COMING HOME: FINDING STRENGTH THROUGH THE WOMEN IN MY LIFE

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By

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Thesis Committee Approval

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COMING HOME: FINDING STRENGTH THROUGH THE WOMEN IN MY LIFE

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In partial fulfillment for the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Combining self-analysis, Indigenous ceremonial process, and storytelling via survivance, this study is about my life's journey. Having the ability to navigate the world of western society with my Indigenous worldview and identity is a delicate balance. This ability to navigate two worlds is borne out of the female influences in my life, in particular on my matriarchal ancestral line. Using story as a means to locate myself, discover myself, and lay a path for my children is integral to this process. This work is about love, and the discovery of self and identity, honouring Indigenous women, honouring the Anishinaabe trickster Windigokaan, and sharing and recognizing Indigenous knowledge, strength, resiliency, and beauty through story.

This research is an ever-evolving and organic discourse of academia and Indigenous worldview. It is a living entity in itself. Combining and finding balance between the two worlds is vital to understanding and dissecting the multi-layered stories that are shared throughout. Storytelling as method, with the influence of teaching, guiding, and telling stories for children is the vehicle used to demonstrate introspective leadership in education.

This study took place in the Parkland and Interlake regions of the Treaty 2 Territory in Manitoba, Canada. Using an open-ended interview process, over the phone or via video call, this research was an analytical journey to find myself. The purpose of collecting stories as data was to be able to retell, rewrite, and restory a female influenced Indigenous history during a time and era where these stories have gone historically untold or forgotten. It is a preservation for the future generations in my family.

Terminology

Anishinaabe – Ojibwe people. This is the most common term in this paper and it is also used to describe ways of being, ways of believing, and speaking the Ojibwe language. The plural form is Anishinaabek. Also known as Ojibway or Ojibwa.

Anishinaabemowin – Ojibwe language

Indigenous – unless otherwise quoted or stated, I will use this term throughout the paper. I refer to Shawn Wilson's definition in *Research is Ceremony*: "Indigenous is inclusive of all first peoples – unique in our own culture – but common in our experiences of colonialism and our understanding of the world" (Wilson, 2008, p. 16). Other terms you may see are: First Nation, Native, Aboriginal, and Indian.

Kookoo – grandmother. The actual Ojibwe word for grandmother is Nokomis. People also say the following: Ninokomis (my grandmother), and kookum. This varying degree of form is akin to saying in English: grandmother, grandma, gramma, granny, and/or gran. These varying terms are all dependent on worldview, location, region, upbringing, vernacular, and communal slang.

Leadership – leadership in this paper is multi-layered. It involves a unique tension of a double-consciousness, and mindfulness, of understanding two worlds: Indigenous identity and ways of being, and the modern context of Western institutions. A leader of two worlds must first survive, then negotiate, interpret, and finally understand the intimate and inextricable relationship that this entails (Fitzgerald, 2006).

Settler – not a new term but emerging more each day in the world of academics and research. I refer to Adam J. Barker's complex definition that "it is not enough to simply state that Settler people are 'non-Indigenous […] this ignores the complexity of Settler society […] Settler people in this context include most peoples who occupy lands previously stolen or in the process of being taken from their Indigenous inhabitants." He continues, "in the contemporary sense Settler increasingly includes peoples from around the globe who intentionally come to live in occupied Indigenous territories [and] this definition is not comprehensive; it does not attempt to describe anything about Indigenous peoples, nor does it address complicated hybrid identities" (Barker, 2009, p. 328).

Storier – this word will be used in place of "participant" unless otherwise quoted. Storier is simply a teller of stories, a person who knows a small history of a given context, people, and persons. Each person is a storier, we all come from diverse and complicated backgrounds, and offer multiple ways to look at ideas and stories (Berglund, 2011, Krupat, 2008, Vizenor, 2008).

Survivance - are stories that are directly linked to the history of you and your people. Gerald Vizenor describes it as a "sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry." It is often described as an active incontestable presence, a continuation of stories, a visual memory or trace, sources of evidence, a map or geography of remembrance, and an active resistance (on Indigenous terms) that arises from experiences that preserve native culture (Vizenor, 2008).

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"The words in this book are embers […] They are embers from every story I have ever heard. They are embers from all the relationships that have sustained and defined me. They are heart songs." – Richard Wagamese

Reader's Map

I grew up in a small Indigenous community. My family, on both sides, is relatively large so I was consistently surrounded by many family members, holidays and Christmas dinners were always big, loud, and fun. Although my families are large, the communities where I am from are your typical small, rural, western Canadian Indigenous communities. When you grow up like I did, you are often held accountable to your community, and everybody knows everybody, and there are always eyes there to watch or help.

With this in mind, I wanted to provide a reader's map due to the varying styles of writing in this thesis. This work contains a balance of western academia and Indigenous knowledge and storytelling. It can be rare to see a blend of both, and there could be some discomfort in what many of us view as "typical" reading and writing of academic papers. I do this because I have a relational responsibility to my family and to my communities. I know there are eyes and ears on me both literally and figuratively, and I have a duty to be accountable to the Indigenous people whom I represent. Relationships and relationality are integral to an Indigenous identity and I simply could not share all of my ideas and thoughts with the reader by only using the traditional academic form of writing. I want other Indigenous scholars to understand that western institutions are becoming more open in their scope of what research can look like and feel like. Although my piece is small in the academic world, I feel that it is important to acknowledge that this thesis may feel different than most.

The first thing you will notice is that I have threaded small children's stories throughout the piece that accommodate and relate to the information I know, have gathered, and now come to understand to be integral to my life. You will see the short children's stories italicized because I wish to emphasize that particular piece in that section. The stories are to highlight a

theme and are meant to be read out loud, similar to when you read to a child. When I read to my own children, I emphasize certain words and phrases to highlight the message that I wish to share with them. However, the interpretation of the story is left for the child to reflect and learn on. I ask the reader, when they get to the small stories such as *Wasii'aa Giizhigo Inini* or *East*, that they do the same. This paper has many purposes, including the requirements for a Master's Thesis, to be accountable to my community and Indigenous identity, but also as a recorded history for my own children. You will see that messaging throughout.

Personally, there is a level of discomfort and insecurity in my writing. A Master's Thesis is always for the academy, but as I made my way through this process, I found myself writing this for my family and for my children. I wanted to preserve this history for them, so that they have access to it whenever they need it. This work is for my family and community, but ultimately it is for my daughters; if they wish to have children, it will be for my grandchildren. I want the reader to think about how we story ourselves and how we include our children in our stories. There are parts and sections throughout that are poetic, and we often do not see that in western academic writing. It may feel like an interruption or detached, but I wanted to weave family, Indigenous knowledge systems, and stories throughout the writing.

Secondly, in chapter two entitled *Niish – Story*, I also italicize the phrases *why am I here, where do I come from, where am I going,* and *who am I?* In that chapter I use these phrases at the end of the section to draw the reader's attention to the importance not only of reflecting on ourselves, but also how we grow and change in relation to others. It is important to look back at how the relationships in our lives have formed all of us, but have also fundamentally changed me. These relational encounters are important to reflect on and as I revisited memories, I started

to see how my current presence has truly been shaped by my family history, I also need to recognize and honour the memories of the storiers I spoke to. Their stories are woven into mine.

Lastly, in chapter five entitlted *Naanan – A Story of Stories*, I write a trickster story that I thought would best summarize all of the memories and stories that were shared with me during the research process. The trickster in the story is the Windigokaan, and the entire piece has almost zero structural and grammatical presence. This is done intentionally, much like Indigenous scholar Peter Cole does in *Coyote and Raven Go Canoeing.* I wrote it like this because I felt it was the best way that I could honour my storiers, the stories that were shared with me, my relational responsibility to community and people, to write a unique story for my children to interpret, to honour the essence of the Windigokaan, and to lay one brick on the road for future academic scholars. I will not be the first person to push the envelope in academia and I am certainly not the last. I know that I stand on the shoulders of my own family and community, but that I also stand on the shoulders of all the Indigenous academic scholars who have come before me. It is their road that I walk on, and if I can add one small, yet important, brick to that road then I hope that I have done that. I am forever grateful.

Wasii'aa Giizhigo Inini

There is a boy who stands on the shore of a lake. He loves the water, and the sky. He is also very shy and talks only when he has to. He talks only when it is needed. He is always listening and learning, and he loves a good story.

On this particular day, the sky is blue and it seems like it goes on forever. He throws a rock. He is looking at the endless sky and watching the calm rippling water. He watches the tiny waves and ripples that move both away and towards him. Some of those ripples reach his toes, and some of those ripples go further and deeper out towards the water; yet he is connected to them all.

He reaches down and touches the water and hopes that it helps him find the answers he seeks. He then raises his hands to the sky, with the water dripping from his fingertips. He does this and prays.

Wade

My name is Russell Wade Houle. I put tobacco down and raise my hands to honour the generations that have passed, and the generations to come.

I wish to acknowledge the Treaty 2 Territory of Canada, a place where I was raised and currently attend post-secondary school. It is also my place of employment and where I now reside. I am a high school teacher in Dauphin, Manitoba, and I have a passion for Indigenous education. As a teacher, I work closely and passionately with Indigenous students, and as a staff member, I support and help educators incorporate meaningful and relevant educational experiences of Indigenous perspectives into our school.

The Treaty 2 area is the traditional land of the Anishinaabek, Ininiwak, and Dakota peoples, and the homeland of the Metis Nation. This territory is a large sect of prairie in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan and it borders the United States. Near Estevan, SK, the Treaty boundary heads north to the Ocean Man First Nation. From Ocean Man, it darts northeast to the where the Assiniboine River meets the Manitoba border. From the Manitoba/Saskatchewan border it heads north towards the Duck Mountains and the Swan Valley area. The northern border of this territory then zigzags eastward from Swan Valley to the Meadow Portage area wedged between Lake Winnipegosis and Lake Manitoba. From this northeastern area, it then heads south along the shores of Lake Manitoba, near the Ebb and Flow First Nation, to Kinosota, Manitoba. Near the Metis settlement of Kinosota is the historic location of its signing, formerly known as Manitoba House. From Manitoba House, it then zigzags southwest back to the Brandon area. From Brandon, the line heads south to the US border and then heads west back towards Estevan. It is a beautiful and abundant area and in the middle of it all is the Riding Mountain National Park (see Fig. 1).

