

# Poetry and stories build anti-racism understanding

BY ANNETTE PATEMAN

I AM WRITING this article to commemorate the United Nations Decade for people of African Descent, 2015-2024. I am a person of African heritage born to Jamaican parents, in the United Kingdom. This is where I grew up and lived until eight years ago when I came to live in Thunder Bay.

My heritage matters to me for a variety of reasons and not simply because it gifts me with the identity, "visible minority," "Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC)," and "Black."

My first collection of poetry, *Spectrum*, was published during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in May 2020. Through *Spectrum*, I focus on a wide range of issues such as identity, race, relationships and the African diaspora around the world. I discuss racism.

The book provides a glimpse of what it's like to be Black woman in Canada. Many of the poems I have written are based on my life experiences, as well as conversations I have had about my race and identity. For many Black people, these are regular experiences. *Spectrum* helped me in processing these observations. Conveying the emotions and thoughts through my poetry has been cathartic and therapeutic for me.

I am pleased and grateful that my book *Spectrum* was launched by the Thunder Bay Public Li-



ONE CITY,  
MANY VOICES

**The Thunder Bay's Anti-Racism and Respect Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario.**

brary. That was followed, a few months later, by a live poetry reading at The Bodymind Centre, which stocks the book.

I invite you to read my collection of poems available at the Groggy Toad Cafe and local Indigo bookshop. I also invite you to visit my online blog, The Great Canadian Woman (found at the [greatcanadianwoman.ca](http://greatcanadianwoman.ca)), where I have written about my cousin, the Black British activist Olive Morris.

I share with you below my poem on Olive. I hope to build awareness and unity through my poetry and storytelling.

## OLIVE MORRIS (edited)

*Olive lived in Brixton, south London in an empty house.*

*Olive was a student*

*We her family who loved her.*

*Visited her in her squat in Brixton.*

*My father took her picture.  
Many times.  
He goes unacknowledged.  
We chatted about all sorts of things.  
Education, resilience, travel, politics*

*What it is to be a strong woman  
Then one day  
Olive said she had a pain in her lower back.*

*She said it was probably cancer and she laughed,  
and so did we.  
She was born in 1952.  
She loved me.  
She saw me.*

*Asked me to carry on her work.  
Whispered this to me when I leaned close,  
to her bed when she was travelling to the other place,  
dying and close to the end.  
"You are clever."*

*"Use your gifts to carry on my work."*

*"You can do it."*

*"You have what it takes"*

*This is what she said.*

*To me.*

*Quietly, so nobody else heard,  
She smiled at me then,  
although it was difficult.*

*Annette Pateman is a poet and writer of African-Caribbean heritage. She uses her performance poetry and stories to discuss issues such as racism. Her book, *Spectrum* is available on Amazon. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.*