BLACK and RURAL saskatchewan

by

SHAYNA JONES

HERITAGE
SASKATCHEWAN

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Black and Rural Saskatchewan was produced by Heritage Saskatchewan in partnership with the Saskatchewan African Canadian Heritage Museum Inc., and the Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan.

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Thanks also to CBC Saskatchewan for its support.

Thank you to all the project participants for sharing their stories:
Maria Cole-Gayle, Christine Fiddler, Cheryl Foggo, Jane Ibisiki, Carol LaFayette-Boyd, Lewis LaFayette, Yemi Laosebikan, Jim Miller, Nastra Muloyawi, Randy Morin, Charlotte Williams.

Published by Heritage Saskatchewan Alliance Inc.
ISBN 978-0-9959249-2-5

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Proudly supported by Sask Culture

This project and its participants live within the traditional homelands of the Nehiyaw/Nehithaw/Nehinaw (Cree), Nahkawe (Saulteaux), Dakota, Lakota, Nakota, and Dene, the homeland of the Michif (Métis), territories covered under Treaty 2, Treaty 4, Treaty 5, Treaty 6, Treaty 8, and Treaty 10, a place many cultures now call home – Saskatchewan.

We acknowledge the part settlers of African descent have played in displacing the Indigenous peoples of this land. As we draw strength from our own stories of Black heritage upon the plains, we also hold within our minds, hearts and spirits the countless generations of Indigenous peoples, who first, and still, steward this land. We acknowledge our place as uninvited guests and share our stories with gratitude and reverence that we, too, may now call the plains home.

In solidarity,

Shayna Jones

Shayna Jones

Shayna Jones is a multi-disciplinary professional spoken word artist specializing in the traditional oral storytelling of African diasporic folklore. As an award winning actor and emerging poet and playwright, Shayna has written and performed for theatre companies, schools, and festivals across Canada. As a folklorist, Shayna combines her passion for live, theatrical performance with the study of traditional Afro-centric folklore and contemporary Black experience to create dynamic, soulful, and impactful performances.

Learn more about Shayna and her work at:
www.wearestoryfolk.com

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An Introduction by
Heritage Saskatchewan

Black and Rural Saskatchewan is Heritage Saskatchewan's fifth living heritage project and to echo Maria Cole-Gayle, one of the participants interviewed, we "couldn't be prouder" of it. Like all our living heritage projects *Black and Rural Saskatchewan* started with a conversation that led to an idea and a growing relationship. This work is an offshoot of folklorist, and artist Shayna Jones' larger, national project, funded by the Canada Council of the Arts, *Black and Rural*. Shayna's approach has been one of utmost integrity and respect and we are privileged to have worked with her to bring the stories shared in these pages and through performance to the wider world.

Her words, and the words of Maria Cole-Gayle, Cheryl Foggo, Jane Ibisiki, Carol LaFayette-Boyd, Lewis LaFayette, Yemi Laosebikan, Jim Miller, Nastra Muloyawi, and Charlotte Williams are, in a word, powerful. Shayna has the true gift of a storyteller in that she brings her own voice and perspectives into relationship with the words presented by others – neither overshadowing the participants nor retreating too far from the narrative. This is a compelling collection of a few voices from rural Saskatchewan – not the definitive documentation of Black and rural experience here, rather, the beginning of a larger and longer discussion. We must continue to recognize the true diversity of communities on the Canadian prairies – both the triumphs of that diversity, and the tragedies of racism, prejudice, intolerance and the loneliness, heartbreak, and anger that result.

Shayna's artistic and ethnographic integrity kept this project rooted. She felt impelled to follow a thread that had been missing: the weighty absence of Indigenous experiences from the narrative. Her desire to understand and educate herself, to ask questions, some of which are not yet answered, and to share the perspectives of Randy Morin and Christine Fiddler in *Black and Rural Saskatchewan*, are a stirring example of the kind of work we, as residents of this land, must continue to do. We must reconcile ourselves to the untold and silenced histories of our communities, we must expand our understandings of heritage in this province, and we must recognize how much more we must learn about each other and about ourselves.

Though Shayna's work is the heart and soul of *Black and Rural*

Saskatchewan, a project requires many helping hands to bring to fruition. The Saskatchewan African Canadian Heritage Museum (SACHM) was a natural partner, and it has been a pleasure to work with its executive director, Carol Lafayette-Boyd, whose knowledge about the Black community in Saskatchewan is bolstered by her own experiences growing up on a farm in west central Saskatchewan. You will find her words within these pages as one of the participants interviewed by Shayna. We invite you to learn more about the organization and to visit SACHM's virtual museum, which celebrates the rich heritage of people of African descent who call Saskatchewan home.

The Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan (PAS) was also an invaluable partner, and we thank Provincial Archivist Carol Radford-Grant for her enthusiastic support of the project. As well as hosting one of the *Black and Rural Saskatchewan* performances, archivists made oral history recordings available to Shayna. PAS will safeguard all the materials from this project in its collection in order that the voices gathered here will endure long into the future, when we hope the discrimination and prejudices related here are no longer a reality for people of African descent living in Saskatchewan.

What will endure are the strength, courage, and dignity of these participants and the lives they live, and those their ancestors lived. We are grateful to Shayna Jones for finding these voices, recording them, and amplifying them in this work. We are honoured to play a part in bringing them to you.

HERITAGE
SASKATCHEWAN

An Introduction by the

Saskatchewan African Canadian Heritage Museum

It has been a real privilege for Saskatchewan African Canadian Heritage Museum (SACHM) to partner with Heritage Saskatchewan and Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan to be a part of this project involving Shayna Jones. The purpose of the project was to amplify the voices of Canadians of African descent who live in rural places across Saskatchewan. The project features stories and life experiences shared with Shayna by folks of African ancestry who live in rural Saskatchewan today. Some of the project participants have deep, rural roots in Saskatchewan, stretching back to the settlement days of the early 20th century in prairies. Others have arrived to Saskatchewan more recently from African countries. Shayna is an amazing and dedicated artist with skill as a storyteller and folklorist. Her personal focus, empathy, and consideration in relating to the people she interviewed was evident in our discussions. I had the personal pleasure of being interviewed by Shayna for this project.

SACHM, whose goal is to recognize and document the contribution of people of African descent in the province has had the opportunity to be involved in learning about the contribution of people who have not been documented in our virtual museum (www.sachm.org/virtual-museum). The interviews Shayna has completed will provide SACHM with more individuals to be included.

Therefore, the project is not only appropriate for SACHM but also for those who had the opportunity to participate, and for the general public to learn more about the diversity of people in rural Saskatchewan. Shayna takes us first to the descendants of early settlers of African descent, many who came seeking a better life free of prejudice and discrimination, and then to those who came to Canada from other countries mostly because of employment opportunities.

In light of learning more about our Saskatchewan's Indigenous peoples and in the spirit of reconciliation, we in the African descent community are now learning the inappropriateness of calling ourselves "pioneers." The early settlers may have had a pioneering spirit, but the land that was settled on was all part of the treaties Indigenous communities signed with the Canadian government, which

many of us never understood or were educated about. Thanks to efforts of reconciliation, we descendants of African descent settlers are learning the truth as are many other Canadians.

It should also be noted that the title using the word “Black” is in a state of flux as some people may prefer to be referred to as “Black” in respect of their historical backgrounds while another thought is that people of Canadian of African descent should be allowed the right to self-identify based on their national and ethnicity origins. This approach not only supports the recognition of diversity; it would also expose the historical and persisting experience of racist categorizations, myths, and stereotypes.

We all face challenging moments in life, and my hope is that Shayna’s performances will be educational and inspirational both to those who kindly shared their life experiences in interviews and to those who get to hear the stories.

Carol LaFayette-Boyd
Executive Director
SACHM

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An Introduction by the

Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan

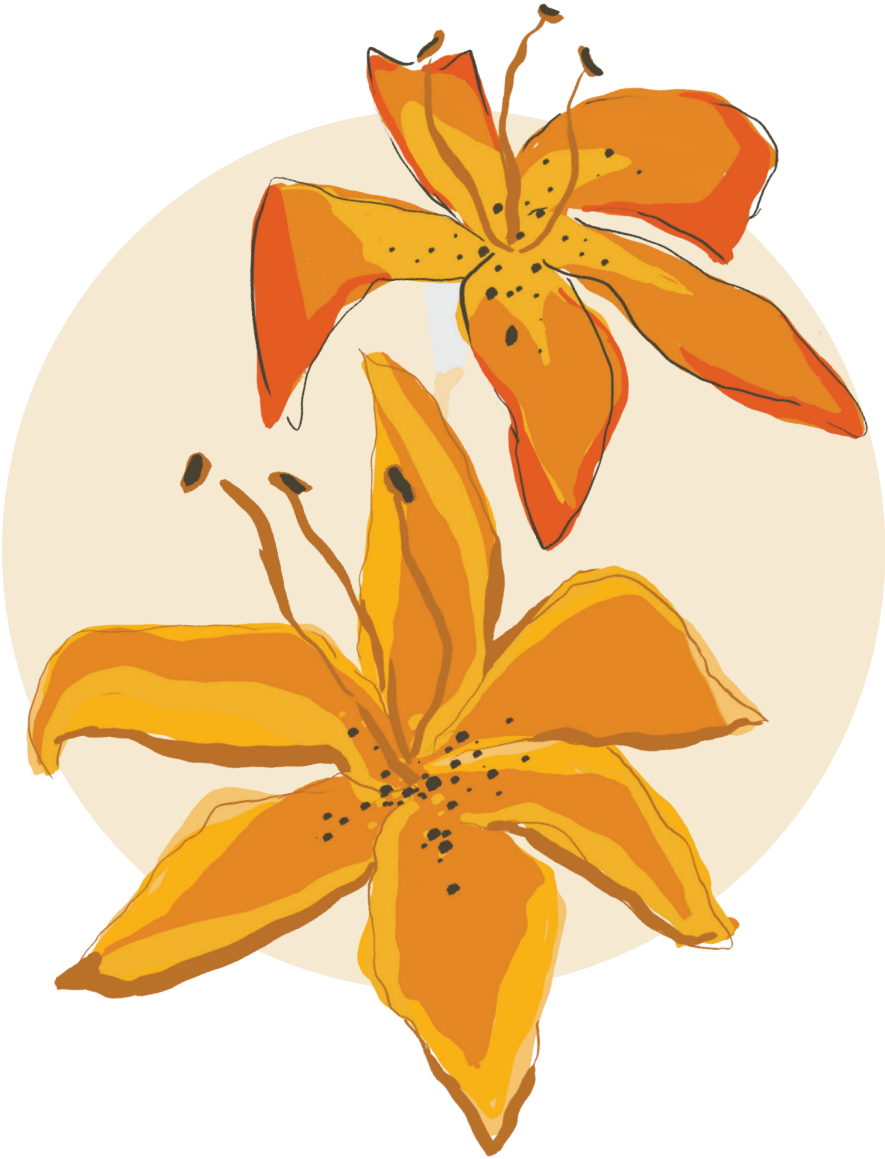
Archives have a tradition of preserving the documentary heritage of our communities. In an interview documented in this publication, Yemi Laosebikan speaks of how his culture has a tradition of oral history in a civilization where the practice is weighted towards written documentation. This reality is reflected in the collections of most Canadian memory institutions, which have fewer oral histories recordings than other history-telling formats such as books, letters, diaries, and reports. An oral tradition of sharing history and family stories creates rich and binding roots for communities and families. The value of these traditions cannot be overstated.

The Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan's mandate is to acquire, preserve and make available records of significance to the history of the province of Saskatchewan. Our collection is broad and rich; however, similar to other memory institutions, there are voices of the past – including the recent past – that are not represented as strongly as they could be. Collecting oral histories is one way that the Archives can strengthen our collection and preserve these crucial stories.

The Archives appreciates playing a role in this unique project with Heritage Saskatchewan, Shayna Jones, and the Saskatchewan African Canadian Heritage Museum. The oral histories resulting from this work will be donated to the Archives and will be a treasure for future researchers. The Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan is pleased to accept this work as a contribution to preserving this history.

Within these pages, Shayna Jones reflects on the past to place the current Black and rural experience in a context that is as unique as the Saskatchewan landscape the storytellers call home. Thank you to Shayna for her dedication and creative insight that ensures that these stories will be remembered: stories of strong, brave, and loving people who contribute much to this great province.

PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES OF SASKATCHEWAN



PROLOGUE

I was pretty young when it struck me [that Black history in Canada] was a story that needed to be better known by all Canadians. Because I assumed that if White Canadians knew that we'd been here for more than a century, they would stop shouting, 'go back where you came from...' The story was not in the history books, it was not in the novels. I loved reading as a kid and it wasn't in the story books either. And I thought of that as a deficit within our narrative as Canadians.

- *Cheryl Foggo, descendent of George W. Smith, who immigrated to Maidstone, Saskatchewan in 1910*

I come to this work honestly. I am an intentionally, actively rural dwelling woman of African-descent* in Canada. I am intrinsically drawn to living my life in spaces removed from the din of urbanity. More often than not I am an ethnic anomaly in my chosen spaces. This is unsurprising as, according to the most recent census survey, only 3.5% of Canada's population identifies as Black and the vast majority of these Blacks live in major cities.[1] The reality of these low figures underscored by the predominantly urban depictions of Blacks in contemporary popular culture may tempt one to subconsciously assume that Black bodies have no business in rural spaces. That we lack not only the skills needed but the inclination to even survive, let alone thrive, outside of city bounds.

* I use the terms African-descent and Black interchangeably in this publication. However, this interchangeability is often debated as the term "Black" assumes a uniformity of culture and perspective that is a far cry from the diversity and complexity of African diasporic reality on this land.

I posit, from experience, that this subtle, insidious, assumption siphons off African-descent Canadians, dissatisfied with the grind of city life, from even envisioning that they may find wellness and belonging out on the countryside. The barriers in place are multi-dimensional. Practical considerations such as sufficient employment or educational opportunities (or the lack thereof) may be cause for any Canadian, regardless of race or creed, to forgo rural living. Cinemas and shopping malls are sometimes missing from the topography of a small town, and "Nowheresville, Canada"* is less likely to draw big name performers or attractions for the enjoyment of its residents. However, the Black Canadian, unperturbed by such "lack" on the countryside, faces a far graver barrier - one that exists in the intangible realm. It is the absence of true representation through the silencing of Black voice and story in rural spaces. In this void, assumptions of who belongs and who does not grow unchecked. Invisible walls are fortified. And we Canadians, as a whole, suffer for our ignorance.

The work of *Black and Rural Saskatchewan* is to centre and honour stories of African descent Canadians who have chosen to live their lives against the urban grain, living and thriving in rural Saskatchewan. In so doing, we challenge the invisible walls that box Black Canadians into certain spaces and out of others. It has been a privilege to listen to stories of pride and struggle, triumph and quiet dismay from the mouths of Black Canadians whose families have been rooted here for over a century to those who are the first generation to call the plains their home. I am honoured now to capture their voices here for you. I have done my best to allow the words and reflections of the men and women that I interviewed to shine alone. I provide historical and contemporary context where it is useful. However the beauty of this work has been to centre their reflections, straight from their mouths. May we listen with an open heart to this living heritage. May we all be strengthened by it.

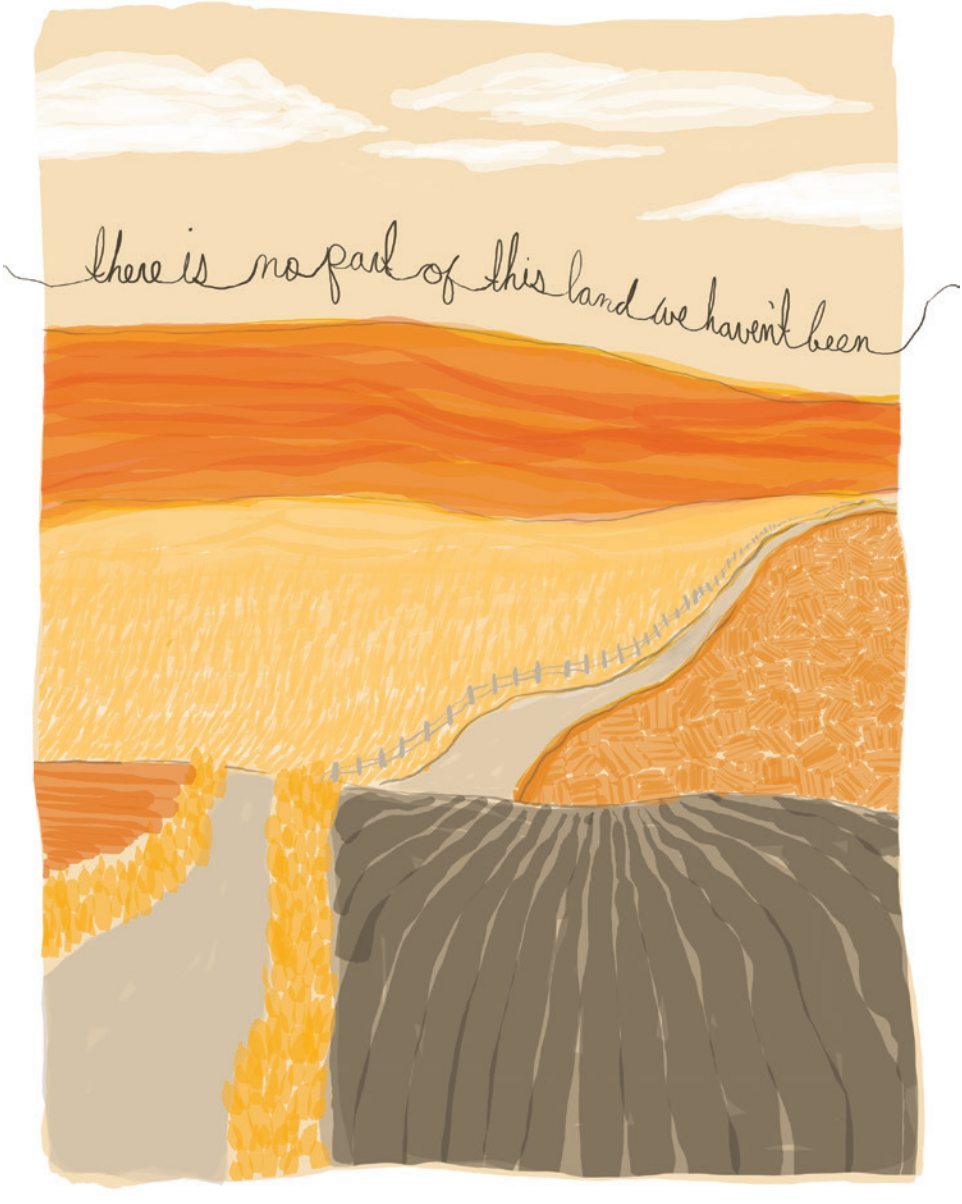
* I use the term, "Nowheresville, Canada" to describe a rural setting with great affection. I, personally, take great delight in thriving in a rural setting that boasts of hidden merits that others know next to nothing about.

PART I

Setting the Stage: An Historical Context

There is no place in this country where Black people have not been, historically. Because of our history in North America, we have been everywhere... Black people were all over BC, Black people have been all over Alberta, all over Saskatchewan. There is simply no part of this land where we haven't been.

- *Cheryl Foggo, descendent of George W. Smith who immigrated to Maidstone, Saskatchewan in 1910*


there is no part of this land we haven't been

Canadians of African descent have a diverse history. There is no monolith that will do justice to our presence on this land. We have served this nation as leaders in government and world class legends of sport, history making medical practitioners, and critically acclaimed artists.* We are educators, farmers, business owners, and volunteers, and like every settler on this land, there is a story of "how we got here."

Most of the earliest Black settlers in Canada can trace their history on this continent to the dark days of the transatlantic slave trade which saw the kidnapping and sale of ten to twelve million Africans to the Americas between the 15th and 19th century.[2] Slavery persisted as a legal and even celebrated means of economic growth in the United States until the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the subsequent defeat, in 1865, of the pro-slavery Confederate states in the American Civil War. In the years following the legal end of slavery, thousands of African American freed men, women, and children migrated west to escape demoralizing and debilitating Jim Crow laws designed to keep Blacks in a position of social inferiority and economic deprivation.[3]

The "Unassigned Lands"** of the American Northwest were regarded as a promised land to many Blacks mired in the racist south. After the civil war, all Black towns and settlements flourished on the "Unassigned Lands." These communities, based in agriculture, supported businesses, schools and churches. Community members rallied together to create and circulate newspapers that advertised throughout the south for Black settlers. Droves came. In fact, between 1865 and 1920, "African Americans created more than fifty identifiable [all Black] towns and settlements in the region," a number unrivaled even by the Deep South.[4]

The Black communities of the "Unassigned Lands," however, were far from untouched by racial prejudice. Surrounding White communities, especially those settled by southerners still faithful to racist ideology, laboured, successfully, to propagate segregationist legislature in the local government. By 1907 when the "Unassigned

* For example, Jean Augustine, Canada's first Black female Member of Parliament and Cabinet Minister; John "Army" Howard, Canada's first Black Olympian competed in Stockholm in 1912; Dr. Alfred Schmitz Shadd, immigrated to the plains in 1896 and served as the first Black doctor in Melfort, Saskatchewan; Benny Bing, a Nigerian-Canadian contemporary fine artist of growing acclaim.

** The "Unassigned Lands," now known as the state of Oklahoma, referred to the last parcel of land in "Indian Territory" that had not yet been "reassigned" by the American government to a First Nations tribe forcibly removed from their easterly homelands.

Lands" and Oklahoma Territories were ratified into the official state of Oklahoma, the social landscape for Blacks in the new state bore striking resemblance to the racism of the Deep South.

Meanwhile, 1600 kilometers north of Oklahoma, major work was underway by the Canadian government to settle the prairie lands, dubbed the "Last Best West."[5] Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior (1896 - 1905), worked diligently to populate the west with farmers, circulating advertising pamphlets to attract "agricultural immigrants" throughout Great Britain, European countries, and the United States. The robust campaign reached the ears of the Black communities* of Oklahoma where the newly formed state was readily codifying debilitating Jim Crow laws. Sifton's offer of a quarter section of land for $10 with the provision that settlers "stayed on the land for three years and improved it by clearing, planting, and building a house"[6] was an incredible enticement. Consequently, in the early 1900s hundreds of Black men, women, and children migrated from Oklahoma (and other areas of the American south) to the prairie lands of Alberta and Saskatchewan to forge for themselves a new life of dignity.

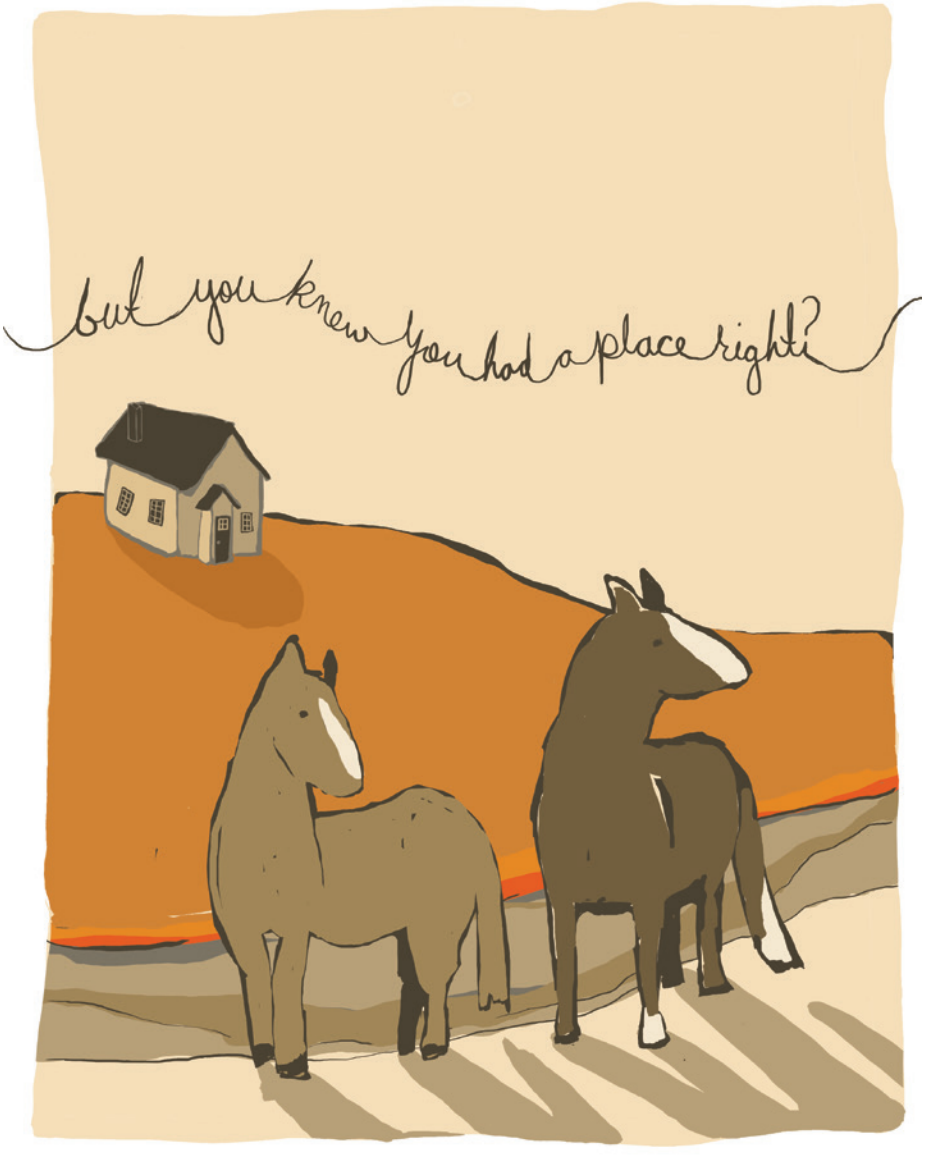
* However, anyone considered to be a non-agricultural immigrant (e.g., southern Europeans, Blacks, British urbanites, East Asians) was discouraged from settling here.