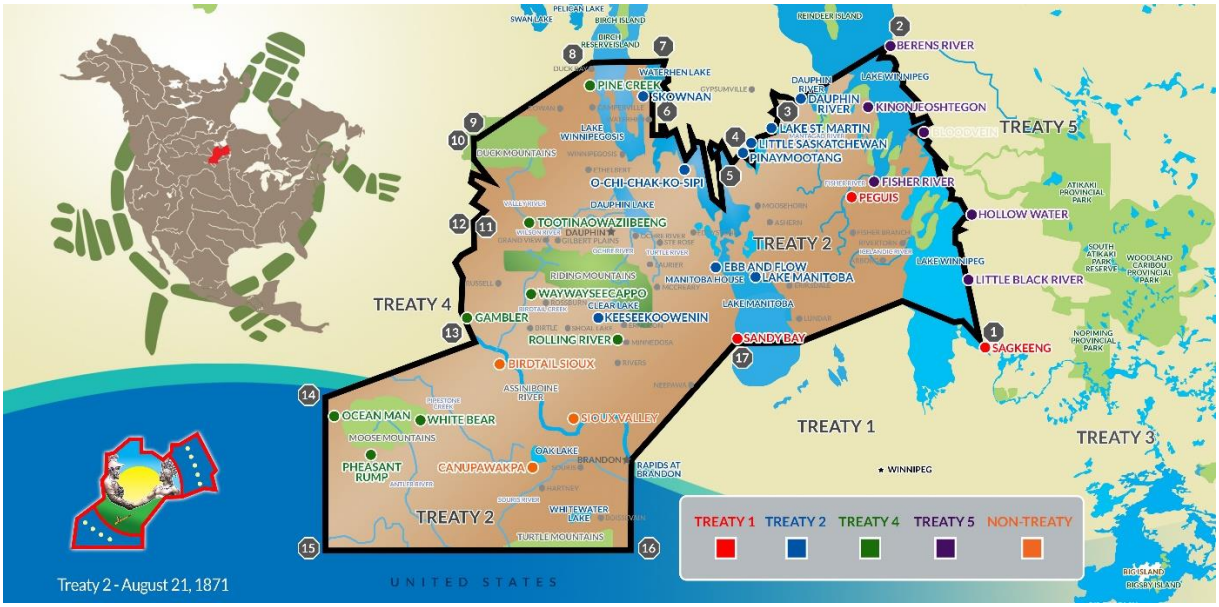

Figure 1: map of Treaty 2 area

I share the same name as my father Russell who worked the majority of his life with the Canadian National Railroad. He was raised in a placed called Shaawanaang on the southeastern outskirts of the Ebb and Flow First Nation, a band in which he is a member. I wish to acknowledge my mother Margaret, an educator of over 40 years who was raised in Vogar, MB, adjacent to the Lake Manitoba First Nation, a band in which she too is a member. I love you both.

I have been married for 14 years. I first met my wife Desiree in high school 23 years ago. She was born and raised in Dauphin, MB, and is a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation in northern Manitoba. She is an incredible human being and I love you with all my heart.

My wife and I have two beautiful and vibrant girls named Grace and Natalie. Grace is ten years old and is calm, observant, and loves to play. Natalie is seven years old and is feisty, sensitive, and enjoys making people laugh. They are incredible human beings, I love you to the Creator and back.

I come from a long line of strong Anishinaabe and Metis women who have demonstrated and paved the way for me and my family. My resilient and considerate wife Desiree has a passion for music and works to advocate for children in her job. My calm and patient mother has educated Indigenous children as a teacher for over 40 years. My kookoo Ida worked so hard to raise a large family and welcomed so many others into her home. My great-grandmother Nancy told stories and ensured families were taken care of in her community. They are strong and resilient women and I wish to honour and acknowledge the shoulders on which I stand. I love you.

In this work, I demonstrate and showcase the strength and resiliency of the women in my life, despite tremendous odds and colonial roadblocks. I wish to do this through story. I

solicited a multitude of stories from close friends and family members; I then rewrote, retold, and restoried these stories. I wanted to be able to provide these stories for my own children and the generations to follow. My children, and their children's children, need to know why they are here, who they are, where they come from, and where they are going. I wrote these stories so that they may survive for generations to come.

My love and gratitude are paramount. You are my heroes. Gitchi-miigwetch.

“Stories remind us of who we are and of our belonging.” – Margaret Kovach

Pezhik – Milk, Bannock and Bacon Grease

A Message to My Reader, My Girls

To my reader, and my daughters Natalie and Grace,

I used to spend a lot of time at my kookoo and papa's home. Ida and Abe Monkman were their names and they lived in a small Metis village called Vogar. Going to their place was the best part of the weekend for me as a child.

I would get to their place at some point in the evening and head to the room where I would be sleeping, then place my bag on the bed. The bed was always neatly made. Afterwards, I would look for a snack and go play. As darkness approached, I would watch a bit of TV and start getting ready for sleep. I would head down the hallway to the bedroom and there would often be only a bedsheet with no covers. I would lay down, straight as a board, with my arms by my side, and my kookoo would come in with fresh flannel sheets. Kookoo Ida was a towering, beautiful woman, and she would stand at the end of the bed and let loose the folded sheets that she grabbed from the nearby closet. I would watch her intently with a sly smile and wait for my favourite moment. I knew it was coming and it was the best part of bedtime. She would give the bedsheet a firm shake and then she would give it a big whoosh into the air and over the bed. The shine of the bedroom light would disappear and the bedsheet would float there for a split second and slowly parachute down over my entire body. The bedsheet would come down with a short, cool, refreshing breeze. Those bedsheets smelled glorious. They smelled liked fresh air from a Manitoba north wind, the same smell I try to replicate as I hang laundry on our clothesline.

She had this beautiful blanket with patches that she sewed, and it would follow next. Or there was this light brown blanket with big patches of red, dark brown, and yellow on the front that she would often use to cover me. It was always easy to fall asleep after that.

I have always been a heavy sleeper and I am typically the last person to get up each morning. It is both a blessing and a curse. When I awake, I like to roll around before actually getting up. This allows me to hear what is going on outside the bedroom door, the sounds of people's feet as they shuffle around to start the day, and the laughing or teasing that is going on. My aunt Rhonda's big, beautiful, obnoxious laugh would ring out from the living room. My uncle Larry or Charles would show up for coffee or tea and I could identify their distinct laughs in an instant as well. My papa Abraham would typically be outside puttering around before he would be called in for breakfast. The phone would usually ring and my kookoo would be talking to someone on the party line they shared with my uncle Albert next door. And bacon. I could always smell bacon. It was certainly common to smell bannock too. Bannock on the counter was a staple in their home, but on the mornings I could smell bacon, I knew it was going to be an awesome day.

I know that the breakfast was made for everyone, but I always felt she made it for me. I would lazily tumble sleepy-eyed out of bed. I would open the door and head down the hallway half-embarrassed but excited for the day as well. My kookoo would be going back in forth in the kitchen getting everything ready for me, and then my papa would come into the house, head for his corner seat at the kitchen table, and light a cigarette.

Their kitchen table, which also worked great as a hockey net, sat on the west wall of their home and I would pull up a chair in the middle. The other corner was either for my kookoo or other visitors who came over. As I sat down, my kookoo would bring over a piece of bannock

and place it on the table. I would split it open and butter it. Then she would bring me a small saucer plate with bacon grease in it. That's it. I rarely ate bacon or eggs on those mornings, because my favourite breakfast in the entire world when I was a kid was bannock and bacon grease. I would dive into the meal but also slowly savor it. It was delicious. When I was thirsty, I would get up, grab a cup out of the cupboard and pour myself a big glass of milk. Boy, do I miss that. That memory, that story, is etched in my brain forever.

I can still see that kitchen table with its greyish hue composite top, and its faded and worn gold edges and legs, with a hint of green trim. My papa would sit in the corner with his big red coffee mug with the brown and white rim. He always had a tobacco tin off to the side or behind him because that is where he rolled his cigarettes.

When everyone was served, my kookoo Ida would sit at her corner of the table and light a cigarette. They would sit there and watch me eat. Sometimes we spoke, sometimes we didn't. The radio was always on with a station out of Portage la Prairie that always came in the best. They would talk to each other in a hybrid of English and Anishinaabemowin. They referred to the language as Saulteaux in those days, and I picked up a few little words here and there, and I knew the tone they used if they were watching me or talking about me. They would blow their smoke high into the air, with their elbows down on the table and their cigarette saluted to the ceiling between their fingers. They loved each and every grandchild the same, with absolute admiration. And the way they would stare and admire me, they did that for everyone.

At the kitchen table is where they spoke the most. My kookoo liked to laugh or get mad. Those were the emotions I saw out of her at the table. They would share stories with each other of the happenings in the community or their plans for the day. My papa Abe was unpredictable with his words so he would tease or go over the line with his comments. Hence, the laughter or

the anger. They would sit there, puffing away at their cigarettes, waiting for me to finish my milk, bannock and bacon grease.

When I was young, it was at kitchen tables where I heard stories and laughter the most. I learned a lot outside as well because we were always out there, but most of the stories were in the house. Papa Abe loved to talk about the old days and reminisced often about the way people lived. He seemed to miss those days. I loved how they would share about "simpler" times and I would imagine the people and places they talked about.

When I started to enter my thesis portion of my Master's program, I really struggled with what to study or research. Most of the research I read through the front end of my program seemed very formal and written at a level that I did not think I would be able to achieve. I felt out of my league. It was intimidating to think that I would have to do something similar. I thought about a multitude of topics I could cover, but I kept coming back to me. I wanted to know more about myself, and in thinking this, I was not sure that that would even be a possibility. With support and guidance, I concluded that I wanted to preserve stories, and draw out memories from people about my family's history. Ultimately, these stories are about me, and they are about you.

In doing this, I wanted to stay true to myself, both as a person with an Indigenous identity, but also a student in a western institution. What you are about to read is a culmination of all those thoughts, ideas, and conclusions. This research is a multi-layered mix of western academia, Indigenous storywork, and an unorthodox order that will both challenge you and reward you. This information, these layers of stories, are about me, but they are also about you. It's who you are and where you come from. I wanted to protect and preserve that. I want you to

do the same. Hold these stories tight, create your own stories, remember your grandparents and how special they are to you in your life. Treasure those memories. I did.

There will be lots of memories you will cherish in your life. Big memories. But, remember the little stories too. The little stories are just as important. They reveal the character and human nature of our families. Recognize the mistakes they made, honour that bad stories make up who they are, and who you are, too. Cherish the little moments where they made you feel special, and what made their home special to you. That is why I did this. I went down this road, with many unknowns, in order to protect and restory, so that any questions or answers you seek, you may draw your own conclusions.

