



Poetry, Fiction, Essay, Art: Grown Out of Our Experience

I Am Black History

My name is Donna Paris

And I **am** Black History

The story, I am told, is that my great-great-grandfather came to Nova Scotia from Ireland once slavery was abolished in Great Britain. Despite the many hardships he faced, he managed to send his three sons to university and a dream into the future so I can have the life I now live.

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The story, I am told, is that my white great-grandmother came to Nova Scotia from France. She met and fell in love with a Black man. Her family said, "You can have him or you can have us." Their union produced my grandfather, who produced my mother, who produced me.

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The story, I am told, is that my paternal grandfather was a member of the No. 2 Construction Battalion—one of over six hundred Black men from Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia who fought for the right to fight alongside their countrymen despite the prevailing sentiment that Canada didn't want a “checkerboard” army.

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The story, I am told, is that my family was the first Black family to live in the now closed armed forces base Cornwallis in Nova Scotia. When my father was posted there the commanders of the base went around and asked the families how they would feel about having a Black family live next door to them. Then they called my father in and said, “We don't want any trouble from your children!” The five of us ranged in age from six years to six months.

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The story, I am telling, is that when my Grade One teacher gave me a piece to sing and I couldn't do it very well she said, “What's wrong with you? Don't you know your people can sing?”

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The story, I am telling, is that my Grade Five teacher accused me of cheating when I got a ninety-seven percent on a history test because “How could a little Black girl really be that smart?”

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And the story, I am telling, is that there was a time and place when Black people were not allowed to learn how to read and I now teach children how to read.

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By Donna Paris | Issue 12 (2017): African Nova Scotian Women | Creative Nonfiction |