PART II

Memories of the Black Pioneers

... I know that if my great great grandparents hadn't persevered, I wouldn't be here today, enjoying the relaxed state that I'm in. Like, I would not be able to feel comfortable walking down the street and enjoying my small community, had they not tried extremely hard to be a part of community in rural Saskatchewan. They had to leave behind and forget the heat that they experienced and the segregation they experienced. They had to put that all behind them.

- Charlotte Williams, descendent of Joseph and Mattie Mayes, who immigrated from Oklahoma to Maidstone, Saskatchewan in 1910


but you knew you had a place right?

Joseph and Mattie Mayes were among the first Black pioneers to break soil on the Canadian prairie. In 1910, at the age of 54, Joseph led his family, alongside eleven other families, across the border to start life anew, free from the crippling racial laws of the United States. Though girded with hope and resolve, these Black families faced the same harrowing hardships that all pioneers of the plains had to endure: the struggle to adapt to an "exceptionally challenging environment, characterized by great climatic extremes over enormous expanses of land."[7]

Not only this, the socio-political climate of the newly formed province of Saskatchewan was tinged with all-too familiar hostility towards the Black settlers. Many White settler neighbours from eastern Canada and Europe were as against Black settlement as their American counterparts.[8] "Considering Black immigrants to be poor farmers and bad citizens, Whites petitioned the government to restrict [their immigration]. They argued that Black settlers took the place of more desirable immigrants and that property adjacent to Black settlements could not be sold."[9] In response, on August 12, 1911 an Order-in-Council was passed by the Cabinet of Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier to ban Black persons from entering Canada stating, "the Negro race… is deemed unsuitable to the climate and requirements of Canada."[10] Though the order was never made law, the action was a clear message that government officials did not want Black immigrants in Canada. Further still, the measures to stop Black migration ranged from orders like the one described above, to strict medical checkups and efforts to limit their access to information and certifications that could give them equal economic opportunities.[11]

Despite chilling echoes of the life they left behind, in faith, Joseph Mayes and his community of Black families pressed on, settling in Eldon district, thirteen kilometers north of Maidstone, Saskatchewan. Charlotte Williams (née Mayes) is a proud and vocal descendant of the Mayes family. In fact, she is of historical significance herself, carrying the distinction of being Saskatchewan's first female Black veterinarian. Charlotte reflects:

> *My great, great grandfather [Joseph Mayes] was the Baptist minister. So, the first thing they did was build a church. And that was their meeting place, that was their social place, that was a place of refuge for the Black community. From there, they built a school and they all built their own farm houses, their barns. But*

the first thing they built was a church. Now, in terms of faith, the basis of your spiritual foundation is faith. Believing, persevering, hoping and of course, love. So, everybody knows that love trumps hate. If you love, it's gonna obliterate any kind of hate that you might feel… Cause even though they were in this community, there was still hate around them. Because, you and I know that once they found that all these Black people were coming to Saskatchewan, they tried to stop them. They were deemed unsuitable. So they had to kind of overcome hate with love.

The church she refers to is the historic Shiloh Baptist Church, "a one-room building constructed of dovetailed, hand-hewn square poplar logs hauled by ox cart from the North Saskatchewan riverbank."[12*] The community began to build in 1911 and the simple structure served the settlers until the 1940s. The community, later dubbed "the Shiloh people," also designated land as a cemetery for their deceased loved ones, an act of necessity as surrounding communities were reluctant to bury Blacks on their grounds.[13]

While sharing further memories with me, Charlotte recounts the experience of taking her father, 90 year old Murray Mayes, grandson of Joseph and Mattie Mayes, to visit his childhood homestead in Maidstone. She recalls the stories the neighbours shared with her as they remembered her great grandmother Mattie and her generous spirit:

… and the stories I heard about my great grandmother – they'd be out skating, enjoying the pond. She would make cookies and hot chocolate and take it out to these children, who she had no connection with, only the fact that they were children in her neighbourhood – farming neighbourhood. So, she had to walk down a country road to the skating rink and give these children hot chocolate and cookies. And they remember it. Do you know what I'm saying? They recall it to me. These are – these are elderly people. They remember my great grandmother who made that effort… the effort of going from house to house. She was a midwife, and she also knew a lot about the local plant foliage. She was an excellent gardener. She would pick berries from the area, make jams, and take them around to the community, and let them taste her jams, the things she

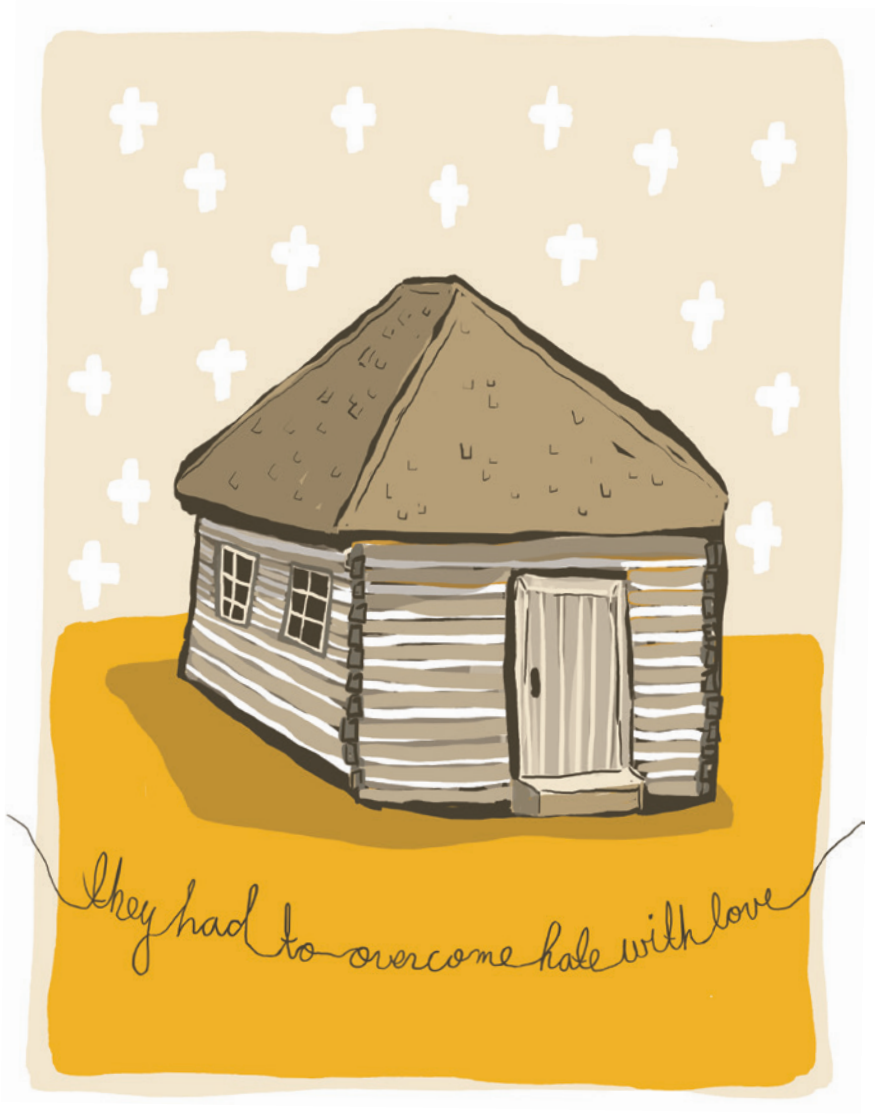
* The Shiloh Baptist church was designated a provincial heritage site in 2019.

created. She made a point of visiting. In fact, when she got elderly and got lost in a storm, everybody stopped what they were doing and went looking for her. Everybody stopped, because she was such an important part of their community, of their lives, because she had made sure that they – that she made them part of her circle. Took the energy to do those things for them. You know, and being a midwife, being a doctor, if the doctor couldn't come, she would go and help get them prepared or – or use poultices or whatever she could do to help give them some time until the doctor showed up.

She shares further,

My father remembers going on a buggy with her on a stone boat. Now if you don't know, a stone boat is basically a piece of plywood on two pieces of what I understand is some kind of wood. And you have to stand on it and hold the reins of the horse, and let them pull you along grass. So it takes a lot of energy to do that. And he remembers when she was first – when he used to first go out with them it would be on a stone boat in summertime. In the wintertime, she promoted herself to a buggy, you know a buggy with two wheels and a horse. But he remembers going with Granny on a stone boat to go help somebody. He remembers – my dad remembers going with her to go provide medicine, herbs, poultices, whatever it was. He remembers her going to deliver babies, you know. And she didn't have to do that. She could have said, "well, I'm only gonna help my people and I'm not gonna help the general – you know, why should I help these people? They hated me. Why shou–" No, she never took that stance. She took the stance of "I'm here. I'm gonna help. That's it. I don't care what colour you are."

Pioneering communities breaking land and homesteading often did so hundreds of miles from established cities. They had to rely solely on their own resources, creating from scratch "everything from food, shelter, and clothing to [provisions for their] medical and spiritual needs, economic interests, and social and cultural activities."[14] Regardless of race, this reality made a spirit of neighbourliness a necessity of survival.


they had to overcome hate with love

Mattie Mayes is but one luminous example of strength, courage, and love toward all from within the pioneering Black community. Lewis and Lily LaFayette predate the 1910 en masse migration of Blacks to Saskatchewan from Oklahoma. They arrived four years prior, in 1906, to Regina from Oskaloosa, Iowa. Lewis established a farming operation for himself in Fiske and finally moved his family over from Regina in 1911, some 150 miles from the Black settlement of Maidstone. His grandson, also named Lewis LaFayette, 89 at the time of this publication, recalls his grandfather's unwavering kindness:

> *I know one time, just south of our farm there, there was a lady, she was expecting, and my grandfather heard about it and – and said she should be in the hospital. And [the husband] says, "You know, I haven't got any – any money either for her to be in hospital." And like, at that time, my grandfather reached in his pocket and give him $100. And say, "You get her into the hospital." And he says, "Well, I – I don't know when I can pay ya." And he says, "Don't be worrying about that. You get her in the hospital."*

He recalls fondly his grandfather's love and kindness towards him. When asked about his relationship with his grandfather, her shares:

> *Oh, yes – when he died, I think I was around twelve. He used to – we were a mile and a quarter from Grandfather's place, and he would – my birthday was in November 23rd. I got one comin' up. And my grandfather would walk down to celebrate my birthday. And when he got ready to go home, dad would hook up the team. And Grandfather was to drive the team home and then tie the lines up and turn 'em and they – they would come home – back home, because the roads were built up with snow. And the team would stay on the trail and come home and we would go out and put 'em in the barn… And, boy, we used to have a lot of snow back then... We'd be going back and forth up to Grandfather's place, and the snow would be built up from the horse's sleigh. And the horses would just stay on the built up trail and come home.*

He recounts, with simplicity, the reputation of LaFayette hospitality in the community:

When my grandfather came over, he never had no problems, and – and when – when people were traveling through the country, you know, in those days, people would be traveling through and they would be asking, "Is there any place we could stop and stay?" and most people would say, "Well, you go up to the LaFayettes. They'll – they'll have room for ya." So therefore we always got along really well.