Even the stories of flannel bedsheets and bacon grease, are just as important as to your first kiss, your driver's license, your first huge accomplishment, your life's biggest moments, both good and bad. It is the little stories that often get lost in that shuffle. Take the time to think about them, reach back into your shadow, and attempt to protect them. Circle back, always circle back. This paper, this research, I hope it circles back for you.

Much like me visiting at my kookoo and papa's, I wanted this thesis to be about memories and stories. The stories circle back with purpose, and they always bring me, and you, to the centre. My weekends at their house are like this research. My weekend was about details. As fast as those weekends went by, I cherished every single moment of them. This research is an attempt at slowing down time, stamping it, and preserving it. The stories you read throughout this work represent my journey.

As a child, I have my own memories of my mom and my kookoos. I truly cherish those. In my mind, I can envision what they look like based on my childhood experiences with them, but when I started to have conversations with my storiers, those images became clearer and

clearer. The conversations added depth; I could envision more and more wrinkles, the stature and nature of my kookoos, the way they walked through their world. That became clear. I can see how powerful they were. My kookoo Nancy was frank, but funny. My cousin Marlene shared a story with me about an early encounter her husband Arthur had with kookoo Nancy. It wasn't a big story, it didn't take long to tell, but it was one of those small insignificant stories that best describes Nancy's demeanour and wit. Marlene's husband was somewhat scared of kookoo Nancy; because she was so frank and unpredictable in her truths, she came off as mean. Arthur picked her up to take her to town, and I can just envision her slowly making her way down the ramp of her tiny home, leading to the car. She moved slowly. She got into the front seat, and in Anishinaabemowin, told Arthur that this would be the first time he would ever "sit" with a real woman. A story like that might come off as insignificant, but it best describes her quick-witted nature and her dominant personality. But that story also added depth to who she was and what she looked like. It made her shoes, her skirt, the bun in her hair, the handkerchief she wore, it made all of those things pop brightly into my head, like I was the one holding the door for her to get into the car. It was as if she was talking to me.

The same went for kookoo Ida. I spent a lot of time with her before she fell ill. The storiers and the conversations of others only made more details pop as they explained their own experiences with her. My cousin Linda shared a brief story about how she was driving on the highway and saw Ida on the road, walking and confused. She was lost. Her memory was starting to get the best of her. It was a sad story. A story I remember too fondly, but after Linda shared that with me she drifted off in her thoughts and mentioned that they used to my call my kookoo "gitchi-Ida." "Gitchi" in Ojibwe is a strong and versatile word. It is a short word, but it carries many meanings and is often used to describe something big, great, or astounding. It

carries a high value, and people use it to say “gitchi-miigwetch” (huge thank you) or “gitchi-manitoo” (The Creator). They called her gitchi-Ida because she was tall, but she was beautiful. She had a beautiful soul and was a major influence on my life.

Talking to these storiers and hearing their stories, it was like sitting at a kitchen table. I was listening, smiling, and crying because these characters they were describing were people in my life. They came to life in those conversations, just like stories come to life at a kitchen table. That is what I sought to protect, and that is what I got. It was beautiful. So all of the multi-layered stories I share throughout this thesis, they have been borne out of simple, joyous conversations that are reminiscent and are the essence of sitting at a kitchen table.

Visiting

Your kookoo Nanshee lived way back in the bush. Living in the bush was the way of the people back then. The bush has everything you need to survive. Only difference is people didn’t call it surviving back then, they were merely living.

Hard to live like that. Good to live like that.

Going to kookoo Nanshee’s was a wonderful trip. You never know who you might see along that trip, maybe some friends, maybe some cousins, maybe an uncle, maybe a bunch of aunties, or maybe someone’s kookoo or papa tapping maple trees.

Aaaaahhhh…. we’ve finally arrived at Kookoo’s. But wait… it looks muddy. That’s why you step on these boards that hover and float on the mud. Got to try balance those. That’s kinda fun, you know. Don’t get dirty, or your mom’s going to be mad. Good thing you put those bread bags on your feet before you put your shoes on huh?

Kookoo Nanshee won’t be mad though, when you get there.

"I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person." – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Niish – Story

Naming

There were two beautiful little girls sitting in a darkened living room on a cool, fall afternoon. With them were their parents, grandparents, and two elders.

The elders prayed and prayed, and they sang song after song. Soon after, the woman elder spoke and she said, "This little girl right here will be known as Gabiidaabang Ikwe, Rising Sun Woman. She will bring tremendous energy and life to the lives of people every day. The wolf, ma'ingaan, will be her guide."

The elder continued to speak, "And, her big sister will be known as Misko Mikinakoons Ikwe, Little Red Turtle Woman. And, she has a gift that she will share with the world. That gift is in a spider's web in her hands, and she will have many dreams and heal many people. The turtle, mikinak, will be her guide."

This is who these girls are, and this is what these girls will be. In their lives they will learn to speak Ojibwe and be Anishinaabekwek, Ojibwe women. They must honour this every spring and every fall.

Why Am I Here?

When I was twelve years old, I travelled from Dauphin, Manitoba to the Long Plains First Nation, near Portage la Prairie, with my mother. It was a quiet ride, as per usual when travelling with my mother. We are both reflective people and I do not remember, besides your normal chit chat conversation, anything particular about what we said that day. It was near the

end of winter when the south wind starts to bring warmer air into Manitoba and the snow starts to look grey and dirty; always an exciting time of the year.

We pulled up to a regular looking house, much like many reservation homes, which had a centre front door and a centre back door. It had a small 6 x 6 deck to enter the door in the front and the first thing you saw to the right in the entryway was a living room. The only difference in this particular home is that it was decorated with some of the most beautiful pieces of Indigenous artisanship I have ever seen. It was like walking into a museum. My mother and I were greeted by a woman and they spoke Anishinaabe to each other. We laid our coats on the sofa and elder Don Daniels walked out from the back kitchen.

There was always something special about Don. He had an aura about him and he always spoke with such grace, humility, and kindness. We shook hands and sat down. As is customary in my family, I didn't say much because the adults were talking. I was never told that this was our custom, but it was always something my brother and I did; if the adults in the room are speaking, then you are expected to listen and be respectful. I sat there in awe, both listening and observing. They spoke in Anishinaabe and my eyes wandered the room. There were beautiful paintings, extraordinary sculptures, crafts made of antler and wood, and some of the most extravagant dreamcatchers I had ever seen. Don was not a flashy person, but these artifacts represented the amount of sacrifice, respect, and honour that was bestowed upon him. I knew that he was a special person, and many other people thought the same thing and honoured him as such.

In Anishinaabe culture, Don was considered a medicine man. Whenever my parents spoke of medicine people, it was with respect because they were gifted people. Medicine people have a tremendous amount of responsibility and they sacrifice much of their lives for the greater

good of everybody. Often, the biggest sacrifice made by medicine people is time. Time is taken away from their families, time is placed in the energies of other people, and this takes them away from their spouses, children, and grandchildren. They give the ultimate sacrifice and are selfless.

On this particular day, Don was taking time to spend with me. My mother had brought me to his home to receive my Spirit name. In my family, we often refer to these names as "Indian names." I understand this is not politically correct, but as my parents often answer when it comes to older slang or Anishinaabe translations, they usually say, "I don't know, it's just what people call it." Hereinafter, I will refer to it only as a Spirit name. My mother pulled tobacco out of her purse and handed it to Don. Tobacco, one of the sacred medicines, is a customary exchange for the knowledge and wisdom that people have. It is an act of humility, respect, and love. There is always a moment, a split second, of energy that is shared when these exchanges occur. In the gifting of tobacco, the people involved are allowed to centre themselves, and it provides purpose and reason.

Don led us down the hallway of his home. Through the first door to the right of the hall was the bathroom and we took the first turn to the left into a small bedroom. Before entering the room, I could see that there were two more bedroom doors a few steps further down the hall. The design of this home was familiar and much like my uncle's home. I felt very comfortable and warm. We entered the bedroom which was also adorned with Indigenous artifacts that I could only assume were gifted to elder Don. The room was dark and my mother and I sat on the floor beside a bed; Don sat on the floor, preparing for the naming ceremony.

Knowing your Spirit name can be integral to an Indigenous person's identity. It provides purpose and direction and in "*Naming*," that is why I shared the story of how my two daughters, Grace and Natalie, came to receive their names.

Names are important, especially for Indigenous peoples. We live in a settler society, a Western society, which is not always welcoming to our beliefs, our traditions, our truths, and our names. So, at times, we can feel unsafe in sharing something so intimate. And regrettably, when we do tell non-Indigenous peoples our names, there is always a chance that it is followed by ridicule, or sarcasm, references to stereotypical or silly names from TV or movies, or questions about culture that are often tiring and exhausting to answer time after time. To share a name requires trust and a relationship strong enough that you do not feel judged. When trust is established then the listener comes to understand that Indigenous peoples' Spirit names are symbolic of many things but it ultimately means that we walk in two worlds: Indigenous and Western. We exist in two places and that is not always fully understood; therefore, Spirit names are not always shared.

After Canada's creation of the *Indian Act* in 1876, these types of ceremonies were outlawed and many people practiced in private or in hiding (Vowel, 2016). Ceremonies, sweatlodges, shaking tents, medicine bundles, powwows and celebrations were banned. The *Indian Act* also circumvented the Numbered Treaties and allowed chief superintendents to create the reservation allotments and the Canadian Residential School system. Being born when I was, I was not directly affected by these policies, but I have inherited the colonial effects of these paternalistic decisions. It is an odd feeling to both be relieved and feel privileged to not have to go through some of these acts of legislation, but to also feel the rightful pain, anger, and hurt for my ancestors that did.

In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (hereinafter referred to as the TRC) was established to honour the stories of Residential School survivors. In 2015, the government of Canada called to action the citizens within our country, "in order to redress the

legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation" (TRC, 2015, p. 1) with Indigenous peoples. The TRC of Canada released 94 Calls to Action. The Chief Commissioner of the TRC was Senator Murray Sinclair, and a former Honourable Justice of Manitoba's Court of Queen's Bench.

In a speech to delegates at the Mosaic Institute Peace Patron Dinner in 2016, Senator Sinclair addressed the crowd about the identity, and the future identity, of Canada's Indigenous population, especially young people. Having a sense of identity is integral to any culture and any person's self-worth, self-esteem, and purpose. In his speech to delegates, Sinclair says,

> "It boils down to four very important questions: you have to know *where you come from* […] It is also about what is our creation story, the history of your people? […] If you know the answer to that question, then you will be able to help it yourself answer the next question, which is *where are [you] going?* […] All of that is about faith, a sense of hope, a sense of future. […] We also have to answer that third question: which is *why am I here?* What is our purpose in life? […] If you know the answers to those three questions, then you can answer the fourth question for yourself and that is: *Who am I?* Who am I is the question [...] the one that we are always challenging ourselves to be, the one that we are always trying to figure out" (Sinclair, 2015).

