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Childhood Sexual Abuse Fires Artist's Activism & Art

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By Kim Hughes | www.samaritanmag.com



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Multidisciplinary artist/activist Ingrid D. Johnson.

Anyone looking for a powerful example of something really good coming out of something really bad need look no further than Winnipeg-based multidisciplinary artist Ingrid D. Johnson.

Through music, poetry, film, spoken word and performance, the 37-year-old has turned childhood sexual abuse into a platform for positive social change, providing “a voice for the voiceless,” as her production company *In the Closet* trumpets in its tagline, while putting the spotlight on a difficult issue.

At the age of nine, Johnson was molested by a babysitter. At age 12, when she opened up about it, the sexual abuse began anew, this time with her stepfather as the perpetrator, Johnson says.

Horrible as that was, Johnson admits her ongoing activism and all her subsequent creative output — including her recently released full-length debut record *What About Love?* — can be traced back to those shattering events.

“Since I was 12, that’s how I dealt with things,” Johnson confirms to Samaritanmag. “I had foster parents that took on kids, but didn’t want to hear anything about sexual abuse. They just wanted me to not talk about it and to put it away.”

“My family had been torn apart by what had happened and I had no connection with them for a long time, so writing was a way to express myself and say anything I felt like saying. And there was no judgment or silencing; it was whatever I felt. And it helped. Today, I can revisit my past without being traumatized by it anymore.”

Johnson's work is both personal and public. She has penned a book of poetry (2005's *Little Black Butterfly in Iridescent Sunlight*), issued a compilation spoken word-music CD (2009's *Wounded Souls*) plus the above-mentioned disc, all the while serving as a speaker, performer, fundraiser and activist for others coping with trauma and abuse in her Winnipeg hometown.

"I try to always have a focus for why I am creating," she says. "I don't think there's anything wrong with art for art's sake. But because I have been through so much, I feel compelled to try and bring people's attention to important social issues like sexual abuse."

And she walks it like she talks it. In 2010 alone, Johnson performed, guest lectured and/or raised funds for the Canadian Red Cross RespectED: Violence & Abuse Prevention program, Voices Manitoba Youth In Care Network, UNICEF (as part of their Haiti earthquake disaster relief) and the Laurel Centre, a community resource center that counsels women who were sexually abused as children.

"Anytime I perform I try to make sure it is in support of a cause I believe in or that's in association with my mission and vision," Johnson says, adding that the name of her production company, In the Closet, is a nod to her Christian faith.

"In the bible," she explains, "it talks about going into your prayer closet. That's the way that I see it. You go in by yourself and you are creative and when you come out your creativity inspires and might offer a solution to a problem or offer a new way of perceiving a situation that someone might not have thought of before. So for me it represents production and creativity."

Johnson continues: "I always want to feel that I am making a difference with my art, that I am not just making money out of it. I want to do something that will follow us to the community."



"Even with *Black Butterfly* [her book of poetry] and when I released *Wounded Souls*, I invited a bunch of other artists to come out and share their positive

RECENT STORIES

Johnson's ongoing advocacy work has not gone unnoticed. Just last year, the Manitoba government included me in a publication issued under the Manitoba Status of Women — which they do annually — honouring female artists in the community who use their art to inspire positive social change," she explains.

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"I was so humbled. It was during a time when I was questioning whether I was having any impact at all. It was incredibly uplifting.

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"You know, I'll never understand my stepfather's mindset and how it was okay for him to do what he did after I disclosed to him what I had been through,"

Johnson says. "But people do crazy things in this world. It never makes sense."

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"I'm just glad I chose to keep going forward. There were many times on my journey where I felt very depressed and suicidal but I always had my faith to rely on.

And, she adds, sadly by bearing it. I just turned 37 on November 26, which was also my wedding day. My fiancé was also born on that day and we were married in Hawaii. So yeah, life is good."

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CHARITY SONG OF THE MONTH:

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FOREIGNER, "I Want to Know What Love Is (New Recording with Shriners Hospitals Kids Choir Live)," 2019

Starts Building Bands Canada For Marginalized Youth led their 1984 hit "I Want to Know What Love Is" complete with a children's

choir to benefit [Shriners Hospitals For Children](#). The new version of the song features the Shriners Hospitals Kids Choir singing

backing vocals and is a bonus track on the band's new charity album, *The Greatest Hits Of Foreigner Live In Concert*. An

historical recording site in Hollywood, California, Gracie Wilson's Sebastian Bach, Members of Blue Oyster Cult and more

and tours the hospital to witness amputees being fitted with new prosthetics. Buy it [here](#). — *Aaron Brophy*

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CAUSE SONG OF THE MONTH:

LOUIS TOMLINSON, "Two of Us," 2019

Ex One Direction member Louis Tomlinson is hoping his new pop ballad, "Two of Us," helps others, just like it provided a kind of

therapy for him. Written in memory of his mother, who died of leukemia in 2016. the 27-year-old sings, "I will be the best of me,

always keep you next to me. I'll be living one life for the two of us." In a press release, he says, "I don't mean to be too sappy about it,

but if 'Two of Us' can help just one other person who's going through the tough time that I went through, then that would make me

really happy." Buy it [here](#). — *Karen Bliss*

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