Several times throughout our conversation, Lewis reassured me that his grandfather and his family "never had no problems" being Black in rural Saskatchewan. His insistence struck me, especially in the face of historical reports of the actions and sentiments of the general public of the time (as mentioned earlier in this writing). However, trusting Lewis to know his story better than I, I did not argue, respecting him as my elder, nearly 60 years my senior. Upon further reflection and exploration into the lives of Black settlers, I believe I have a small window into his assurance. Great effort was exerted by the Black settlers to rise out of the shackles of the physical and psychological effects of discrimination and to forge a better life for themselves and for their children. They laboured to ensure their children could live with dignity and freedom. Petty demonstrations of racist sentiment were swiftly mitigated by stout kindness, the fruits of their own hard work, and the explicit coaching of their children to not succumb to the ignorance of others.

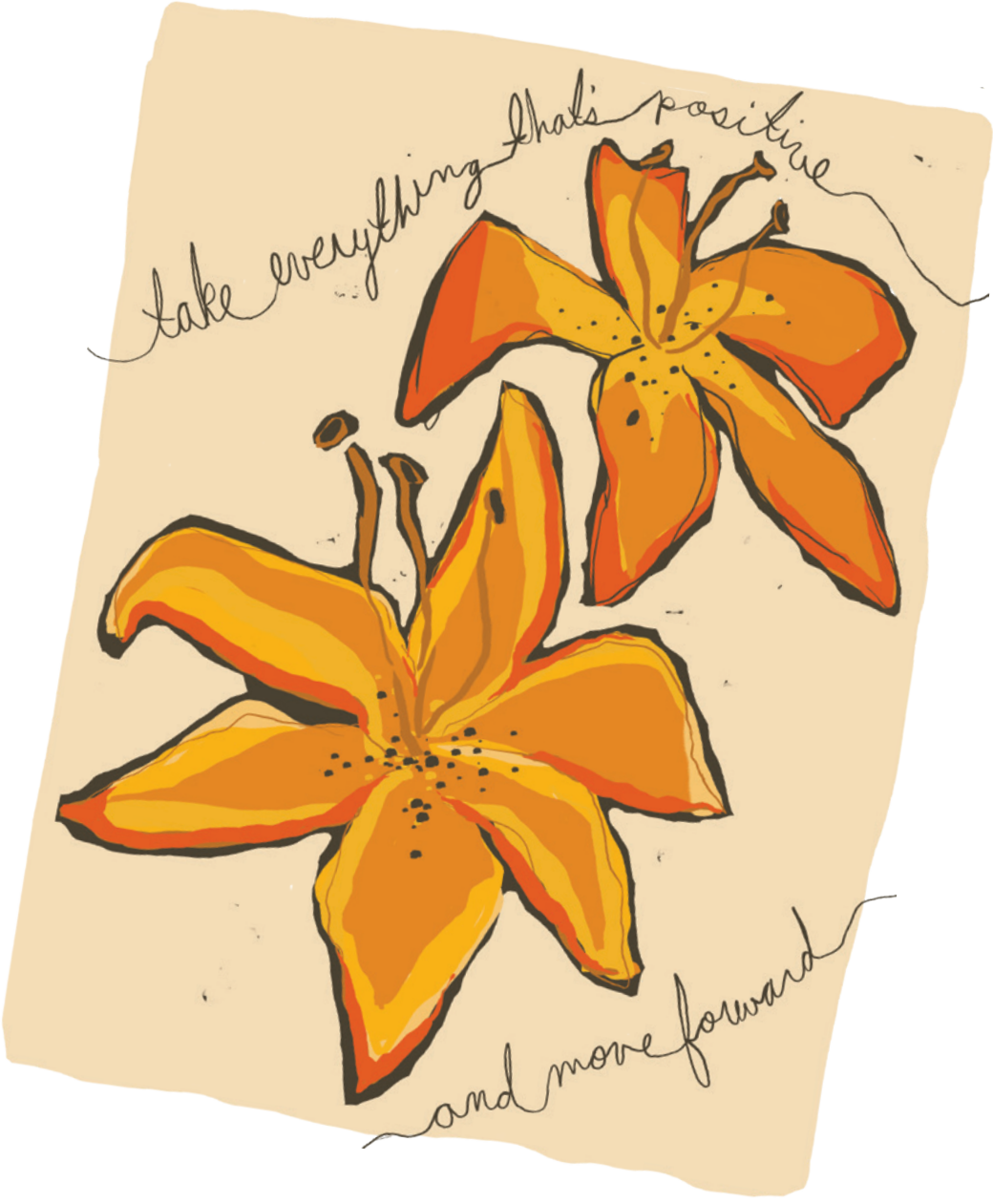
Carol LaFayette-Boyd, Lewis LaFayette's younger sister, and, at the time of this publication, executive director of the Saskatchewan African Canadian Heritage Museum, reflects on the advice given to her by her parents upon encountering children at school who "called her names:"

But it's kind of interesting. Like how I grew up… our parents taught us that if somebody calls you a name, it's because they feel bad about themselves. So we never thought about being Black. Like, we knew we were, but what we – I've been thinking a lot about that, because I never had a problem being Black. I think my one sister probably wished she wasn't at some point in time. Like, we hear of people saying – wishing they weren't Black, like kids wishing they weren't Black. I never ever wished that. I don't know why… but you knew you had a place right? With some people? That some people were prejudiced because they were

ignorant and stupid, right? So you don't deal with ignorant, stupid people. You just forget about them and go on your way. And you know, that's one person's house you don't go to because their dad is prejudiced. And you don't go to this one, because these people are like this. But I never internalized anything about being Black as negative. Do you know? 'Cause I think some people do, and I never did, like I – I just never did.

When invited to share more about her own days of rural schooling, she recalls fond memories of attending Oskaloosa School, built on her grandfather's property, and named after Oskaloosa, Iowa, the town where he lived before settling in Saskatchewan:

I attended this one room schoolhouse, but they closed it that year because there were only five kids in the school and they were all my brothers and sisters and I… I have just wonderful stories about them... We had to go seven and a half miles into school at Anglia. We walked most of the time home. If we got a ride, we walked home. Otherwise we took a horse and a buggy in the summertime. And if it was flooding, we rode horses. And my oldest sister and I had to leave a half hour before everybody else because we couldn't gallop. Well, we couldn't trot, I guess, or you know, gallop because it was too hard… we would take the wagon, a horse and wagon in the wintertime. My second oldest brother – he would make us play hooky sometimes, because he didn't like school. And we would hide out in the gravel pits. 'Cause you could go inside this gravel pit, and we would hide out in there. But I think that the last time we hid out, my brother and the neighbour were coming by on their horses. And when horses hear one another, they make noise. And I'll never forget my brother and sister. 'Cause the two horses we had, they were putting their hands over these horse's mouths to try and keep it– [she laughs] And then… we would eat our lunch and go to school at noon, and my brother would say "Oh, the horseshoe fell off the horse or the wagon fell off… the wheel went, fell off the wagon." So it was just a lot of fun. Just really a lot of fun living on the farm there.


take everything that's positive
and move forward

She muses further, with humour, yet sheds light on the racial prejudices she and her family had to face:

> *It was just fun. It was just fun… they built the school on [Grandfather's] property, but it was a municipality school. And both Black and White kids went there. And my grandfather's sister was trained as a teacher. She was fluent in German. She came up in 1920 to teach at the – the Shiloh school place there. So she taught there for five years. And she wanted to come down and teach at Oskaloosa. And the chairman of the board said "there's no way any –" I don't know what he called her, but, "a Black woman is teachin' my kids." So, she got mad – and she and her husband, who was one of the Shiloh people, went off to South America. And they ended up in Brazil actually. And, there was a – a coup in, I guess in Brazil after she arrived. And my grandfather, her brother, said she probably started it because she was so feisty.*

Families like the LaFayettes that lived outside of the major Black settlement of Maidstone were often the only families of colour for a hundred square miles or more. Many of the White settlers, especially of Eastern European descent, would have had little to no experience with people of African heritage. Jim Miller, grandson of Black pioneer Robert Miller Sr., who broke ground thirteen kilometers north of Prince Albert in 1910 (nearly 300 kilometers from the Maidstone settlement) reflects upon the experience of his father, Robert Theodore Miller, labouring as the only Black farmer in the region:

> *Well, I guess [the other farmers were] not used to seeing Black people in rural situations… Like, my dad when he was farming – that's what he did all his life… he would go places when he had a load of, y'know, cattle or pigs or whatever, and... they've never seen – when people haven't seen anything, they're – they're pretty curious, and they kind of look, right?*

Yet for Jim, who continues to homestead the property he grew up on, "just south" of the land where his pioneering grandfather broke ground, he recalls with a tinge of amazement and much fondness the community in which he was raised:

> *The Miller family side is pretty unique in the community.*

It's called Whitfield that we grew up in. And where my – y'know, that's where we homesteaded. A lot of times communities will settle with a lot of Ukrainian people, or a lot of French people or a lot of English people or a lot of German people, or, y'know, they – they kinda gather in one area sorta? In our area, it was a complete mixture of – of each of those that I just talked about, including us with being the Black family. So there was no, really the culture was, right from the beginning, was – was integrated, eh? Like it was a mix. And it just went on from that, so... And it's still… I mean – when there's a funeral… people still laugh at, y'know, after – If there's a luncheon after the funeral that there's a Whitfield table. They still sit together, like 100 years later, right?

When invited to share more about his grandfather's life on the homestead, Jim relates:

I think one of the questions we would ask is why – why my grandfather moved here? He was from the Chicago area. My mom's side of the family were very poor. Their side of the family was – I think [my grandfather's] younger sister had gone to university, actually. But his brother was a porter on the railway goin' across Canada... and Prince Albert was a stop, and when his brother stopped in Prince Albert, he really – he – liked it. He thought it was really good. So he's the one that convinced his brothers to – when he was home – y'know, to homestead in Prince Albert.

Jim Miller's mother was Helena Mayes, granddaughter of Joseph and Mattie Mayes. Jim reflects upon his family's triple pioneering heritage:

It is a little weird because the three Black families that homesteaded in Saskatchewan that seem to have people around were the Millers, Mayes and the LaFayettes. One [LaFayette] brother settled in Rosetown and the other in Athabasca. When my brother moved to Edmonton he met one of that particular family and married her. So in part, our family had connections to all three. On my mother's side her parents were John Mayes and Melvia Jackson. One day there will be some research done on that side of the tree to follow

*their history which has a very rich background and lots of uncovered stories.**

Jim was particularly expressive about his interest in uncovering more stories from the Miller family history and enthusiastic about any work done to reveal more of the family tree, a tree that very likely weaves many of the Black settler families together. It was certainly commonplace for the Black settler families to intermarry with one another. As previously described, the majority of Blacks who migrated en masse from Oklahoma settled in Amber Valley, Alberta and Eldon, Saskatchewan, near Maidstone. When looking for a spouse, one knew which community to check out first! Carol LaFayette-Boyd describes the search of her brothers for wives:

... You had to go to Alberta to get a wife because there were no – well, you could have gone to North Battleford, but there really weren't any there because they were mostly relatives or really close friends. So they had to go to Alberta to find a wife [laughs] – their first wives. And the same with my uncles and aunts. They had to go to Maidstone like the – the Shiloh people in Saskatchewan there, that Maidstone area, to get a husband or wife. Or to go to Alberta and get a husband or wife. My – and my aunt, she married a Black preacher, a traveling preacher, my aunt. But the other two aunts married Shiloh people. And two uncles married Shiloh people... and my aunt, yes, she married a Shiloh person too.

Cheryl Foggo, great-granddaughter of 1910 Maidstone settler, George W. Smith, is an author, playwright, and documentary filmmaker. Her seminal works are steeped in Black prairie history, a history of which she is deeply proud. When asked to reflect upon the Alberta and Saskatchewan Black communities she shares:

[The Alberta-Saskatchewan border] had very little meaning for my ancestors. Same with the border between Canada and the United States. People had their rooted experiences in particular places, but we never lost our connections. We never lost the shared elements of our African origins and heritage and traditions that come to us from probably 12 or 15 or 20 generations back. We still carry traits that came to us from Africa

* For those interested, Jim sent this reflection as an addendum to our recorded conversation. It will not be found in the original transcript.

and that were passed down to us, that don't have a border… We were in many ways always a community within this large landscape of North America or Turtle Island. Our community was large and inclusive of all of the different pieces that make us.