Senator Sinclair poses these four questions to Canadians: Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? and Who am I? These questions are essential to identity. They are very difficult to answer, but we must attempt to do so in order to understand and situate ourselves in the fabric of our society, and attempt to understand our shared history. In doing this work, I am attempting to do just that. I am attempting to figure out who I am.

Sinclair is providing the Canadian public with a fundamental teaching in Anishinaabe culture. The questions posed might be new and novel for some, but these are questions I have heard my entire life. Since I was child, and into adulthood, I have consistently been asked these questions. They surfaced in everyday conversations with teachers from my early schooling in Indigenous communities, interactions with elders, and when meeting new Indigenous peoples in order to situate ourselves via our communities and our family members. We are consistently referencing these questions in everyday life, and although the answers we seek are not always there, we understand that these questions remain the same our entire existence. Sometimes, we find our purpose in life through the Spirit naming ceremony.

That day in Don's small but warm home, in that small and darkened room, I received my purpose. I was gifted and honoured with my Spirit name. Much of the ceremony of my name was done in Anishinaabe, and the majority of what happened that afternoon had to be translated by my mother. I understand very little of our traditional language and I always have to refer and defer to my parents when it comes to Anishinaabemowin. I was told that afternoon my name, which already existed in me when I was born. After the ceremony, Don and my mother exchanged words again and he explained to me in English where my name came from. He said that I was placed on the Earth to bring brightness to people's lives. He also stated that when the sky is at its bluest, the ancestral relatives and the Creator were communicating and reminding me of my purpose. It was an amazing feeling that connected me to my history, my people, the land, and my culture. It is my Spirit name that has guided me ever since. In that moment, like Sinclair states, it was "the name of the spirit that was placed in you when you were created, by the Creator" (Sinclair, 2016). It is this name that has helped me find my purpose and upon reflection, it has shown me that purpose starts with something as simple as a name.

I do not remember the drive home afterwards. All I remember is that I was with my mother. My mother Margaret is shy and quiet. She enjoys laughing and staying connected with her family via stories, phone calls, and watching grandchildren. She has been a school teacher for over 40 years and has always kept me grounded and connected to my culture. My father Russell worked for the railroad, travelled frequently, and has never been a firm believer in the spiritual ways of the Anishinaabe people. Interestingly enough, his first language is Anishinaabemowin and he grew up surrounded by the culture. Yet, he has never truly been a believer in the traditional customs and ceremonies of our people. In no way does he mock or disrespect these beliefs and traditions, but he is not a consistent practitioner of Anishinaabe ways.

For my entire life, my mother has always been there. I rarely remember a time in my childhood when I was away from my mom. My father travelled with his job and he often left for work in the early years of my life; it was my mother and grandmother, who looked after my brother and me. My brother Kevin and I were active boys who loved to play hockey and baseball. Therefore, my mother was our driver. My older sister Elaine and Kelly were close to adulthood and had moved on from our home when I was young. My older siblings Elaine went off to school and worked in Winnipeg. She ultimately became a teacher and works in Ebb & Flow FN. My brother Kelly started a family young and he left his schooling to work and support his young family. He eventually moved back and works within the Ebb & Flow community.

All of this made my brother Kevin and I very close, and we spent a lot of time together as children. My mother would drive us to our hockey games in the winter, and she would drive us to our baseball games in the early summer. If we were not playing sports, then she would drop us off at our grandparents' home for the summer holidays. My father is extremely reliable and I

depend on him for so much, including advice that has led me down my current path, but whenever it comes to traditional teachings or Anishinaabe spiritual ways, it is my mother I talk to. She always has a reflective answer to my questions, and if she doesn't, she seeks out those answers from people she trusts.

I am forever grateful for my mom and her spiritual guidance. It was her decision to take me to Don Daniels' home knowing full well that going through that sacred naming ceremony would provide guidance and assurance in my life as an adult. I understand that it was the grandmothers and grandfathers of my ancestral line, along with the Creator, that placed my spirit name in me, but it is my mother who showed me how to go through the process so that I could understand and have that knowledge and experience to pass on to my own children. It is because of her that I know *why I am here*. Life is a journey, and so is this work, and it is the building of a trusting relationship between researcher and reader that allows me to say that my name is Wasii'aa Giizhigo Inini, Bright Sky Man.

East

Nanshee always loved the spring time. Spring, just like the sun, always brings new beginnings.

Well, one day, she woke up before the sun rose and made a warm fire in the stove. She then placed a kettle on the stove and warmed the water for her morning tea. She prepared all her seeds and plants as her tea boiled and then cooled.

When her tea was ready, she took a few sips to start her day. As the sun started to rise in the East, she tied her scarf under her chin so that it covered her head. She was heading out to the field, near the lake, where she was going to plant her garden. She took her hoe and her shovel. She hammered in sticks on both ends of the garden and tied a string all the way across them to make a straight line. Then, she planted her seeds and softly covered them with dirt. Her garden was going to be huge.

She never used gloves. What for? Your hands should get dirty and feel the earth.

Where Do I Come From?

I remember my great grandmother Nancy. I was young when I would go and visit her. My kookoo Nancy lived with her son Ernest, my great uncle. She was born in 1899 and she was small but wore the experience of perseverance and resiliency on her skin and in her eyes. She only spoke Anishinaabe. I never verbally communicated with her in English or Anishinaabe, but she had this sly and warm smile, and a genuine look in her eye when the adults were speaking about me, or if she asked me to do something for her.

In the story entitled *East*, I wanted to symbolically locate it here because my kookoo Nancy was an early riser. For me, and for many others in our family, she represented so much of our family's foundation. She is the beginning for us. And much like the sun rising in the east everyday, she symbolizes new beginnings and the start of a new day. My daughter Natalie is the same way, as she is the beginning for my wife and I because she typically starts our day, and she provides the energy in our cozy home. That is why I believe she was named Rising Sun Woman. Natalie carries that same energy with her, much like my kookoo Nancy.

Nancy's home was small and she never needed the modern comforts that many people desire these days. She didn't watch TV much, but when she did it was the soap opera *All My Children*. My uncle Ernest would translate the English dialogue that was happening on the screen for her. She had a small bedroom she slept in, but she also had a small bed/couch in the corner that she would sit at if she wasn't sitting at the kitchen table. There was a stove near the entrance and it was a comforting place to be. As was a regular occurrence in those days, she often wore a handkerchief around her head with it tied around the bottom of her chin. If there was ever a picture in the dictionary of an elder Ojibwe kookoo, her face with that handkerchief on would be there.

Nancy was born in Fairford, Manitoba, and she married my great-grandfather Charles Maytwayashing in 1921. Charles was from the Lake Manitoba First Nation and people in the community referred to him as "Shaal" or "Shaalaban." He died in the Selkirk Mental Hospital in 1971. I include this piece of information because it is important. It is important because my mother Margaret states that the odds were that Charles had what we would now know as Alzheimer's disease. He started to lose his memory early in life and would do things like lose direction, get angry, be unpredictable, misplace things, and tell lies to make up for his

forgetfulness. In those days people just assumed doctors were right because they were doctors, but when their daughter Ida (my grandmother) got Alzheimer's in the 1990s, pieces of Charles' story were put together to reveal this disease was passed down hereditarily from him to her.

People in the community called my kookoo Nancy "Nanshee." She and Charles had a log cabin along the shores of Lake Manitoba where they had two big gardens: one near the lake, and one near their home along a bush line. My kookoo Nancy loved to garden. She also loved to tell stories. She was a storyteller. Like most storytellers, she liked to embellish stories about people in the community and gossip about their exploits. I was never privy to these stories because I could never fully understand Anishinaabemowin. That being said, she wore expressions and experiences on her face like granite on the shores of a lake. Her eyes were piercing and I would watch words form on her lips. I would listen and hear, but it was her eyes and hands that I watched. I could feel them. She weaved humour, embellishment, love, and a crafty and sly sense to her everyday life. I was fascinated by her.

Nancy truly cared for people. Whenever someone died in the community, she would pack her things in an overnight bag and she would travel to the home of the people who lost their loved one. She felt the hurt people were going through and helped to look after the children. She would do all the cooking and cleaning, in addition to preparing meals for the wake service and the visitors who would stop by the homes to pay their respects. She understood people's pain. Sherman Alexie, in his book The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, talks about funerals and death and how mourning is related to crying and laughter. He states, "when it comes to death, we know that laughter and tears are pretty much the same thing […] and when we said good-bye to one [person], we said good-bye to all of them. Each funeral was a funeral

for all of us" (Alexie, 2007, p. 166). It is what Alexie is explaining here that Nancy fully understood and that made her simply incredible and selfless.

When considering my inquiry into where I come from, I know that her story is integral to mine. She is symbolic in her perseverance and resiliency in the women in my ancestral lineage because, although she was small in frame, she was big in heart and in voice. She died in 1993, and I miss her. I wish I could go back and spend more of that quiet time with her. I miss those small moments we shared when no words were spoken.

Born of Nancy and Charles' relationship was my grandmother Ida. My kookoo Ida was an amazing person and I spent a lot of time with her. My mother would drive us out to my grandparents' home in Vogar on the weekends or for our summer holidays.

My kookoo Ida was born in 1933 and married my grandfather Abraham in 1951. My grandfather Abraham built a log house on the shores of Centre Lake, which is near the small quaint Metis village of Vogar, Manitoba. As their family grew with my mother, uncles, and aunt, they would eventually move into the village of Vogar, then off to Eriksdale to be closer to the farm where my grandfather worked.

They moved back to Vogar in 1980 and it is their last home in Vogar that I remember fondly. The home that I spent so many days and nights at is where I consider home. I loved going there. Coincidentally, their new home was actually about a mile from their original home near Centre Lake. As a child, I would often walk to Centre Lake because I was playing in the bush and exploring the forests near their home. I was always outside during the day, and at night I would either play or watch hockey or baseball with my grandfather. As I got older, my brother, my cousins and I would quad or snowmobile down to Centre Lake.

