

[Page 11 - A Selection from Song of Rita Joe, Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 70](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1996/6/1

I could not put my finger on it. As time passes the show of senses, My longing realized, they became real. She is special like all children. Ke'salu'kik (We love them) aqq icesaluksi'kilc (and they love us). It was around this time, when Frank and I had been married for almost ten years, that we finally built our own house in Eskaso- ni, and kept Phyllis, who was twelve, home to stay. I remember Frank trying to finish the house the summer before Caro? line was bom. Oh, that poor guy: he worked on the house all summer, until twelve o'clock at night, every night. I would hear the hammer, and then finally I'd hear it stop and know he was on his way home. He used to get people to help by making a batch of home-brew and of? fering it to whoever was working with him on the house. The snag was that whenever they finished a part of the house, they'd drink themselves into a state. I put up with a lot of dehumanizing things in those years, hoping always for a better tomorrow. In the mid-1960s, after the problems with Frank had gone on for sev? eral years, I read somewhere that openly talking about battering often creates peer pressure for the abuser to stop. So I began to mn away from home for periods of time. I would live with friends and rela? tives and tell my story to anyone who lis? tened. By that time, my children were old? er. The youngest were mystified by my absence, but the older ones were eager to look after the little ones so that their mother might somehow re solve this problem.... Sometimes, I'd even try to work on the compassion of the women who took my husband. And, once, after I found out that one of his women was from the commu? nity, I went out and I smashed every window in our car. It was a good car • not a brand-new car, but a good car. I beat that car to pieces, I was so fmstrated. This wom? an was going with my husband, in front of my face, in front of my children. The people in the community could not understand what I had done: Finally, Rita went berserk, they said. They knew I had been a door? mat for many years, but they couldn't understand what I had done because it meant hardship for my family • Frank and I had to pay for that car, and it was difficult. that." I knew I was not crazy, but you take that much from any? body and you go off your rocker. And for a moment I believed Frank, because I had an uncle who was a very depressed man and had been in the hospital for thirty years. So I told my doc? tor I needed to see a psychiatrist. We had a long session and then I asked the psychiatrist, "Am I crazy?" "You're as sane as I am," he said. "Will you put that on a document, be? cause I want to take it home to my hus? band," I said. I wanted everyone to know that I was as sane as anybody else.... In 1967, I was pregnant with my young? est, Ann. I was still having a hard time, but I did not hide my bmises under long sleeves anymore; I even showed them to my mother-in-law. She would teU me, "I married two men, and neither one of them ever laid a hand on me. No one hurt me." It was a heel print on my breast that was the last straw for her. It drove her wild. She comforted me, finally expressing her love for me. After I wrote my first poem about Eska- soni, I sent it to the local Mi'kmaq news? paper. They printed it, and, oh, I got such feedback • I got letters and fan mail and people wrote to the newspaper and com? mented on my writing. So I



wrote more stories and poems and articles. After Frank & Rita Joe on their wedding day. 1954 awhile, I began to write a monthly column for the Micmac News. Each month, I would collect little incidents and anecdotes. If But I told Frank, "I will do the same thing again if another situation develops. If I smash up a car, the car doesn't cry. I didn't kill anyone, I didn't beat up that woman, I didn't beat up my husband and I didn't hurt anything but that car. It's made of metal. It didn't cry." That was my philosophy. Frank called me crazy. He said, "You're insane to do

**CATERING TO ALL YOUR HEALTH FOOD NEEDS** • Herbal Remedies & Teas • Vegetarian Foods • Free Range Chickens & Eggs • Nut Butters • Dairy Free Ice Cream & Cheese • Tofu • Body Care Products • Juices & Grinders • De-Alcoholized Wines & Beer • Bulk Foods  
nanCL InatuxaC fooji 156 FALMOUTH ST., SYDNEY (NEAR CENTRE 200) 562-7083 Island Vinyl Siding Ltd. LeBlanc Siding Ltd Authorized Dealer for M'JBIYICM' Aluminum & Vinyl Siding g'j. " J. -- Aluminum Windows & Doors t' TCAN Shutters / Softfit / Fascia / Awnings Heavy Duty Vinyl Replacement Windows |109 Reservoir Road SYDNEY Professional installation of Aluminum & Vinyl Siding in Cape Breton for over 21 years. FREE ESTIMATES, and any siding inquiries! Call Collect: BRUCE or SONNY MacPHERSON 539-3665 & 539-4626