**The Same as Trees**

**Nicola I. Campbell**

**Before reading:** think about the title of this selection within the context of the theme of Truth and Reconciliation. Predict the connections and comparisons the author will make to trees in her poem.

**During reading**: As you read, jot notes on the comparisons, similes, and metaphors the author uses.

I remember the elders

 talking to us as youth:

 at youth conferences, youth groups,

 or at the sweatlodge.

The Elders said:

 Remember

 we human beings

 are the same as trees.

 *Cedar, Douglas Fir, Hemlock*

 *Lodgepole Pine, Blue Spruce,*

 *Aspen, Cottonwood*

 *If you listen carefully in the high mountains*

 *You can hear the ancients sing.*

Today, our youth live in two worlds:

our Indigenous way and that of mainstream society.

At times this will be confusing.

At times you may experience despair.

You will have to learn a new kind of strength.

 *When I finally found my way there, to the sweatlodge.*

 *I was confused. I did not understand.*

 *Two worlds, yes.*

 *I didn’t understand this “new kind of strength.”*

 *How would I find it? From whom”*

*The Elders said:*

 If you choose to go away to learn, then do that

 but always return home.

 If you are scared to take risks, then be scared

 and do it anyway. Be stubborn, be persistent,

 have faith, have reverence, have compassion.

 *I went away to lean. And I was afraid*

 *To fail. And I did fail: Math. History. English.*

 *I wanted to quit.*

*The Elders said:*

Remember, the blood flowing through you is the blood of our ancestors.

 Sacred Grandmothers and Grandfathers never gave up -

 even when our loved ones were buried in mass graves,

 even when the children were stolen. They persevered.

 Resilience, reciprocity, respect, these also exist within you.

 *I didn’t know our ancestors were buried in mass graves.*

 *Our beautiful pithouses collapsed, entire families buried within.*

 *As a child, I wondered how the blanket of despair came*

 *to cover my godmother after she tried yet again, to commit suicide.*

 *I only knew the blanket was old, older than her, older than my mother.*

 *I didn’t know until I read the stories in books, until year later*

 *I heard her storytelling with another elder over coffee & cigarettes.*

*The Elders said:*

As you go forward be that tree,

 go to the water to pray,

 grow roots deep within our traditional homelands,

 grounded within our culture, nurtured by our elders’

 teachings, ceremonies, and languages,

 twined within the skills and education of today’s society.

 Raise your arms like branches, in strength and humility,

 season to season weathering storms and heavy winds:

 praying, cultivating knowledge,

 ever growing, ever producing, ever healing.

 In honour of our elders, our culture,

 our past and future generations.

 This is the task before you, your responsibility.

 *Standing among the trees on a mountain trail*

 *searching for the string that tied my spirit to and earth*

 *I no longer wanted to walk*

 *the words of my elders came to mind,*

 *the year following my younger brother’s death.*

 *Shoes off, toes immersed in creek, soil, sand & stones*

 *hands uplifted to the sky I emulated*

 *the patience of an ancient one - rooted,*

 *needle tips or leaves, branches dancing with the breeze,*

 *perhaps their greatest pleasure is savoring raindrops,*

 *their greatest joy lifting sorrow, sickness.*

What generation are we?

 We are the transforming generation.

 We watched our parents and grandparents,

 a generation confused, at war with themselves.

Empty bottles broken on the floor, scars

too often on bloodied faces of

our mothers and our grandmothers,

our fathers and our grandfathers.

As children, we learned church prayers.

In the late night when our parents didn’t know

we could hear our mothers weeping

we prayed for their safety.

We prayed to fix their broken hearts.

*I never understood her silence,*

*followed her from room to room.*

*I felt unloved unwanted invisible*

*even when I stood in front of her.*

*As her oldest child, everyday*

*I prayed that we would learn how to be*

*mother and daughter.*

As child witnesses, we watched a return to the old ways.

We watched our parents as they put shame aside,

remembering, relearning, reawakening: ancient traditional practices.

We listened as our elders taught us to talk to the spirit in our ancient ways.

*It is time to lift the blankets of despair.*

*It is time to put it all away.*

*Rage. Suicide. Violence is not an option.*

*We need to stop recreating and reliving their genocide.*

*It is time to put their shame away.*

*Decolonize!*

*Resurgence!*

What generation are we?

We are the transforming generation.

Hands back, hands forward

we remain connected with our parents and elders.

Together we heal and transform ourselves.

*Pray, sing, dance*

*in ceremony, in celebration!*

*The strength of our ancestors,*

*is our strength as well.*

*This is resurgence!*

Hands raised we gift weavings of joy,

sacred memories, traditional practices,

ancient knowledge, language and education,

forward to our future generations

our children and our children’s children.

*We are a generation that walks in strength.*

**Reading for Meaning:** the author made references to many effects of residential schools. Generate a list from the poem. Explain whether you feel that the poem is solely about the negative impacts.

**Understanding Form and Style:** Explain the extended metaphor(s) used in this poem. What is necessary in a poem to create an extended metaphor? Explain your answer by using this poem as an example.

**Understanding Form and Style:** Shifts in voice and tone occur throughout the poem. Analyze the significance of these shifts from person to person or between different times or places.

**Critical Literacy:** can this poem be described as a rallying cry? Explain your answer and support it with evidence from the text.

**Student Voice:** Who acts as the main guiding force in your life? It could be a family member, friend, teacher, community leader, or someone you don’t know personally but respect and admire. In a journal entry, recall one piece of advice you received from this person and explain how it helped you.

From: *Moving Forward A Collection About Truth and Reconciliation.*