My kookoo Ida cooked delicious food. It was simple and humble food and I was always accustomed to a big pot of soup on the stove that would sit there and simmer all afternoon. My grandfather Abraham loved to visit and talk about old times so he always had a lot of visitors. As was customary in those days, and the way they were raised, there was always food available at anyone's house at any given time. Soups as simple as garden tomatoes and macaroni, or hamburger and macaroni or duck or rabbit soup were often simmering on my kookoo's stove, ready for her next visitor or a hungry grandchild. When you walked into their small kitchen, there would always be bannock on the right-hand counter. It was always best when it was warm and I always knew if there was fresh bannock because you could smell it everywhere, or it would be resting sideways up against the flour and sugar containers because that was the way she cooled it off. I can still taste that warm bannock and the butter melting on it, ready to eat with that fresh hamburger and macaroni soup. Anytime I have that combination to this day, I am taken back to those warm memories of my kookoo.

Ida was a caregiver. Much like her mother Nancy, she looked after people. She always had food ready for visitors and she welcomed people into their home to spend the night. My brother Kevin was born in 1975 and my mother was in the midst of her teacher training. My kookoo kept Kevin in Eriksdale while my mother went to Brandon University, and when she got her first teaching job in Jackhead First Nation she once again kept Kevin in those formative years. She cared for people and loved her grandchildren dearly.

In the 1960s, when my mother was a teenager, my kookoo Ida would take my mom to Winnipeg to help look after relatives. Ida's niece, my mother's cousin, was struggling with alcohol addiction and an abusive relationship, but sang in a music band on the weekends. The weekend gigs and binge drinking were hard on the young children and my kookoo would travel

with my mother to look after those kids. Unfortunately, those children would ultimately be taken by Child Services and my mother's cousin Hazel would never see those kids again. Later in life, Hazel would succumb to alcoholism and never did see her children because they became a part of what is now known as the Sixties Scoop. Those children were taken and needed to be in protection. Never seeing the children again was not part of our family's plan. There was no consultation or parent plan, there was no treatment or rehabilitation programming and zero effort was made in offering therapy to Hazel and reuniting her with her family. There was never an intention to keep them together or at least with other relatives or in the same community.

The Sixties Scoop was a period from the 1960s to the 1980s, at the time the Canadian Indian Residential School system was being phased out, where government officials purposely removed Indigenous children to be placed in foster homes all over the world. In 1998, one of those children contacted my mother via mail to initiate a relationship in order to re/discover his family roots. Sadly, Lawrence was in a penitentiary in the state of New York and was looking for his siblings. This process started to unfold in the years following that first initial contact where we were able to meet and reunite with seven of the nine brothers and sisters of the family. It was an exhilarating and exciting time in meeting long lost family members, but it was also a tough time for those siblings because they had been apart for so long. We discovered that some of the children were moved to Pennsylvania, North Dakota, South Dakota, and some were placed in Winnipeg. Sadly, two remain out in the world somewhere.

This type of event would be traumatizing to anyone and like I stated earlier, Hazel never recovered from her addiction; it only intensified. This colonial approach to dealing with Indigenous people was traumatizing for my grandmother and mother, but it was not uncommon. Colonialism and Canada's history and relationship with Indigenous people has been tumultuous.

Policies such as the *Gradual Civilization Act of 1857*, which was created ten years prior to Canada becoming a country, was designed to assimilate Indigenous peoples. The act was a paternalistic document that encouraged assimilation, and for "Indians in good moral standing" to apply and adhere to the ideals of European land ownership (Abraham, 2016, para. 1-2). Colonial attitudes and beliefs were forced upon Indigenous peoples. Moving towards the creation of our country in 1867, dealing with Indigenous peoples was paramount. The *Indian Act of 1876* is evidence of this assimilative practice because it superseded the Numbered Treaties which were signed on the prairies starting in 1871, and it allowed the Canadian government to circumvent their constitutional obligations. In 1885 and through to the 1940's (and officially repealed in 1951), the government also implemented the *Pass and Permit System* which required First Nation farmers to obtain a permit to legally sell their products off-reserve. The Indian Agent, who controlled First Nation communities, controlled and distributed the permits. The system was restrictive and Indian Agents would often not grant permits which would leave crops and produce to rot in the fields. As part of this practice, passes were also handed out to residents living on reservations where the Indian Agent would allow peoples to leave the community to go to nearby urban centres, visit family in neighbouring communities, or to seek employment. As was the norm, time limits were often placed on people. They could be arrested or taken off the band register if they took too long or obtained jobs outside of the community. This important history often goes untold in Canadian educational institutions.

Policies such as the *Gradual Civilization Act*, the *Indian Act*, the *Pass and Permit System*, Enfranchisement, Indian Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the current plight of the high number of children in the foster care system can arguably be attributed to the paternalistic attitude and discriminatory legislation (King, 2003; Vowel; 2016) that has been forcibly imposed

on Indigenous people in Canada. I understand legislated discrimination is important to who I am, but it is not my focus. I cannot move through this work without mentioning the types of horrors Indigenous people faced, but I do not want it to be the focus of my writing. Chimamanda Adichie, in her popular TED talk entitled *The Danger of a Single Story* states, "all these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience and overlook the many other stories that formed me" (Adichie, 2009, para. 29). The resiliency and perseverance that all Indigenous peoples have, just like my grandmothers, are especially important stories that need to be told. They need to be honoured and I wish to do so by "*re*writing and *re*righting our position in history" (Smith, 1999).

My kookoo Ida was a band member of the Lake Manitoba First Nation her entire life. As a child, she lived on the shores of Lake Manitoba itself, which was on reserve land. When she married my grandfather in 1951 at the age of 18, she lost her status as an Indian under the *Indian Act*. This meant that she was not allowed to live on the reserve near her mother, and ultimately moved to Vogar, the nearby Metis community. My grandfather Abraham was considered Metis and grew up near the community of St. Laurent, one of the largest Metis communities in Canada. "The paternalistic manner in which [Canadian] governments manage the affairs of Native people" (King, 2003, p. 128) led them to the creation of the *Indian Act* in 1876. The *Indian Act* and its enfranchisement rules stripped the Indian status of women once they married a non-status man. It only allowed men to retain their status as Indians when they married non-status women, and interestingly enough, non-status women (ie. German, Ukrainian, Chinese, etc) gained status rights under the *Indian Act*. In those days, once Indian status was lost, you were unable to live in a First Nation reservation in Canada. Forced assimilation and enfranchisement were common practices (Vowel, 2016).

Despite the forced effects of colonialism and the attitudes of settlers in Canada, my kookoo Ida persevered. She was tough. She was tough mentally and physically. When I was a child, and as she neared retirement, she worked at a small resort called The Narrows Lodge near Vogar. She would work at the restaurant and help to clean the hotel rooms at the lodge. I remember going there and running around and playing. Although she was quite shy, she had a great sense of humour. I recall fondly her eyes and her smile. She liked to laugh and because my grandfather was funny and crazy at the same time, she laughed all the time. When she gave her biggest laughs, she would bring one hand to her mouth to cover it and raise her head in the air to try and contain it. When I was five, I walked out from their kitchen into the living room; she was sitting on the recliner and I said,

"Kookoo, how come the chicken couldn't cross the road?"

She said, "I don't know, how come?"

I replied, "Because, it had no legs."

I promptly walked away after telling her the joke and she started to laugh. She couldn't stop laughing; and, just when you thought she was done laughing, she started to laugh again. I'll never forget that moment. It took her a full 20 minutes to stop laughing.

When I was about ten years old, I started to notice little quirks in my kookoo. One day, she was sitting at the end of the couch like she always did. She had her glasses on and she really wasn't doing anything but looking at the TV or glancing out the front living room window. She put her glasses down, got up, and started walking towards the kitchen. She took about four steps, stopped and looked around, and asked where her glasses were. I thought she was joking, but there was a genuine look on her face and I could tell she was serious. When I told her where they were, she showed a small sense of embarrassment, but also a stern look of concern. What I

did not realize at the time was that she was slowly starting to lose her memory and Alzheimer's disease was starting to set in. It was slow at first, but those types of incidents started to become more frequent and soon she was leaving stoves on, forgetting to eat, and missing steps walking up and down stairs. It was becoming very dangerous, and one day, she fell. It was a serious fall, and one that she never really recovered from. Her disease progressed more rapidly. She was soon confined to a wheelchair with home care service coming more consistently, especially when my grandfather started to struggle to look after her.

Honestly, it was awful to witness. I felt like I never got a chance to say goodbye to her. She was in the room but she was not present. There were times though when a little bit of her would come through. I was on the couch one day lying down and she was seated in her wheelchair near my feet. I must have had a small hole in the bottom of my sock because she reached out and stuck her finger in and wiggled it around. She tickled me. That was the last interaction I had with my kookoo where I knew she was in the room with me. I consciously think about her every day in the hopes that she follows me from the spirit world.

Like my kookoo Nancy, I miss my kookoo Ida dearly.

Being Young

When Margaret was a young girl, she was always playing outside. That is what everybody did in those days, and that is what people should do now. But you know, people sometimes forget their ways. It is both funny and sad how people can lose things so quickly.

Anyways, when Margaret was outside, she was always playing with her cousins. Playing with cousins is always exciting. It is just so fun to be young, to be small, to laugh, to cry, to

breathe heavy from running, to scream in joy and excitement, and to simply just sit and visit and talk.

Sitting and talking and doing nothing can be fun. It is fun because you have to get creative. You have to get up and pretend and create an imaginary world that you can do anything in.

This one time, Margaret and her cousins found some old tires in the bush. They pulled them out of the weeds, cleaned them up, poured the water out of the insides, and started rolling them. Those tires rolled so fast that they pretended they were cars. They ran and ran, and they pushed and pushed those tires, screaming and yelling and laughing the whole time.

My mother Margaret grew up in Vogar, Manitoba. This small Metis community is near the shores of three lakes: Centre Lake, Dog Lake, and Lake Manitoba. It is also the neighbouring community of Lake Manitoba First Nation. As a young child, my mother's father Abraham, my grandfather, built a one room log cabin for them to live in. It was a humble home that my mother remembers fondly. It was a warm and loving home which was connected close to nature, much like many homes in those days. You were either in the house, or outside.

The house was small with a single fireplace, two beds, and a kitchen table and stove in the corner. My grandparents had one bed, and my mother had the other bed. When someone came to visit, they would often spend the night, which relegated my mother either to the floor or my grandparents' bed. This was common and normal.

Not long after, with my grandparents starting a young family, they would move into the village into a bigger home to be closer to other families and school. It was nice for my mother to be closer to the community at that age because she loved playing with her cousins, who lived

nearby. My grandfather got a job working on a farm near Eriksdale, Manitoba, which was about 50 kilometres away from Vogar. Again, my grandparents moved the family to a new home to be closer to work. My grandparents decided to move to Eriksdale and raised my mother and her three siblings there.