Though each family was unique, and their experiences as settlers nuanced and diverse, the early Black settlers in Canada undoubtedly retained within them the triumphs and wounds of their American heritage and their African roots. They broke ground in a foreign land in order to live with dignity, to thrive, and to lay a foundation of strength and perseverance for the generations to come. When asked "what does it mean to you to be Black and rural," Charlotte Williams, descendant of the first Black pioneers and a rural-dwelling Saskatchewanian herself, shares words that beautifully honour the legacy of all Black settlers:

What does it mean?... I guess I have a unique – I have a unique gift. I have a unique perspective, and so for me, all I can do is be positive. A positive part of the community, right? A positive role model, I try to be a role model to my youth… to use my unique background, my gifts, my opportunities to make a positive contribution to the community.

She offers this word of advice for Black individuals and families who seek to establish life for themselves in rural Saskatchewan as her own family has done for generations:

I think that if you can look back on your heritage, or your legacy, I would take everything that's positive, and move forward. And – don't dwell on anything negative because it's not worth dwelling on negativity. Take the things that are positive and build on those things. And then it can only benefit those people around you. It can only be a positive influence and, you know, encouragement to people around you.

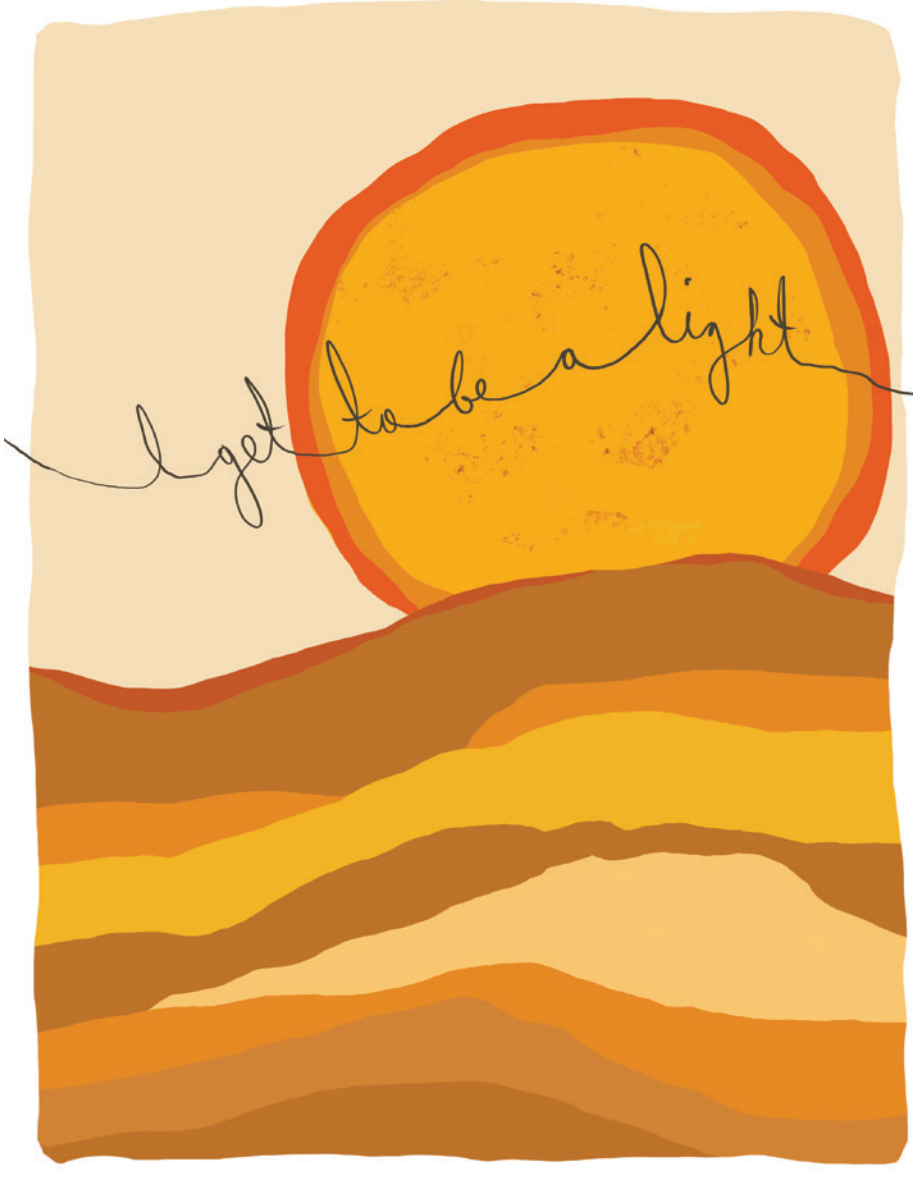
With this wise advice, built upon a foundation laid by the early Black settlers, let us now turn our attention to the contemporary experiences of Black Canadians who choose to live on the open plains of Saskatchewan.

PART III

Contemporary Black Voices in Rural Saskatchewan

It means everything to me to be Black and rural... I see it as a moment where you can shine... I have done so much in rural Saskatchewan, and I think it's because it gives you this opportunity to do whatever you wanna do, to be whatever you wanna be; to get involved in any way you can. It – it provides that. And I also know that because there's not so [many] Blacks, you want to represent your community, you want to represent your culture. And so I'm proud. I'm very proud to be in Saskatchewan, and to be [in] rural Saskatchewan at that. Not the big city, but to be rural. I mean, I – I couldn't be prouder. I couldn't be prouder. I couldn't be prouder. I couldn't be prouder."

- *Maria Cole-Gayle, Melville, SK*


I get to be a light

There is a certain pioneering spirit present in the Black men and women I interviewed who call rural Saskatchewan home today. Courage through hardship, hope and strength through strain, both great and subtle, are a part of the way-making stories of these individuals. It was my goal throughout the conversations to point us toward inner reflection on the experience of Black rural life, to place no assumptions upon what that experience would look like, and to leave the interviewees freedom to take their reflections wherever they deemed fit. Let us listen first to Maria Cole-Gayle of Melville.

Maria Cole-Gayle

My conversation with Maria Cole-Gayle was pure delight. Not only was she energetic, thoughtfully engaged, and full of life, she overflowed with gratitude for her life as a rural dwelling Black woman. Born and raised in Jamaica, Maria moved to Melville Saskatchewan in 2011 with her one year old daughter. She came to join her parents who had fallen in love with the quiet and quaint community only a short while previous and relocated from Winnipeg. She recalls what inspired them to make Melville home after visiting the town for the first time:

> *One of the reasons why they actually were sold [on] Melville, was because my dad had a briefcase, and so when he went to the realtor's office, they took him around, took him around, but he had forgotten his – his briefcase on a car in front of the realtor's office. And they drove him around, drove around, drove around, and then he realized, "Oh, my! I forgot my briefcase on the car." And after about maybe 30 minutes to an hour, 45 minutes, when he got back to the realtor's office, the briefcase was still there. And so he was – it was just such a total different experience from what he would have experienced had this been Winnipeg. So, they were just sold with – with this small town and, you know, the safety and stuff and they just went back home, decided they're puttin' their house up for sale, and sold their house and moved to Melville.*

To her mother's surprise, Maria decided to take the leap too after visiting her parents in Melville:

> *My mom was really shocked. She says, "You're moving*

here?" and I said, "Yeah, I am moving here." She was really surprised because, you know, from big – big city life, you know, it's different, right? But I was just so drawn to the peace... drawn to, you know, everything was such close proximity. You know, I could drive around in five minutes, not the long traffic. You know, it's like the flip side of – of big city life. Right? So I was really excited about that. And here I am 11 years later..."

Maria recalls that when she and her parents first lived in Melville the Black population was decidedly few:

When we moved here there was only one Black family that was living in Melville at the time. A doctor from Sudan with his family, about five kids. So, when my mom moved, she was the second Black. And so, by the time I got here, I was really the third Black family, right? The transition was different, was really different. I think at the time, Melville in terms of the population, they were not used to different cultures.

She reflects further:

So because of that I find that they – for a lot of people, they were very resistant in accepting Blacks at the time. I worked in banking. I had a hard time in banking. Lots of racism and stuff like that. While I was there, people would not come to my – my till, you know. Just... I would – I would go bowling, you know, decided I wanted to join a league, and, we're sitting, everybody, you know, whenever somebody, like, get a strike, right? You would go, "High five, high five, high five." You know, people would go, high five, high five, high five, skip me, and continue high five, high five. So it was – it was a challenge for me in the beginning, because it just seems like it was just – they were just not used to different cultures. And – and I myself at the time didn't – didn't see a lot of culture here. There was not really a lot of mix… Yeah, it was very difficult.

After eleven years in the town, however, Maria can attest to growth within her community. Though, as she says, eleven years ago seems only like yesterday, she has seen her town grow in terms of acceptance of people of different cultures. Some of this change is

likely due to the strength of Maria's own character and spirit. She is a compelling advocate for open communication and takes great pleasure in educating her community about her Caribbean heritage. She shares:

> *I think for me, when I look at... I – I try to understand people. I try to understand people. And I understand at the time that there was a lack of knowledge in terms of diversity. So I took the role of "there needs to be more awareness." So it didn't affect me, it didn't bug me. My mom on the other hand, was offended a lot by the way she was treated. But for me, I – I knew who I was, and, you know, I just... I know, I'm strong. I just knew who I am. I – I embrace. You know, and I just never take it offensive, I just... just say, you know, there's just need for more awareness, and obviously these individuals are not aware. And, you know, so I use different things to encourage me, that it's not me, but it is just that lack of awareness. You know, and so I – I was strong throughout the whole thing. And I also understood at the time – I also understood too, that it was not everybody. Because on the flip side, there were some great people who embraced me, you know, who were there for me, and, you know, they saw me as just a normal person, right? So, so I think when you have those experiences, you just choose which one to move forward with, right? And – and I think that's what allowed me to be grounded and strong and just move on.*

Interestingly, though Maria stands strong in her Caribbean heritage as a cultural minority in her town, she does not bemoan her lack of Caribbean community. She shares:

> *I think for me, it's different. For me, I love my background. I love – you know I'm Jamaican. I love being a Jamaican and everything. I am not one that is drawn to living in a community where there's a lot of my culture. I am not. My sisters, on the other hand, enjoy that. I don't. And I think it's because I have embraced different cultures. I have seeked to just explore Canada and be in Canada. And so for me… I would feel like I would be missing... I would be missing the Canadian experience – I'm not drawn to bein' so much around my culture because I grew up with my*

culture, I know who they are, I know how they operate. And... and I have migrated for a different experience. So I feel like I'll be robbing myself of that experience. Whenever I want to embrace my culture, I go back home, where I can totally engulf in the experience and it reminds me of, you know, when I was young. That's what I want. I feel like if I do that here, I would feel like I'm back home. And I would have lost that experience... So yeah, that's just my experience.

Even when relating the challenges of living in small town Saskatchewan, Maria spoke about living rurally with incredible enthusiasm and warmth. When given the opportunity to offer a word of wisdom to Black individuals and families newly moving to rural Saskatchewan, she gives advice that mirrors the words of multi-generational Canadian, Charlotte Williams:

I would first encourage them to know who you are. You are who you are. When you move to a small town, you take advantage of all the opportunities that there are. All the opportunities, you take advantage of that. If you're an entrepreneur, you go start your business. If you want to get involved, get involved… And so I think that's so important for – for a Black family comin' in, to just understand that – that you can do whatever you wanna do. You can be whatever you wanna be in a small town. You know, you're gonna see so many opportunities – so much opportunity to take advantage of. And take advantage of it because not everybody will accept you. But some will. So, focus on the some that will. Look at the positive side, not the negative side, not the negative side at all.

Maria next shared words with me that filled my own rural-dwelling self with courage. They resonated with me so richly that they are intentionally printed here twice. She concludes her reflections on being Black and rural with these words:

It means everything to me to be Black and rural… I see it as a moment where you can shine... I have done so much in rural Saskatchewan. And I think it's because it gives you this opportunity to do whatever you wanna do, to be whatever you wanna be; to get involved in any way you can. It – it provides that. And I also know that because there's not so [many] Blacks,

you want to represent your community, you want to represent your culture. And so I'm proud. I'm very proud to be in Saskatchewan, and to be rural Saskatchewan at that. Not the big city, but to be rural. I mean, I – I couldn't be prouder. I couldn't be prouder. I couldn't be prouder. I couldn't be prouder."

Yemi Laosebikan

For a Black family moving into a rural community, I think the first thing is to – to be clear about who you are, and, just get that – that sorted out, your identity. And be clear in your mind what that is. The second thing is step out there, know that you are adding value. You are bringing something into – into the community. The impression, the narrative that you may be given, or that you may sense is that you're coming to take away from the community. Know that you are bringing something of value. And that something is valuable. What you bring is valuable. So you've got to – you've got to know that."

