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## Healing wounds with words

**TOPICS:** Local Poetry

**BY NOREEN MAE RITSEMA** OCTOBER 5, 2009

Fresh from the release of her second book, *Wounded Souls: A Collection of Poems and Songs*, and its companion spoken-word CD, *Wounded Souls Vol. 1 & 2*, Ingrid D. Johnson is basking in hope and gratitude. A Winnipeg-based artist with a deep message, she is a survivor of sexual abuse who uses words and music to piece together her own life as an offering of hope to others.

Johnson's first book, *Little Black Butterfly in Iridescent Sunlight*, came out four years ago. According to Ingrid, it was a catalyst for major personal life transformations.



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This meant honestly confronting friendships and relationships that were unhealthy and manipulative. “I feel my new poems reflect my struggle to forgive and let go of the past, ways the abuse affected my voice and sense of personal boundaries, and my spiritual struggle to overcome all the anger, loss, pain, resentment, bitterness and sadness I felt and expressed in my first book. This new book is more positive. It offers truth, hope, healing and inspiration instead of anger, venom, rage, profanity and bitterness.” These empowering messages are evident throughout Johnson’s new poetry as self-affirming themes resonate from each chapter.

Taking a more intimate look at the possibility of an interconnected role between poetry and healing, Johnson acknowledges that poetry is a beautiful medium of expression among many, such as music, film and dance. This eclectic approach to artful forms of expression may help explain how Johnson manages to successfully delve into the music world with her second spoken word CD and as a songwriter and collaborator on Flo’s self-titled album. Johnson elaborates on this fusion by explaining how “sexual abuse destroys your spirit and makes you feel wounded, dirty, broken, numb and dead inside. Belief in God’s love restored my soul (my mind, will and emotions) faith, trust, hope and belief in love again. Poetry is an outlet, not the source of my hope, faith, victory, inspiration or healing. God is my source. I know not everyone will agree with this — I can respect that — but this is my belief and what I live by.”

Having endured so much adversity early in life, Johnson’s positive messages and life example are indeed motivating. She shares that “my love for people who are hurting and lost is also an inspiration to write, and my anger towards people’s ignorance and lack of care for other victims and survivors drives me to speak up for

the voiceless. I work with kids in care and [my] sincerest hope is that my words, my life and my story will inspire at least one of them to be a success.” It is also this love, strength and compassion that has Johnson donating a portion of her book and CD sales to a local organization that provides services to women who were sexually abused as children, the Laurel Centre.

According to Statistics Canada, one in three girls and one in six boys are sexually assaulted by age 18 and a horrifying 97 per cent of these young sexual abuse victims know their perpetrators. As these sexual abuse survivors become adults, 70–80 per cent of them report excessive drug and alcohol abuse. These statistics validate the need for the programs that the Laurel Centre offers. Ingrid offers the following advice to people who find themselves in sexually abusive situations and relationships: “You are not alone. When you are ready, tell your story and don’t stop telling it until someone listens and helps you to do something good to counteract it. Overcoming sexual abuse begins with surviving — coping — but you have to confront the abuse and learn from its impact on you in order to overcome it before you can help others.”

With faith and these powerful messages, Ingrid D. Johnson has launched her own production company called In The Closet Productions. She reveals that her future plans are ambitious and realistic: “I am writing my first non-fiction novel, developing my voice as a new singer-songwriter, planning new community projects and praying that I will attract a compassionate promoter and sponsor/investor and agent to help me with my national and international tour, *A Voice for The Voiceless*, so I can share my story, perform my spoken word/poems and perform my original music.” With clarity and confidence, Johnson’s new works create a

path of hope that can help many wounded souls heal.

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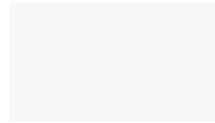
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