My mother describes life as simple, but people worked hard. And she really emphasizes the fact that people worked. That has always been important in my family, and that value has carried on throughout the years. My grandfather, my mom's dad, was adamant that you worked. You either worked or went to school. Those were the only two options in life and my mother inherited those values which she passed down to me.

My mother loves Vogar. She talks about it fondly, and very often. I stated earlier that my mother grew up in a small home, moved to another small home, and eventually moved to Eriksdale. Eriksdale was a small town filled with settler farm families. My mother made good friends in Eriksdale, but she does not speak as lovingly about her experiences in the school. Schools are not designed for Indigenous children (Campbell, 1973; Regan, 2010; Vowel, 2016) and often she was the only Indigenous child in her classroom. She had relatives who would be bussed in from Lake Manitoba First Nation, but there were many times when those children did not make the bus to school. My mother would wait for the buses to arrive. If she did not see any familiar faces come off the bus she said, "it would make for a long day" at school. My mother implies here that without the comfort of her people (Indigenous culture) and family, she felt that she did not belong. What she does not say here is that what she felt was racism. It is not the overt racism that we often associate with the images of the Ku Klux Klansmen in their capes and masks, or horrific images of Black people being attacked, or mauled by dogs, or having turned on them during the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. It is the racism that is intangible and

difficult to identify. Robin DiAngelo says, “racism is a system” and it “does not refer to individual white people and their individual intentions or actions but to an overarching political, economic, and social system of domination” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 28). Simply put, because my mother was Anishinaabe, she felt she did not belong, and racism was the main contributing factor to this lack of connection.

My mother is smart. She is quiet and humble and she has a calm demeanour that is comforting and welcoming. She excelled in school and graduated from Eriksdale in 1970. She always wanted to be a flight attendant or airline hostess. She wanted to travel the world and she loved the way the women looked and the way they dressed. It seemed glamorous. As high school was nearing an end, she started to volunteer at the local hospital as a candy striper and it eventually turned into a job. She learned that she worked well with people. Something was missing though so she moved back to Vogar to work at the school there as an Educational Assistant. A superintendent of the school division was visiting one day and asked my mother if she was interested in becoming a teacher. The government of Manitoba was offering funding for Indian and Metis people to get certified as teachers. She knew full well that neither herself, nor her parents, were able to afford such an opportunity so my mother jumped on it. She registered and hopped on a bus to Brandon University to start her work in the Faculty of Education. It wasn’t exactly what she was interested in, but she grew to love it. My mother is still a teacher to this day and in October of 2018, at the age of 66, she received her Post-Baccalaureate in Special Education from the University of Manitoba. Completing this program was an incredible feat, considering she has been a teacher for over 40 years and still took the time to study while holding a full-time teaching position on the Ebb and Flow First Nation.

It was in Brandon University where my mother studied to be a teacher in the beginning. While completing her teaching degree she had my brother Kevin, and met my father Russell. As she neared the end of her teacher training, my kookoo Ida looked after Kevin and my father travelled in northwestern Ontario on the gangs of the Canadian National Railroad (CNR). Having children, myself, I cannot imagine having to leave my child in order to secure a position in my career of choice, yet that is exactly what my mother did. That being said, my kookoo Ida was perfect for the job. Much like my own mother, she loved grandchildren. My mother made significant sacrifices for my brother, and I would soon come along in 1980 while my mother taught on the Fisher River Cree Nation. A few years after I was born, my mother would move back to Vogar once again. This time she came back as a teacher. We lived right near the school in a teacherage and we were able to walk across a short field to get to class. Near our house and the school was an outdoor hockey rink with a shack that was heated by a wood stove. My brother and I spent a lot of time on that rink, although I was rarely allowed to play late because the big boys were out there and I was too small.

I went to Kindergarten at Vogar School and I loved it. It was a small school and Mrs. Johnson was our teacher. There may have been five or six of us on any given day and I would soon move to grade one. My mother was my grade one teacher, but she was also the teacher of other students all the way up to grade six. There were about 14 of us ranging from grades one to six and my mother was the lone teacher. I was young and small and my memories are scarce, but I loved that school. It had a short hallway that led to the gymnasium, and we spent a lot of time playing and running around on that dark green gym floor. I am sure we learned as well.

The school would eventually close after my grade one year and in grade two, I started to bus to the nearest town some 50 kilometres away in Ashern, Manitoba. This was around 1986,

and at that time my father would purchase a house in Dauphin where he secured a permanent position with the CNR in the town of 7,000. My mother taught in Ashern Elementary while I was in grade two, and in 1988, she got a position on the Peguis First Nation. It is in Peguis where I was truly introduced to hockey. Peguis lives and breathes hockey. I really had no choice because all my friends played, so my mother signed me up. It was the first time I played organized hockey and I wasn't just playing shinny with my brother on the outdoor rink. My brother and I spent many nights at the outdoor the rink or at public skating where he taught me to shoot, pass, and whip around the ice. If I wasn't playing hockey, then my mother, brother, and I would travel to Dauphin to spend the weekends with my dad. As strange as their relationship may sound at this point, they were in fact together. My mom worked and lived in Peguis during the week, and then we either went to Dauphin or travelled for hockey games on the weekends.

My parents, especially my mother, were selfless in their approach to our rearing. They led by example and made sacrifices that ensured that my brother and I would become successful adults. Despite many obstacles in my mother's life, my kookoo's life and my kookoo Nancy's life, these women led by example with a humble and courageous approach to life. I have taken these values and ways of being and I nervously and humbly tell the reader that I am attempting to follow in their moccasins. More importantly, I think I am supposed to do this.

My mother is the pillar of our family. Besides my wife, my mother has been the most consistent person I have had in my life and she has always been by my side. Come spring time, my mother would sign my brother and I up for baseball. However, baseball wasn't in Peguis, it was in Dauphin and we were still living in Peguis. When the snow melted we would travel to Dauphin and stay with my father in order to play baseball. Growing up in Vogar meant that everybody played baseball. Baseball was another passion in our family. Playing these sports

and eventually becoming competitive players gave my brother and I the opportunity to develop leadership qualities. Sports helped us to develop confidence, teamwork, and communication skills that we both employ in our positions as public servants; my brother works for Manitoba Hydro as an Indigenous Initiatives Advisor, and I am a teacher.

We lived in Peguis for five years and we all eventually moved in with my father in Dauphin during my grade eight school year. It was 1993 and it was the first time that we all truly lived together, every single day. Travelling, going in and out from my mother's home, to my father's home, to my grandparent's home was all normal to me as a kid. It was just simply how we operated and this is *where I come from*.

Where Am I Going?

Until 1993, I spent most of my childhood with Indigenous people. As diverse as Indigenous people are, the First Nations I lived and spent most of my time in were composed of people who had similar experiences as I did; they often looked the same as I did, and many of us understood an unspoken language of values, beliefs, and customs. I never questioned my identity up to that point. When I moved to Dauphin, I didn't have much choice but to question my Indigenous identity. It was pretty evident when I walked into my new classroom that I was one of few Indigenous people in the room.

Dauphin is a settler farming community and in the early 1990s, it was made up of mostly Ukrainian people. It's tough to be an Indigenous person in Dauphin. There is a total lack of understanding and education and it was pretty evident back then. I understand that I make a very sweeping statement here, but it is important for me to name the truth. In her bestselling book *White Fragility*, Robin DiAngelo addresses the title of her book and similar sweeping statements, "the mere title of this book will cause resistance because I am breaking a cardinal rule of individualism – *I am generalizing* […] for now, try to let go of your individual narrative and grapple with the collective messages we all received as members of a larger shared culture [and] unsettle the racial status quo" (DiAngelo, 2018, pp. 11-14). That feeling of discrimination was evident, and this lack of understanding was based on the underlying racial inequality that exists in Dauphin.

Dauphin sits on Treaty 2 territory, and that agreement was signed in August of 1871. Not many people in the town of Dauphin to this day know that simple fact. Dauphin was also home to the Mackay Residential School. It was built in 1957 and closed in 1988 and was one of the last residential schools to close in this area. When I moved to Dauphin permanently in 1993, the

location of the residential school was actually a Christian school. It was called the Western Christian College and Churches of Christ bought the property and school from the government in the early 1990s. I never thought much about it until I got to university in the early 2000s and learned in depth what residential schools were. All of those memories from 1986 and 1987, when my brother and I would go over there to skate and see all those Indigenous kids, started to come back to me. We even attended a graduation ceremony there one time with powwow drummers and dancers. I didn't recall those memories until I learned what the actual building used to be. It's weird how that happens, when something triggers memories to come pouring in like that. It was in those university classrooms and lecture theatres that I came to realize that building was a residential school, and it was a mere three blocks from my home in Dauphin. There was a sense of sadness as I came to learn and realize what may have happened, and probably happened, in that building. I started to understand the pervasive abuse, violence and humiliation that occurred in those buildings; but also, the realization that the Canadian government and churches held so much power during that era rendering so many children and families helpless. This knowledge humbled me and I quickly realized the privilege I had.

I met a couple of neighbour kids back then; one was named John and the other was Tony. Tony's family was from the Atikokan area of northwest Ontario. They were extremely friendly and welcoming, and Tony and I became close friends. Tony was much like myself; we both loved to be outside and play in the bush. They were nice people and Tony's father worked on the railroad like my dad. We spent a lot of time together as youngsters. As a point of comparison John's family was not nearly as friendly. On a couple of occasions, John's family would not allow me into their home and I never did see the inside of their place. One time, John's sister came out of their camper, which was pretty cool in those days because not a lot of

people had campers. She looked directly at me, and then looked at her brother and said, "John, that boy is an Indian, and Indians are not allowed at our house." I was with Tony at the time, and we simply walked back down the block and went our separate ways. I told my mother later about what had happened and she told me that I was never to go there again, so I never did.

Because I had spent parts of my summers playing baseball in Dauphin, the transition to my new school was not difficult and I made friends immediately. It was an exciting time in the fall, plus hockey was going to begin very soon. However, I definitely experienced some culture shock. I went to having almost all Indigenous teachers back in Peguis to there being no Indigenous teachers in my new school. I saw myself in no one besides my peers. In Indigenous communities, you have a common bond and a shared sense of humour related to cultural happenings, or people in the community. Everybody knows everybody, and it is that connection that helps Indigenous people relate to many different stories of themselves. Living in Dauphin changed in that way and I only connected with my close friends, who were often my teammates. I loved Dauphin, but I did not have that natural feeling of being connected to everyone in the community. When I went to visit my white friends' homes, I was shocked and appalled by the way that they spoke to their parents. They spoke to their parents in ways that I would never speak to my parents. I thought it was disrespectful and their use of varying tones was extremely rude. It was certainly something that I would never get away with in my house.