- Yemi Laosebikan, Melfort, SK

Dr. Yemi Laosebikan, like Maria Cole-Gayle, embraces his life as a rural dwelling Saskatchewanian from a position of strength and security in his cultural identity. Yemi, Nigerian born, moved to Melfort in 2004. He, alongside his wife and two young children, travelled from Pietermaritzburg, South Africa where he worked as a physician. When the opportunity to take his practice to a Canadian community came to the fore, he welcomed it as valuable work experience. He shares with a chuckle:

I Googled a little bit about Melfort. And the first thing that came – that hit me was, it was Melfort "city," and living in Pietermaritzburg… I just equated it to the same status, city status. The population of Pietermaritzburg is in the millions. So I thought, "Oh, I'm going into another city," and got a little bit of a rude awakening when we drove into Melfort.

Melfort's population of just under 6000[15] was not the only shock upon arrival. Yemi's wife, who was charmed by the notion of prairie

living through the classic series *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder was excited for the move. However, the first few minutes on Saskatchewan soil almost proved their undoing:

> *We flew into Saskatoon airport at night. The kids were one and a half and four and a half years old, so we allowed everybody to disembark. So we were the last to get off the plane. My wife was handling the kids and I handled the baggage. I was leading them and stepped outside of the – the plane onto the walkway, and there was this little gap between the walkway and the plane, and I think the minus 15 wind hit me and I ran back into the plane. My wife was startled, "what happened?" and I told her, "Nothing. But just make sure you're well covered before you step out." If I had not committed to coming that would have been a deal breaker. I would have just turned back the following day. Because I had not – I did not expect it to be that cold. So that was a shocker… My wife hates the cold – still hates the cold.*

Despite the pains of adjusting to a prairie winter, Yemi recalls what moved him the most about his new home upon arrival:

> *We've met lots of wonderful people that have helped us integrate from the very first day we landed. One of the things that endeared me in particular to this place is how we were received when we landed. It was my facility administrator that came to pick us up at the airport. I am not used to the head of a facility coming to – to do that in person. If that would be done, they would organize someone to do it. But I felt that personal touch, and it just placed that person into that place of respect for me, and she went outside of her way into ensuring that the basic minimum that we needed was provided. We – we got into Melfort, there was a – a so-called Welcome Wagon that came to meet us a couple of days after we had settled into our accommodation, to, you know, give us a hamper of basic things to settle in. Coupons to get what we needed in the store and tell us… what is what, where is what, in town.*

In the months immediately following their arrival, Yemi was immersed in his work. The initial challenges of integrating into a new community were largely postponed and even mitigated by the

all-consuming nature of his occupation. All the same, there were palpable hurdles to navigate in establishing himself professionally in the Melfort Hospital:

> *Yeah, there were some challenges. You came across some patients who hadn't seen a Black person before, and before you knew it, they touched your hair; they – they asked you different questions about where you from, and what it's like to be – to be Black, so to speak. There were those who questioned or had concerns about my qualifications, and... after you know, they needed some reassurance... and so on. Of course, again, coming into a new working environment you had some co-workers that, again, were suspect of how you did things until they got to understand you, how you spoke, the so-called accent issue…*

He recalls a particularly sobering experience with a medical institution on his very first day in Canada that darkened his perception of the professional community:

> *... I was working on my registration… and… did not expect to experience any – any racial onslaught at that level. But the last comment that I – that I heard there was that "if you break any of our laws," the officer said, "I would not hesitate to withdraw your license, and you will join people like you driving taxis in town." And that was like, "Whoa... I came voluntarily, I... have a place to go back to if I need to go back. Driving a taxi is never an option in my existence." I mean, you know, I could choose to, but to be forced to – I had lots of other options other than coming to Canada. So to assume that that was my only option left was, quite, shocking. But, again, it gave me an insight into the mindset of the people that I was coming to work with… it just gave me an insight as to what to expect in the environment.*

Eighteen years later, Yemi is now established in his practice in Melfort as a general surgeon, his wife's career is also stable, and his children both attend the University of Saskatchewan. When invited to reflect upon whether Melfort felt like "home" he immediately reflected upon his children:

> *[This] is the place they know as home… We traveled*

back to Nigeria, I believe in 2007, three years after we – we got to Canada and Melfort just to spend Christmas with our parents and siblings and their cousins... So, my youngest really does not like the heat. He developed heat rash from the – right from the very first day we landed at home in Nigeria. He could only just go about in his tank top. And we were using lots of, what do you call it? Powder, to – to help him and cream to help him with the reaction. So it was a bit of a struggle for him. But, you know, we enjoyed our ten days at home. So, come January we're flying back into Canada, and we're landin' in Saskatoon, and he looks outside the window and sees snow. And he goes "Yay! We are home!" We were depressed at the sight of the snow, and he was excited about it. So... so, for – for the kids, Melfort is home.

He then reflects upon his own experience and that of his wife:

... For us too, we – we've been here for 18 years and I think the – if you really want to enjoy yourself, you need to learn to adapt. So even if the place is not perfect, you adapt to the situation that is your reality. So we've – we've adapted to Melfort, and we cannot deny that it is home for us. There – there's a saying that the grass is always greener on the other side. When you get there, you find out that oops, it's not as green as you thought it was.

He muses further upon how the climate and land of Saskatchewan, once so oppressive to him, are becoming increasingly beloved:

I'm beginning to enjoy the seasons… you see the colour change in fall and then you come across wildlife, you know… running across the road that you have to avoid or you see from afar, you stop, take pictures, and, every spring with the farm – farm implements working every harvest, there's always something new. Lots of pictures to take, so... yes, over the years I've come to enjoy the seasons, and the landscape, and the changes. So, even though yes, it's winter, it's cold… the snow falls too, the different snowflakes that fall… you just begin to appreciate the – the beauty that each day brings. It's never the same...

Throughout our conversation, Yemi did not hesitate to give word to the many merits of the Melfort community. At the time of our interview, Yemi was visiting Toronto. The demands and pace of that metropolis inspired further reflection from him on the joys of rural communities:

> *I don't like the hustle and bustle of big cities. It just makes me go crazy… I love the – the peace and quiet of rural. The fact that you almost know everybody, even though I don't – even in my small Melfort, I don't know a lot of people, but, I know that if – if something happens to me, somebody that knows me will be there in the next couple of minutes, so I feel safer. And it also helps me… you know, what I do [as a doctor], I can quickly see the effect of it… it doesn't get lost in the many things that's happening.*

When asked to offer a word of advice to a Black individual or family immigrating to rural Saskatchewan he admits that his experience coming to Melfort with a professional job put him at an advantage and recalls meeting other immigrants who face challenges that he was spared. When asked to share a word of advice for new Black immigrants to rural Saskatchewan he encourages them to network with others who share their ancestry even if they are outside of the community in which they dwell:

> *… because we need that support. We need that balance. Seek them out and identify with them. It's – it's a bit tasking, because we – we learn we're living in two worlds, so to speak, but it's necessary while we are here. If one was in a bigger city, I guess, it would be a lot easier. Theoretically, it looks a lot easier, because you get to see more people like you. And it gives a false sense that you are okay. But if you still don't interact, you will be missing out on a lot of things. I think we have been fortunate. Our experience shows that livin' in a smaller community allows you to establish yourself quicker and better than if you were in a bigger city. You stand out. You're – and if you're doing good work, people see it, people acknowledge it. Of course if you are not doing good work, it also stands out, but your – your chances of progressing, appear to be better.*

At the close of our conversation, I invited Yemi to share any

reflections that lingered within him. Of his own accord he chose to express gratitude for the work of *Black and Rural Saskatchewan* and our aim of recording stories of rural dwelling Black Saskatchewanians. He shares:

> *One of the things that we have not done well... and I think it's a cultural thing… is that we have not documented our stories; we have not documented our experiences; we have trusted too much in oral tradition, which is valid only in our own culture. And unfortunately, we live in another civilization that we have very little control of. And in this civilization, it is what is written, that is the fact.*

He elucidates this sentiment from a unique position of intersection between Melfort Black history and his own lived reality. Dr. Alfred Schmitz Shadd is celebrated as the first Black physician in Saskatchewan (among several other noteworthy accomplishments). He served in Melfort from 1904 - 1915.[16] Yemi reflects upon the presence of Shadd's legacy in the town:

> *… I must say, that for all that he gave Melfort, the only identity that he may have, the only thing we have to remember him, is a – a road named after him. And if you do not know who he is, that does not even tell you anything about him. There is a little thing erected in the parking lot of the hospital, that's very dated. And until – again, this is a hospital that I've worked at for 18 years... until my attention was brought to it this year, I did not know that that was what that was about. So he did so many things in – in Melfort, Saskatchewan. He brought electricity; he brought water and sewer; he brought the hospital; he helped with the Chamber – launching the Chamber of Commerce; He... he did a lot of things and yet he is not visible. He is not visible in Melfort. So until we start talking about these things nobody will know. Until we start writing our own stories, it will be the wrong information that will be out there. So, I really appreciate this work and I hope that this will just be the beginning of many more to come.*

Nastra Muloyawi

> *I'm proud to be Black. I'm very proud to be Black, very. I can't ever change my skin for nothing. Nothing. I'm very proud of my culture with everything. Yes... it's mean – it's mean a lot for me, because it's like I represent my country here. Yes, because if they see me, they see my country jointly. "These people from Congo." Congolese woman, yes I am. Yes. No small Congo, the big Congo. Yes I am.*
>
> - Nastra Muloyawi, Watrous, SK

Nastra Muloyawi and her mother Josephine Tambwe Feza Kabibi relocated five years ago to Watrous, Saskatchewan from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Nastra works with her mother who is an accomplished copper relief artist whose work has been featured in international trade shows in Burkina Faso as well as locally in Saskatchewan.

> *[I] came here with my mom, as refugees. So I think it was a cooperation with the government of Saskatchewan with the community of the Watrous and Manitou. They accept us to come live here. So, that was the beginning to come live in the first place we live in Canada.*

During our conversation, Nastra was an attentive and focused partner. I was continually impressed by her expressed determination to immerse herself in English speaking situations, such as our interview, an activity daunting even for native English speakers. She, however, refuses to let the barrier of language deter her from her goals. When asked about the experience of moving to Watrous she shares,

> *... I find it was very nice for me because I from the French country and I live – I can't leave the English town, so I need to be connecting with the people who speak English because I will speak French. I don't need to speak French anymore. So I need speak the language of where I live. So that was why I'm always connecting with the people who speak English, so they can help me with my English. So we just be – to be in the same direction as them.*

I asked Nastra to share about the experience of being one of the

only Africans in her new community. She shares about the constant questions she would receive from the locals:

> *Yes, there was like, "Where do you come from? Why do you come live in Watrous? Why do you come just – why just do you prefer to come live in Watrous? Why?" So, so many questions, so – "Do you like Watrous? How did you find Watrous? Because it's a small town. So, we know the people, when they came in Canada, they like you, in big city, why do you come small town?" So my answer is be like, "This small town is no bad. So... like, my mom have place to work. That is good enough for me."*

Though she expressed no rush, Nastra was not shy about her desire to relocate to a bigger city one day where she hopes to find better work opportunities for herself that align with the education she has done. Before moving to Watrous, she lived in Burkina Faso where she studied business communication in university.

