

# TAKE HEART

## A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,  
Maine Poet Laureate*

Mikhu Paul is a poet of the Maliseet First Nation. Raised in Old Town, she devotes her creative work to the preservation of Native culture, despite the attempts that have been made to destroy it. In this poem she tells us the “one true way” to save it.

### Mother Tongue

*by Mihku Paul*

Stolen child, stranger with no name.  
Her mouth has been sewn shut.  
The songs, on their long flight,  
years upon years, birth upon death, lost.  
Mute witness, what silence is this?  
Unfortunate demise, flesh and bone,  
language we lived by,  
scattered like pollen dust,  
the trace of finest powder.  
Possessed, our teeth clack and grind,  
purpled lips slap and curl, a strangled wailing:  
tuberculosis, dysentery, pneumonia.  
One thousand ways to kill a thing, and  
only one true way to save it:  
Our words, shape of sounds no longer familiar,  
buried at Carlisle.  
Oh, Grandmother, we are wandering now.  
The map obscured, ripped and bloodied.  
We speak a strange tongue.  
We are ghosts, haunting ourselves.

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