Eventually, I would move on to high school and get comfortable with everyday life in Dauphin. In my Grade 12 year, I moved to a small town in eastern Manitoba to play competitive hockey. It was a tough move, but my parents trusted me to make the decision to be billeted alone with a family there. When the hockey season ended, I moved back in the spring to complete my schooling in Dauphin. Upon my return to the school, I saw a girl.

Magic

One time, not so long ago, there was a little girl who lived on a mountain and was always talking. She would talk and talk and talk, and ask question after question after question. She did so much talking that she started singing.

Well guess what? She now sang and sang all the time!

Soon after she realized she could sing, she started to write down all kinds of ideas. Some of those ideas were good, but some of those ideas were bad. You see, she was not a bad person, but there were bad things going on in her life. Writing her ideas and singing her songs saved her from all those bad things.

She was magic. She used magic to write and write, and sing and sing. People always wanted to hear and see her sing. Her voice and songs were magic and she used it to save herself, and to save other people.

I met my wife Desiree in my final year of high school in 1998 and we started dating in the summer. My wife is an incredible woman. She is a survivor. She is a survivor in so many ways and is symbolic of so many ideals in this work. She is resilient and was forced to grow up fast as a child. We met young, and she was strong willed and strong minded then, as she is today. She is tenacious yet kind, quick witted and patient, and she is brilliant but humble. She holds me to account yet respects who I am as a person. I have grown, matured, and have become a strong Indigenous man because of her unabated support. I am who I am because of her.

My wife is the granddaughter of a Residential School survivor. Needless to say, the horrors her family faced in Canada's Residential School system have greatly affected her life.

The trickle-down effect of the residential school system is inter-generational (Regan, 2010). The trauma faced by children in the system is everlasting. Senator Sinclair, after he discussed and explained the four essential questions for reconciliation, Why am I here? Where do I come from? Where am I going? and Who am I? he states, "for young Indigenous people who were taken away from their families and placed in Residential School institutions, the ability to answer any of those questions was taken away from them by those schools" (Sinclair, 2016). What this means for me is that I have to observe and critically think about how this is going to affect my own children. In one way or another, the Residential School system is going to affect my family, especially my children. It will be up to them to reconcile with their own past along with Canada's colonial past. They will ask questions that some people may not be able to answer or fully comprehend. In doing this work, in writing my story, I am attempting to understand who I am in Canada's fabric. I am attempting to do this through love. It is my wish that they do the same.

Wab Kinew (2015), in his book *The Reason You Walk*, sets out to reconcile his relationship with his father. It is a beautiful journey of love, discovery, sacrifice, and understanding of a familial relationship that has been affected by colonialism, and ultimately, the Residential School system. Kinew's relationship with his father as a child was difficult and challenging. As part of his journey, he decides to reconcile his relationship and better understand his own lineage. He soon discovers that it was never his father's fault, but it was the Residential School system. Kinew states, "We stand by those who came before us, hoping that those who come after us will honour us in the same way. We love, and we hope to be loved […] so as long as anything other than love governs our relationship" (Kinew, 2015, p. 268).

As Kinew states, love governs our relationships, but my wife's grandmother and father were never loved. Their removal from their homes, their family connection, their language, the land, and their lifestyle altered them forever. I am not trying to assume that they were not loved at any time in their lives, or that they could not love others, but it is well known that committing cultural genocide and targeting children has altered the course of our country's narrative, and our people's knowledge of love. My wife's grandmother has been shut off socially, emotionally, and physically as has her relationship with my wife. She has always struggled in showing love. When my wife's father was born, he was given up for adoption. He did not know this until he became an adult. So once again, that lack of love led him down a path of chaos and dysfunction. As a result, he struggled to show love; he sought comfort and tried to cope through irresponsible behaviour. He abandoned my wife and her sister at a young age, along with their mother.

I would be remiss to do this work and not honour my wife and the obstacles she has been forced to overcome, as well as to all the other children who are the survivors of Residential School students, the generations that passed, and the ones that are coming. This work is a small, but significant attempt at "redressing" those wrongs. Chief Commissioner of the TRC Senator Sinclair says, "education got us into this mess, it will be education that gets us out" (Sinclair, 2016). It is my wish to honour my wife, her family's history, and my children, who will one day come to understand and learn about their own family more closely.

Soon after my wife's father left, her mother met a tough Metis man. Her mother's new boyfriend worked as a diamond driller in the northern parts of Canada, but when he came home, he partied hard and long. There were many days my wife went to school on very little sleep and memories of yelling, laughing, and arguing long into the night. Maria Campbell, in her ground-breaking memoir *Halfbreed,* talks about the hardworking, but also hard drinking, Metis men she

grew up with in northern Saskatchewan. My wife's new stepfather was just that. Campbell says, "I never saw any of our men walk with their heads held high […] however, when they were drunk they became aggressive and belligerent, [and] often they drank too much and became pathetic, sick men, crying about the past and fighting each other" (Campbell, 1973, p. 13). My wife and I met when we were young, so I witnessed the behaviours of her step-father. However, like I said, my wife is a survivor. She has the heart, strength, and courage of a bear, and has shown that she can overcome anything.

All my wife ever wanted to do was to leave home and go to university. She found solace in education and excelled in learning. When she completed high school, we both signed up to go to university. She attained a degree in Law after a short stint in the Faculty of Social Work. She is extremely motivated and an amazing mother. Her motivation, hard work, and perseverance has helped her stop a cycle of dysfunction in her family. Education can do that.

That all being said, my wife has fond memories of her childhood. Her own mother worked two jobs and supported the family during those difficult times after her father left. When her new stepfather entered the picture, there were still quiet periods when he would go off to work for long stretches. It is those memories with her mom and her sister that she cherishes the most, and they grew closer during those times. During her childhood, like many young girls, my wife enjoyed music. She especially loved country music and grew up on classic country and western singers such as Dolly Parton, Loretta Lynn, and Reba McEntire. At a young age, my wife started writing songs. As many artists do, she wrote about the things she heard, saw, and experienced. Many of her songs are about alcoholism, partying, and tough times, but it is those songs that many people identified with. People relate to her music as alcoholism and addiction are universal; they do not discriminate.

At the age of 14, my wife Desiree released her first independent studio album, which was an amazing feat, considering the odds against her. Since that first album, going off to university and becoming a working professional, she has released four more albums and is currently working on her sixth. Simply incredible. She has been nominated, and won, numerous awards for recording and song writing and was lucky enough to be nominated for a Juno Award in 2014. My wife, my mother, and my grandmothers, are strong and resilient Indigenous women. They have demonstrated that they are hardworking and humble, and that their past, and Canada's colonial past, does not define who they are.

Flower

I spent many nights waiting for momma in the car outside the local bar.
She said I'm just going in for a cold one, I knew that meant 6 more.
When she'd had her fill she'd take me home wasted behind the wheel.
I'd go to school the very next day like it was no big deal.
I'm a wait in the car kid, while her mom's at the bar kid.
A riding home with a drunk kid, but I turned out alright.
It don't matter where you come from, cause it ain't where you're going.
Looking back, I grew up fast, just like a flower through a sidewalk crack.
We can't choose our mamas or determine our circumstance.
Raising babies, it ain't easy, you do the best that you can.
There was always food on the table and always love to go around.
We all make mistakes sometimes but somehow it all works out.
Now I'm a little older, got two daughters of my own.

I might stumble and I might fall, I was raised by a rolling stone.

One foot in front of the other, take it day by day.

I'm the furthest thing from perfect but you're never gonna hear them say:

I'm a wait in the car kid, while her mom's at the bar kid.

A riding home with a drunk kid, but I turned out alright.

It don't matter where you come from, it ain't where you're going.

Looking back, I grew up fast, just like a flower through a sidewalk crack.

Desiree Dorion, 2017

Who Am I?

Like many people often do, I discovered a lot about who I am in university. It was fun and exhilarating and I met many people. University is also where I excelled academically. It was not that I was not a smart student, but I never put in a solid and concerted effort in high school. I was too focused on being a teenager, playing hockey, and I was too self-absorbed.

I entered university the same time my wife did and I was able to attain my Bachelor of Arts and my Bachelor of Education degrees. I was part of the University of Manitoba's ACCESS program and they provided the necessary supports for both rural and Indigenous students attending post-secondary school. It was an amazing program, and if I did not have classes, then I spent a lot of my time at ACCESS hanging out, using computers, and talking to the different social and academic counsellors there. It felt like home and the people, atmosphere, and culture were extremely familiar. The program had a profound effect on me, and I still talk to some of the people involved in the program.

Along with sports, ACCESS allowed me to be a leader and a role model. I was featured in their public relations posters and pamphlets, and they helped me get a part-time job speaking to schools and helping to recruit Indigenous high school students to sign up and register with the University of Manitoba. It was while doing this part time work, along with being one of a limited number of Indigenous education students in the faculty, that I noticed that I was having an impact on my peers and within my faculty.

I was becoming one of the role models of the program and people were looking to me to lead, speak about, and address Indigenous issues in education. I was consistently asked to sit on boards and committees, and although it was exciting, it also made me understand the lack of

representation, and the need, for Indigenous peoples in all aspects of institutional education. This need for representation has never truly left, and I still witness it today.

ACCESS prepared me for my first job interview during my final year in the Faculty of Education, and I was able to secure a position prior to graduating. I worked at Maples Collegiate in the Seven Oaks School Division, and I was there for three years. In the meantime, my wife quit Social Work and entered the Faculty of Law, so I worked for a few years while she attained her degree. Maples Collegiate was a great school and I loved my time there, but living in the city was not for my wife and me. As soon as she graduated, we purchased a home in Dauphin and I was hired on at the Dauphin Regional Comprehensive Secondary School (DRCSS). Like I said earlier, Dauphin can be tough place for an Indigenous person to live in, but my wife and I felt it was important to move back, contribute to the community, and become leaders in our chosen fields. Since then, I have had the opportunity to sit on multiple Manitoba Education committees and multiple Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) committees. I was also a feature teacher in two MTS television commercials. The first commercial aired in 2009 and the second in the spring of 2019. I have also been lucky enough to be nationally recognized by the Indspire Awards in 2017 where I was awarded for being Outstanding Education Role Model.

I am extremely lucky. I am lucky in all aspects of my life, and I certainly have nothing to complain about. What does feel contradictory, though, is talking about myself. In Anishinaabe culture, there are teachings and natural laws that we are to follow. Within the Seven Teachings, we are taught to be humble and show humility. While writing about the aspects of my life, is rewarding, it feels bizarre and unusual, almost unnatural. I have had these feelings throughout this work, but I consistently think about my end target and goal: to conduct this work with

respect and courage for my children. I ask forgiveness and leniency from my ancestors and family, and I wish for them to see that I know which shoulders and shadows that I stand on.

