

JUSTICE FOR GRASSY NARROWS



THIS POSTER CELEBRATES THE PEOPLE OF GRASSY NARROWS. FOR THE PAST 50 YEARS, WOMEN, YOUTH, AND THE COMMUNITY HAVE LED A MOVEMENT TO ADDRESS THE INDUSTRIAL MERCURY POISONING OF THEIR PEOPLE, TO PROTECT THEIR LAND, AND ASSERT THEIR SOVEREIGNTY. WE REMEMBER THOSE WHO ARE NO LONGER HERE, THOSE WHO ARE FIGHTING TODAY, AND THE FUTURE GENERATIONS OF RESISTANCE.

Justice for Grassy Narrows

Poster by Iruwa Da Silva with Natalia Saavedra and Ryan Hayes

Interview by Iruwa Da Silva with Judy Da Silva

This poster celebrates the people of Asubpeeschoseewagong, or Grassy Narrows First Nation in northwestern Ontario. For the past 50 years, women and youth from the community have led a movement to address the industrial mercury poisoning of their people, to protect their land and water, and to assert their sovereignty.

Iruwa Da Silva's illustration depicts an ancestor spirit with her arm wrapped around a young girl in a protective manner. The girl is emptying a bucket of water into a lake in Grassy Narrows. Ribbons of water flow around her, and form the spirit of a thunderbird above her. The excited spirits of the fish jump in and out of the water, almost as a way to thank her, for carrying on the old ways of her people.

Iruwa: Why is protecting the water so important for the people of Grassy Narrows?

Judy: The reason why it's so important is because of our historical connection to the river system. The English-Wabigoon River system was our main source of life for hunting, fishing, trapping, and accessing our hunting grounds. Our hunting grounds were seasonal. People would go blueberry picking in one area, moose hunting in another area, and beaver hunting in another area. The water was always a part of our life and we are the river people.

Iruwa: How have different generations come together to protect the community?

Judy: The way I've seen that the different generations come together to protect the community is when we would go to protest, and we're not the first to protest, because if you look in the archives you'll see that in 1975 our people went to protest together in Dryden (the site of the mercury dumping). It's been a long time that our people have been fighting to protect the land and the water, and our way of life. It is always intergenerational, there's always elders there, there's always young people, children—it's always been like that, and I think it's just the way the Anishinaabe are when it comes to protecting the land and the water.

Iruwa: What is your vision for the future of Grassy Narrows? How do you see the role of youth and future generations?

Judy: The vision I see for the future of Grassy Narrows is clean, fresh water, with unpoisoned fish. Children that are healthy and elders that are very old and happy people. Happy families, healthy families, and a healthy river.

I see the role of youth and future generations is as strong leaders. I see them being outspoken and protecting our people and valuing our way of life here on Anishinaabe territories, and being proud of who they are and that's something I wish for them.

Iruwa: How can people support Grassy Narrows today?

Judy: The way people can support Grassy Narrows today is by amplifying our voices. While we are a very small community, I know there are thousands of people out there that believe in us and that care about us. I would say go to www.freegrassy.net and find out details about Grassy Narrows and how the poison has hurt my people. Educate yourself, and then amplify our voices, miigwetch.



Biography

Iruwa Da Silva is a youth from Grassy Narrows, as well as an artist, a gardener, and a Grassy Narrows women's drum group singer.

Judy Da Silva is a Grassy Narrows community member and mother to five children, including artist Iruwa Da Silva. Her children help her to have the positive energy to continue to look for justice and for a solution to the mercury poisoning of their river system in Grassy Narrows and Mother Earth.

Further Reading

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