, prirent la forme de rituels. Les femmes formaient un grand cercle. Un long tissu, fait de différents bleus, serpentait sur le plancher de la salle et symbolisait les flots du fleuve. Il y eut du mouvement : des symboliques, des prières, des chants, des danses, des regards partagés. Il y eut des paroles de femmes : des paroles sacrées, des poésies, des échanges, des mots d'enseignement, d'engagement et de sagesse, des récits d'expériences. Les Européens qui s'installèrent sur la terre que nous appelons maintenant le Québec et le Canada, arrivèrent par le fleuve que les Mohawks appelle Magtogoek. C'est au bord du Magtogoek, à Montréal, que les femmes de la rencontre Créons la justice, Reconnaissons les différences se sont rencontrées. Marjorie Beaucage raconte la symbolique du fleuve.*

THE INVITATION TO COME TO THE RIVER – a place where women have always met to collect water, do their laundry, share stories and advice – is a very old tradition on this Land. This tradition was revisited and transformed in this inter-spiritual Gathering of women.

Since we came from different traditions, the challenge was to create a space where we could live our differences and not be absorbed by only one current. “Making camp” at the Gathering meant feeling welcomed, acknowledged, feeling safe and taking one’s own place. Self-governing principles (see the “3 Rs” on page 9) were incorporated into the design of finding new ways to be together. To “de-program” the ways we are used to meeting, and make room for something new to happen is still the biggest challenge in acknowledging difference.

Camps were organized according to the Four Directions, the Four Seasons, and the Gifts we were born with. Since every human being was born, every human being has an equal place in the Circle of Life. Acknowledging and affirming each other’s gifts based on our birth inheritance is a good place to begin.

Magtogoek is a liquid road. How do we approach this river of change? Difference flows through us, in us, around us. Can we swim in it? Do we build dams? Bridges? Do we paddle down the river to sightsee, to exploit its resources, to get from one place to the next, not really noticing the Life that is there?

The exchanges, workshops, rituals offered for *Creating justice, recognizing differences* were opportunities to navigate this river in different ways, or just sit on the banks for awhile. And when the time came to “break camp” and set out to create justice, it was difficult to find our natural allies, communities, people with whom we are engaged. This discomfort was another opportunity to acknowledge difference and to see that a national inter-spiritual gathering is not a place for “action plans”, especially when this is the first time all these different parties meet. Alliances are not made overnight. Women were invited to speak and declare their commitments, reflections, and what actions they would be responsible for. It was a time to ask each other for what we need. It was also a time to give thanks.

Magtogoek still flows.... The waters run deep and wide, fast and rough, still and sparkling in the moonlight.... ever changing.

Marjorie Beaucage est une Franco-Métis du Manitoba, engagée à faire le pont, à créer des nouvelles relations entre cultures et à imaginer d'autres façons d'être à travers sa caméra.