> *I studied business communication, but, like, it was in French. It was very difficult to find a job. And when I came here, I think after five years, I see my level in English, it's good enough to go to university. So now I'm studying administrative assistant from Saskatoon Business College.*

Until she realizes the goal of relocating to a larger city, she works in Watrous with her mother, supporting the astonishing craft of copper relief art. When asked about the community's response to her mother's work, she shares:

> *They always be curious to know what is that. Because it was like – when we came here it was like, the first time for – couple people they see the copper and they say, "A woman do that?" They was very, very surprised. I think it's like the first time to see the – the – copper relief, so they was very surprised.*

Nastra was relentlessly positive about her experience and interactions in Watrous. She shares,

> *Everybody they're kind. So, very well. The community, they accepted us, they was treat us very well. No problem with anybody. So we just keep the good relationship. Very good.*

At the same time she sheds light on the challenges of making a life in her rural community:

> *The difficult is… the first it was language. The second, because if you need the – like you know, the Africa people, they like eat the food from Africa [chuckles]. So we like fufu*. So, if we don't eat fufu, it's impossible. So, if you – [laughs]. We – we like fufu. No fufu it's like, "I'm not eating anything." So if we need to buy the – the food from Africa, we need to go in Saskatoon. So if you don't have anyone, just to bring you there, it's very difficult, very difficult.*

Traveling to a big city to find stores that carry "ethnic foods" was a point of mirth between Nastra and I. The topic led to a line of discussion about interactions with other Africans and her desire (or lack thereof) for a sense of Congolese community. She shares:

> *For me… [chuckles] I'm good. I'm good. So it's good enough for me,to be honest… Because for me, I find some Black people they don't help Black people. If you, like you're new, if they can just show you the way what you can do – like, "You come here, you can do this, you can do that." Some people they will not help you. They will put you down. When you have – if the people they from – they live here – like, they Canadian – they will show you, "You mustn't do that. Not that, but this way. No, don't do that." And they will not follow your life. So it's not like if the bad people they will know everything about you, what you do, when you eat the day, did you take shower today – what did you can wear it tomorrow... So, I don't like this business. So... like they said in my country, they say, "When you come the – the new country, be connecting with the people from this country, not with the people that from the same country. They will not help you." So that's the reality I just keep in my mind. If I have come some place I just took in the people who live there. Because if I ask some questions, they will have me. So, I think it's much better just to stay in my corner, and looking the people that can help me, not the people that will put me down.*

* Fufu, meaning "mash or mix", is a dough-like staple food typically made of ground plantains, yams, cassava (or other tubers) and boiled water. It is common in many West African countries

She ends this reflection stating:

> *That is why I always be... little bit distanced. But if [other Congolese] have some event, they call us, we go. But to be with them anytime, every day. No. That is not really my business to be honest.*

I listened intently to Nastra's straightforward, honest perspective on connection to "her own" Congolese community and couldn't help but muse after all the stories that lay beneath her sentiments. When encouraged to share more, she chose to lay the subject to rest, which I respected. Yet, when given the opportunity to answer the question "what does it mean to you to be Black and rural," she answered with great dignity:

> *It's mean a lot. I'm proud to be Black. I'm very proud to be Black, very. I can't ever change my skin for nothing. Nothing. I'm very proud of my culture with everything. Yes... It's mean – it's mean a lot for me, because it's like I represent my country here. Yes, because if they see me, they see my country jointly. "These people from Congo." Congolese woman, yes I am. Yes. No small Congo, the big Congo. Yes I am. Yes.*

From this place of pride, I asked Nastra for the advice she would share with a new African immigrant to a small town. She didn't skip a beat, beginning lightheartedly:

> *Did you tell them that Saskatchewan is very cold? [laughs] Sometimes we have the winds, they are 50. Did you tell them? No? [laughs] You must tell them to live in Saskatchewan, you must dress warm.*

She goes on, sharing advice that gives us a window into the grit and determination she has brought to the fore in order to carve out a life for herself:

> *If they came in Saskatchewan, they must be very, very strong; and they must focus with what they can do here… but if you know what I came to do here, you will be the winner. So, be polite with everybody… focus with your project, or of your business; if you come studying… be honest. You know, I came here for study, I'm not coming here to play games. 'Cause we don't have the same ambition. You know what you can do here? I know what I can do here. So, if you come*

just like, see the Canada, see the snow, that is your problem. If you know just to come here to say how cold it is in Saskatchewan, that is your problem too. But if you know, "I came here to do something," that is wonderful.

Her words, at heart, are words of advice for immigrants everywhere, yet she elucidates also the merits, and setbacks, of moving to a small town:

So, before you came in Canada… you must know something just to do with your 10 fingers. You must know. You can't just fear or do nothing. Small town…. is good because it help – you can save money because the house is not very expensive... It help you to be focused with your project, because no very noising, no very virus, no very crazy time. Everything is quiet. It help you for many, many things... So, that is for the small town. But the – something is cheap is food [chuckles]. Food and clothes. Because if you need the shop you will have to go in Saskatoon. Otherwise, everything is nice.*

Jane Ibisiki

I was telling my friend, I don't know what it would take for me… to get into politics, but if I wanted to, I wanna be able to have a – a platform where I can speak for immigrants, you know?

-Jane Ibisiki, Shaunavon, SK

At the time of our interview, Jane Ibisiki was nowhere near Saskatchewan. She was in Nigeria, the land of her birth, for the first time in eleven years. At the beginning of our interview she informed me that she had returned to Nigeria for her father's burial. I was humbled. She assured me, however, that she wanted to carry through with our conversation. In no short order, I could see why. Despite the grief within her, she spoke with passion and clarity, especially in advocacy for immigrants in rural communities.

She launched our conversation by describing the process of

* The virus she refers to is Covid-19, a prevalent feature of society at the time of our interview.

investigating Shaunavon, Saskatchewan, where she lived for 2 years, and the shock of encountering small town business hours:

> *So, before moving to Shaunavon I lived in Saskatoon for close to 5 years. And... prior to moving to Shaunavon, I searched online for like, you know, "What kind of grocery stores do they have here?" and "How – how would shopping for my African dishes or African spices be like?" you know? I was trying to prepare myself to see if I needed to get some things from Saskatoon to go with me, and, you know, just to know how often I need to come to the city to get things, right? My first – my first two nights in Shaunavon, I found all the stores close at 5 pm. And the grocery stores close at 7 pm. Like, "No way. Walmart in Saskatoon closes at 10, and Superstore is still open at like 9 o'clock. Why is this store closed?" So, it took me a while to get used to the differences. Like, you – we only had a Co-op store, and... it limited the kind of things you can get, right, in the small town.*

As Nastra Muloyawi alluded to in our conversation, food and the ability to prepare dishes from one's country of origin is a tangible source of connection and comfort while navigating a new society. Jane shares:

> *Cooking just helps me... pretty much reminds me of where I'm from. So, I recall, I always try to remind myself of home when I make my Nigerian dishes and all of that. Yeah, cooking is one of my cultural... of bringing a cultural identity on scene. 'Cause like, even when I went to BC for this contract job I had to go with some Nigerian spices that I couldn't do without [chuckles]. And then every time I ordered take out I would sprinkle my spices on there just to give me that feeling of home, you know?*

Discussing food and comfort naturally led our conversation to talk of "home," what it is, and how it feels. She shares, reflecting on the word:

> *It depends on what sense [of the word] right? Because... I think of when I go to Superstore and I try to find something that's a little Nigerian. It takes a little bit... 'Cause, like, I think one time we had – they*

had some Nigerian kind of yam in Superstore and it felt like Christmas! Because having that yam in Superstore... it will save us a lot… sometimes, I do my quarterly – quarterly shopping for African food and all of that. So, with those yams it's really expensive to get them from the African store, right? Or I think if – if I were to be fair, living in small town Saskatchewan, sometimes I – sometimes I don't really feel that representation on the scene. I don't really feel the representation. But, like, I feel like in the city, because of how much of the population they have there, y'know, they're trying to find representation for them. But for me... it depends, I think it depends. Because I guess I have to tell myself that I don't think any other person will make me feel at home if I don't make myself feel at home wherever I find myself, right?

The subject of adequate representation as a means of creating a sense of belonging was significant for Jane. Though she recognized the difference in city versus rural demographics, she expressed her frustration with the lack of adequate representation at the rural Newcomer Welcome centre she attended,

So... with the – the Newcomer Welcome Centre… having volunteered with them and having gone to some programs… I feel the representation for Africans, it's a little... less. I feel like there's the – the, what's it called? The effort and then the approach they put into it is what counts, you know? Because I remember... we would see every other country flagging – never see a Nigerian flag or whatnot... so… so, if this is where I feel like the thought is not put into place I try to, you know, just express myself and let them know that do – you know, do this, do this, and do this more, you're opening the door for that conversation. You're opening grounds for more people to feel more welcome and all of that.

Jane recalls her own struggles to find employment and to gain permanent residency while in Shaunavon due to a general lack of awareness about the realities immigrants face:

I tried to apply for a second job while I was there, and this guy, who was an employer, had no idea what it meant for me as an immigrant to have a work permit.

So, I submit my work permit and he goes, "Are you in Canada illegal – or what is your secret?" I'm like, "It's supposed to be, I have to give to my employer if I apply for a job." He goes, "I don't want your papers. Do you not have a social insurance number?" I'm like, "I do have one." I give him my social insurance number, and it's different than the usual Canadian one. He goes, "This is wrong. You don't have the right one." I'm like, "No, it is…" They don't understand the process of what it means to hire an immigrant and all of that. That's why when it was time for me to apply for permanent residency, and my employer in front of us said, "We can't help you. We don't want to get involved with immigration." I just knew it was time for me to move, right?

Despite her frustrations, she shared with levity and mirth, her fondness for the land on which she lived:

So, like, in Shaunavon… there's this massive land, space, you know, and… coming from Nigeria, you don't see landscape like that, because any – any land that we see, somebody's given a house on top of that land space… On my days off I would go for a drive round, you know, and just scream, and like sing, and just [chuckles]... even go for a walk most times and just like, embrace nature. Like, one time I went for – it was called a maze. So, we went to this farm… and at first I was like, "Why am I gonna go walk – walk in bushes. Like, what am I doing this for?" But when I got there and I – I realized that it was so beautiful... and I think for me, I would enjoy having that compared to living in the city where there's just too much traffic, or like, noise of cars and trains and buses. I would enjoy living in small town. You know, just enjoying nature, the breeze, you know, fresh air, and all of that. So yeah. You know, massive lands in those small towns was one thing I really admired a lot.

She relates also, her fondness for the quality of community that can be found in rural communities and how the tight knit connections remind her of being home in Nigeria:

So like, for me what it means is that in a rural town or rural community, you get more out of that community

than you actually give… I feel like the – the friendships I made, the connections I make... because of how small the community and the town is, they respect each other more. And we tried to make that friendship work for better living than in the city where, you know, "Oh, I might never see this person again," right? And like, bump into each other maybe in Superstore in two, three years. But in – like for example, one of my African friends in Swift Current go to Saskatoon and Regina, and he's just trying to catch up with me – I might stop by the African store, "What can I get for you? Or, what would you like?" And then if I go, I'm like, "Here, I'll be going to the city tomorrow. Send me your list, order your things, I'll pick it up for you, and I'll bring this for you." See that? So just, make that bond… Somebody cooks and invites every other person to come eat. So, it just reminds me of home. I'm home. Like I'm home right now, right? And I haven't cooked one day. I've been home a week now. I have not cooked. Auntie brings food. My uncle says, "You are to bring food," and Auntie brings food to me [chuckles].

When asked to answer the question, "What does it mean to you to be Black and rural?" she answers readily:

Oh wow. For me, what it means for me to be Black and rural is, I get to be a light… I get to be a light to people who do not have an understanding of what it means to be African, right?... Being African and Black in the rural community, oh my god it's – it's still beautiful for me. It – y'know, sometimes it has its challenges, but then if you find – find your circle, right? Find your circle and know how to nurture that circle very well, right?

She goes on:

... It's given me joy. I don't know why, but it gives me joy. You know, because to have that experience to live in the city and then in rural communities. I haven't... what's the word? It gives me a better understanding to appreciate opportunities that I'm – that I get, and am being granted, right? I get to go to the farm and get fresh food and don't have to go to Superstore, and, you know, struggle for tomatoes or whatever, it's – you get

first dibs from the farm…

When asked to share a word of advice for a Black individual or family newly moving to rural Saskatchewan she offers this:

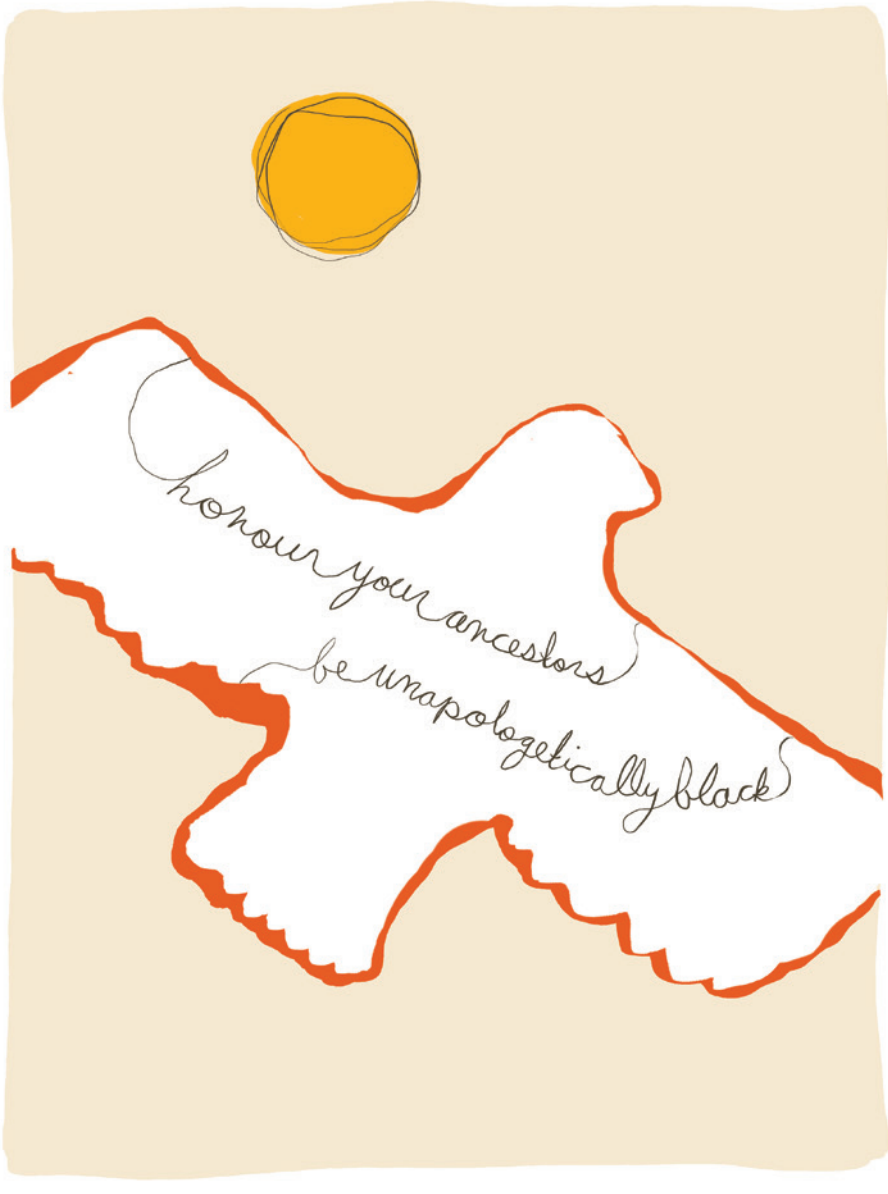
> *Oh wow. My advice would be... be open minded, and... do it. Be open minded in the sense that people have expectations, right? Just free yours – have this free – this free mind of, you know what? Like I told myself, see this as an adventure. Right?... So set your goals and go for it. It's an adventure; it's an experience; it's a process in your journey of life. But a lot of people think, "Oh, living in a rural town means I'm without the fun of living in the city." Oh no. No, no, no, no. Living in a rural town teach you different experience, teach you different identity, teach you different perspective of what it means to be in Saskatchewan.*

Before the end of our conversation, I asked Jane if there were any final reflections she wanted to share. I'm glad I did. She once again spoke in support of creating more awareness and thoughtful action for immigrant newcomers arriving in rural Saskatchewan:

> *I hope, you know, the provincial government, like the MPs, the MLAs, the mayors, get more understanding of what it means to have opportunities for immigrants to come into a small rural town. Don't just want – Don't just have opportunities for doctors and nurses and all of that. Make more support opportunities for other people to come too, right? And I think another thing is, I'll – I hope for a day where employers, managers, supervisors will understand what it means to have diversity in the workplace. Right? Because as much of Black people who already here, we still have more people who do not understand that. Right? And I just, you know, I hope for that day, that more immigrants will have the badge, you know, sense of belonging when they go to a job…*

PART IV

"Black and Rural" Meets Indigenous Truth



In order for the work of *Black and Rural Saskatchewan* to stand with its full integrity, I must bring to light a voice that is palpably missing. While researching the historical context that predated the early Black settlers I was moved to tears by the colonial realities faced by the Indigenous people of the plains. Once recognized, I was halted in my tracks as the weight of a deafening silence throughout the *Black and Rural Saskatchewan* conversations hit me. Not a single dialogue touched upon interaction with Indigenous peoples and Indigenous ways upon this land. It simply "never came up." The silence was painfully telling. I immediately reached out to Heritage Saskatchewan, who originally commissioned this work, for support in finding interviewees of Indigenous heritage who would be willing to share with me their reflections on Black settlement (and settlement in general) upon their land. Their voices must now, rightfully, be woven into our story.

Christine Fiddler, a Cree woman and proud mother of two Black-Indigenous children, grew up in northwest Saskatchewan, in the Waterhen Lake First Nation community. She is deeply connected to her Cree heritage and her people's history upon their traditional land. In fact, at the time of this publication, she is a PhD Candidate at the University of Saskatchewan studying Indigenous history. She shares:

> *The focus topic I chose is to look at the history of traditional healing and traditional medicines that have been used since the early 1900s when our band – our communities – signed a treaty in 1921 and became a reserve up until the 1970s. So all through the time after treaty, the government was imposing colonialism measures like residential schools, day schools, the pass system – not fulfilling treaty promises like they were supposed to, and all these things. So all of those have impacted how our traditional medicines and healing practices kind of disappeared – not disappeared but they became less practiced up until today. They are still practiced but not to the extent that they were before. And today our First Nations people have the poorest health outcomes of society, so it's really – it's really interesting to look at how that happened, where we were once really healthy, we didn't have diseases and how that developed over the years.*

Her people carried the burden of treaties left unfulfilled while Black

settlers laboured to establish their own homesteads on traditionally Indigenous land. Christine later reflects upon the intersection of Black presence on the plains and her own family history from a point of immediate connection – her children are half Sudanese. When asked for a word of wisdom for a Black Canadian living in rural Saskatchewan she shares from a recent conversation with her daughter:

> *In answer to your last question, and also after talking to my daughter, as First Nations people it seems to be easier to connect with Black people in Canada than other non-Indigneous people. The friendships come naturally and trust is built more easily. I'm not clear why this is. Possibly because of shared experiences as people who experience marginalization/racism, similar understandings of cultural practices and kinship relations...*

She goes on, reflecting upon Black wellness while a cultural island in their rural spaces:

> *How people of African ancestry can possibly find wellness alone, living on the plains, is to simply spend time out on the land if they have that opportunity. Again, to build relations with First Nations. Find those connections and usually First Nations are willing to share our knowledge of the land. Learning about the plants and how they can be gathered and used helps a person to spend more time out on the land. Or visiting historical sites is another option, learning the histories of nearby areas as it concerns First Nations and early settlement.*

Randy Morin is a Cree storyteller, author, activist and language keeper. My conversation with him was spirit-moving. Articulate and passionate, he educated me from a place of strength, grounded in humility, on the egregious injustices faced by his people at the hands of a shortsighted, selfish colonial system:

> *I appreciate the people that suggested my name to you. I always say that I don't know everything and because we're always learning, each and every day, no one is perfect. No one has that perfect knowledge, I guess. And so, I – I will tell you my truth, I will share with you what little knowledge I know in hopes that it will*

help you. In hopes that it will help people. We – we need this country to unite, you know. There's just too much separation, too much hatred, too much division between peoples. Especially toward the original peoples of the land. There's just way too much hatred being directed at us. From many, many people. Even the newcomers that come onto this land – they hear the narrative that Indigeous peoples – the history of this land has been written from the colonizers' perspective for many years. It was taught in the school system that this land was empty, you know, that the people were savages, that we had no spirituality, that we had no laws, no education systems, that we were aimlessly wandering this land and we were uncivilized, and that we lived very short, brutal lives.

This is the very narrative that paved the way for settlers of all hues to come and start life anew on the "untouched lands" of the plains. The early Black settlers, so often overlooked in the history books, could only make their way to Saskatchewan due to the gross misrepresentation of the Indigenous peoples of the land – and the silencing of their voice – that justified colonial presence upon it. From this place of sobering recognition, I asked Randy, as I asked Christine, to offer a word of advice to Black Canadians living rurally in Saskatchewan. He begins:

This world with its rapidly expanding technologies is really, really severing our ties to who we truly are as humans, as spirit beings… You know, we believe the earth is alive, we believe the thunder is alive, the fire is alive, the wind is alive, we believe the rock is alive, we believe the animals, that the insects, and the birds are our relatives, that they deserve a place, you know, they deserve a home, a sanctuary, a place where they feel safe… the destruction of our mother earth is alarming… We need to do more, you know, we need to listen to Indigenous peoples. We need to support Indigenous peoples. And to… learn to love and appreciate Indigenous peoples for our contributions to this world.

He goes on:

… So acknowledge the land you're on by learning a land acknowledgement, learn an Indigenous language, you know, make friends with Indigenous people. Like,

> *oftentimes, you know, the most hardened, the most desperate of Indigenous peoples, once they can trust, you become the most loving, the most loyal people that you can have in your life. We are a frayed people but we just, through – through history, our trust has been broken so much that we have hardened our hearts to hope that the world can still be better.*

His words moved me. I could not help but ask Randy to offer me a specific word – and Black Canadians like me – who are deeply drawn to living close to the land and to the healing presence that it provides. His words are a resounding gong, and I believe they beautifully honour and conclude the stories of *Black and Rural Saskatchewan* captured here. Randy Morin sends us off with this reverberating manifesto:

> *It is so beautiful when you can actually understand how colonization works. You become colonized… you know. So, what you gotta do is decolonize. And you know, you got to start talking to your ancestors. You gotta start honouring them by practicing what they left you. They left you many teachings. And those are going to be your source of strength… If you saw me I am Indigenous. I have long hair. I wear my culture with pride and dignity wherever I go. I speak my language. I sing my songs. I do my dances. I am unapologetically a Cree Indigenous man… I would die for my people. I would die to protect who we are. So I would say to you, honour your ancestors. Be unapologetically Black. Don't ever back down, don't ever bow down… to your oppressors.*

Afterword

It goes without saying that this brief collection of stories and reflections merely skims the surface of historical and contemporary Black and rural presence upon the Saskatchewan plains.There are as many perspectives, experiences, and sentiments as there are African descent peoples in rural spaces. And if we care anything for the integrity of our future history books, each rural space must be acknowledged in relation to the First Peoples who traditionally stewarded the land. This said, for the purpose of this work, this humble collection of voices has done its job. It has provided a window into a segment of the Canadian narrative that is readily overlooked.

On numerous occasions, when explaining the aim of *Black and Rural Saskatchewan* to others, I was met with the same response, "I've never thought about that particular experience before." These responses, though unsurprising, reminded me of an old saying I stumbled upon in my youth: "Until we are called by name we do not truly exist." In the context of *Black and Rural Saskatchewan*, I take this saying to mean that until each hidden story, each quietly lived experience is brought to light, and spoken aloud, it is denied its rightful place upon the earth, within our history books, and within our own hearts. I intentionally offer no final analyses or tidy conclusions to define what it means to be Black and rural in Saskatchewan. Instead, like a true country girl, I opt first to work the soil. By the very virtue of seeking out and listening to the voices of Black and rural Canadians, we are acting as pioneers of our own hearts and minds – breaking ground and sowing seeds of recognition where once we may have been blind.

Acknowledgements

The work of *Black and Rural Saskatchewan* felt, in many ways, like a family effort – a family bonded together by a shared love of the "intangible cultural heritage" of Canadians, its preservation, and amplification. I would like to thank Kristin Catherwood, Director of Living Heritage at Heritage Saskatchewan who, at the recommendation of a fellow folklore loving friend, met with me, took heartfelt interest in me and my vision, and jumped head first into realizing this project. I cannot thank her enough for entrusting me to realize this project on my own terms, at my own pace, and from my own seat of integrity. I would like to thank Carol LaFayette-Boyd, Executive Director of the Saskatchewan African Canadian Heritage Museum who has stood steadily by this work from its inception, sharing her own stories as an interviewee, her insights for the project as a whole, and her position of influence in Saskatchewan's African heritage community. I would also like to thank Marieke de Roos who absolutely wowed me with her artistic skill as our Graphic Designer and Communications Manager. Her expert creativity inspired my own. And last but not least, thank you to Olivia Shumski and Ingrid Cazakoff who patiently and graciously waded through the financial and logistical realities of bringing this work to life.

In addition to this creative family, I extend my deepest gratitude to the interviewees themselves: Charlotte Williams, Lewis LaFayette, Carol LaFayette-Boyd, Jim Miller, Cheryl Foggo, Maria Cole-Gayle, Yemi Laosebikan, Nastra Muloyawi, Jane Ibisiki, Christine Fiddler, and Randy Morin. Thank you for stepping forward to share your stories so honestly and forthrightly with this project. You are indeed "lights" in your rural communities (as Jane so beautifully shared in her interview) and I am honoured to have been given access to you and your world. Thank you all for how you have enriched my life and the lives of all who will read your words.

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