My daughter Grace was born in August of 2011. Children are medicine. I sat on a Government of Manitoba committee that oversaw the development of a high school Indigenous studies curriculum and one of the members of the committee was Elder Ron Cook from Thompson, Manitoba. In explaining the life cycle of children into adults, he starts with the infancy stage of life and states, "Children are healers and they bring medicine, because when they are born, they immediately make us [parents] be better people" (R. Cook, personal communication, September 24, 2018). Life took on new meaning the day Grace was born and, like many things that have happened in my life, I was provided with more purpose. Grace is an old soul who is shy and loves playing. She is not particularly passionate about one thing but she loves to sing, dance, solve math problems, visit family, be outside, snack, and play with her cousins. What more could you ask from your child?

My youngest daughter Natalie was born in May of 2015 and she is a fireball. She was brought into our world to provide us balance. She keeps my wife and me honest and challenges us every day in a multitude of ways. She is the jokester of the family and is always attempting to get a smile, laugh, or reaction from people in the room. She is quick to learn and observe human behaviours and she can often be heard singing songs that are inappropriate, yelling expletives, crying irrationally, and stubbornly testing our patience. With this in mind, she is also very shy, but once you get a feel for her energy and she recognizes that you notice her, she reveals her sense of humour and wit.

These young ladies have changed my world and are now my purpose. Obviously, my wife and I, and our schedules, revolve around our children's schedules. They keep us busy like

many other families, but my children bring me pure joy. As challenging as they can be as they grow and learn about our world, I feel like it is my responsibility to ensure they understand themselves, who they are, and where they come from so that they are able and prepared to answer where they are going and why they are here. As I continue to work for my community, always keeping their best interests in mind, it is Grace and Natalie that provide reason. They are the reason I do this work. This is *who I am*.

Home

You know, not so long ago, there were lots of people who did not need much to be happy. They were loved, and felt loved every day. That is what every person needs. There was a young girl named Margaret who loved to be loved. She used to live on the shores of Centre Lake, which is near the small Metis community of Vogar.

When she was small, she would spend time with her mom walking along the beach at Centre Lake. Margaret thought it was the most beautiful place in the world. She would hold her mom's hand and simply walk in silence. She would pick rocks and show her mom; she would point at birds; and sometimes, she would just watch her mom's feet.

Afterwards, they would go back to their small, but warm, one room house. In this house was a fireplace, a kitchen, and beds. The small house was built by her dad. There is no better feeling than going home.

"Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes." – Linda Tuhiwai Smith

Niswi – Indigenous Knowledge

Survivance

Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor coined the term "survivance." Survivance is about writing and storytelling. It is about the survival of stories, the act of orality and oral tradition, and it is presented in the written form of the English language. To tell a story is an act of survivance. To write, preserve, tell, and retell a story is "an act of survivance [and] is formulating survival on one's own terms […] it provokes the absence of meaning that is thought to be and shows the undertones of being" (Glancy, 2008, p. 278). Survivance is about transporting and protecting stories, especially Indigenous stories; the stories that are historically marginalized, disappearing, go untold, go unprotected, or do not pass down the traditional way. Vizenor in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* states,

> "Survivance is an active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry […] survivance stories create a sense of presence and situational sentiments of chance [and] survivance, in this sense, could be the fourth person or voice in native stories" (Vizenor, 2008, p. 21).

This work is done with survivance in mind. Writing stories and expressing one's existence in the world is liberating. In this research, I attempted to do three things: write my thesis as a story itself, interweave children's stories that I have been gifted from storiers, and tell a trickster story for my findings. I did this for a few reasons: the first is to protect the stories that articulate how I have come to this world; secondly, I wrote these stories so that my children will have access to how they were created and where they come from. Lastly, I wanted to provide a

piece of work that demonstrates that when I am willing to look to myself and to the influence of women in my life, that I am ultimately provided with the skills and values that allow me to lead.

I heard about tricksters and trickster stories all my life. Going to school in Indigenous communities, it was often teachers that read trickster stories to us in circle, or we were given reading assignments with both human and animal characters in them. Anishinaabe stories included Nanaboozhoo, the first human, the first humans, and the animals that helped them to either save the earth, or create the earth. Animals were key to the foundation and creation of our current world. We learned about the sacrifice of Muskrat. We learned the patience and knowledge of Turtle. We learned about Sky Woman and her incredible abilities and resiliency. Most of the characters stood tall and faced many challenges, but they were also characters and teachers who made mistakes along the way. These mistakes were lesson based, but they were also essential to human growth. Characters such as Coyote, Rabbit, and Weasel they were playful yet sly, smart but fumbly, and they were wondrous but often overly curious. Typically, in Anishinaabek stories, right beside them was Nanaboozhoo. In English vernacular, he is often referred to as Nanabush. Nanaboozhoo, the first man, is a resilient and strong character, but human nature always got the best of him. He was easily persuaded by profit, material items, large quantities of food, and taking advantage of those he felt superior to. On the other hand, he was brave and brilliant, and used the land around him to build community, establish relationships, show the people how to live, and he sacrificed himself for the betterment of his community.

In my home, and in my grandparents' home, Nanaboozhoo was referred to in passing. My mom had a small yet wonderful set of stories about him and we often read them together. Sometimes, I would grab those books on my own to read them. My personal favourite was a

particular story where Nanaboozhoo tricked the ducks and ended up eating them in gluttonous form. My mother doesn't have those books anymore, and I am not entirely sure why I remember that particular story but I really liked it. Another personal favourite of mine was *How Turtle Set the Animals Free* by Barbara Marchand. In a similar fashion to the common children's story about the Tortoise and the Hare, Turtle defies all odds by beating Eagle in a race to help protect his community. My mother referred to those stories and pointed out how all of these animals and humans made mistakes in order to figure out how to live their lives properly. The right and proper road is not always as straightforward as we think. My grandmother, on the other hand, referred to Nanaboozhoo as someone who lived in the woods and told us that we were not to stray to far or stay out to late. She never said what could happen to us, but her statement was a way of ensuring that we behaved properly, made good decisions, and did not engage in activities that might put us in danger. Also, if we stayed too late, it would certainly scare the adults in our home and community, and this behaviour would be out of character of any children in our family. She said the same thing for a character called the Windigo. A Windigo is a flesh-eating beast or monster that can easily terrify a child (Johnston, 1995). If my grandmother mentioned the Windigo, then she was serious and meant what she was saying. Being out late at night for my cousins and I was never really a problem, but there were times we probably strayed too far from their homes based on today's standards. It was a glorious time and I reflect on it often, especially now that I have my own children, and it was always Nanaboozhoo and the Windigo that I thought about if I was out too far.

The questions that provoked this inquiry are: Who am I, and how have the women in my life shaped me into the person that I am today? The stories I unearthed and wrote about connect

a current presence with a storied and diverse past. To that end, the threads of survivance that I trace in this study are not stories of victimry, but of beauty and resiliency.

The stories in this work are written with my children in mind. Therefore, it requires patience and teaching. When you reach the stories that are *italicized*, they are meant to be read aloud, read with emphasis as if you were reading to children, and they are meant to be articulated and animated in such a way that creates intrigue and imagination in young minds. Thematically, children's stories are important to the work, but stories are for everybody. Stories are universal and are important to our being. The stories of my life, of the women in my life, can be interpreted by anybody and are for everybody. I hope and allow the reader to use them if needed, understand them, deconstruct them for their meaning, but please care for them (Lopez, B. as quoted in Clandinin, Caine, & Lessard, 2018, p. 1). Stories are essential to survival, and with Indigenous peoples they are both traditional and personal. This is my attempt to "use stories with children and adults […] to help people think, feel, and 'be' through the power of stories" (Archibald, 2008, p. ix). Through the power of stories, I want to connect to my children, and to my reader.

In an interview with Allan J. Ryan, author Joseph Boyden addresses survivance in his bestselling novel Three Day Road. Boyden says survivance "offers entry into a world and worldview foreign to many readers but made accessible through the skilful interweaving of stories that resonate with universal human experience" (Ryan, 2008, p. 297). These stories are meant to bring to life the realities of my world, but also the universal experiences that many people have, especially Indigenous people. I think as the researcher in this project I have a responsibility to care for these stories, but to also recover, reveal, give voice, and provide the words and insight needed for them to survive (Smith, 1999).

The italicized stories such as "*Naming*" and "*East*" are meant to invoke thought, intrigue, provide Indigenous human experience, and accompany Chapter One, which is about reflective self-discovery, the purpose of this work, and story. This is why I sought to elicit the stories from family members, and close friends and acquaintances that my female heroes would have known. With these interviews and stories, came more clarity.

Engaging the Sacred

The fourth chapter of this work is a trickster story where I introduce the Windigokaan. I wanted to honour the gift of story that came from my conversations with storiers. Although some could, several of the stories and conversations could simply not be rewritten as children's stories. I needed to restory them in a format that both honoured the women in my life and the storiers themselves, but also interweaved traditional and Indigenous knowledge systems (Settee, 2013), while not conforming to western institutional and academic writing. These stories are living, breathing entities, and they may change over time. How they survive will not be up to me, but to my children and the reader.

In saying and revealing the weaving of western academia and Indigenous knowledge, I do need to address the reader regarding several matters. Keeping in mind the western institution I am currently working with, and the thorough documentation of western institutions invading, appropriating, and exploiting Indigenous peoples historically in academia, I do have to tread carefully (McCallum, 2014).

As the author and researcher, I assume a great amount of risk in presenting my findings as a trickster story. The fourth section is called a Story of Stories, and this is where I introduce the entity of the Windigokaan. The story is intriguing and interesting and, I hope, enjoyable. I

say this humbly. The reader may find some portions funny or complicated, but the humour and slyness is not meant to undermine my storiers, my community, or my people. Firstly, it is not my intent to be disrespectful, or to reveal too much information about the Windigokaan, a sacred person in Anishinaabe culture. I do not wish to reveal anything that is sacred to Anishinaabe people and the Windigokaan society. As scholar Aaron Mills reveals, "I accept that diversity of opinion about what it means to respectfully engage the sacred is vast. I offer this small slice of my view so that even if yours is quite different, you'll see that I haven't been thoughtless in proceeding as I have" (Mills, 2016, p. 168). The story is a minimal view and expression of the Windigokaan.

Second, there is a significant amount of traditional knowledge that I do not possess. I do not intend to speak on behalf of Anishinaabe people and Windigokaan society. I understand, much like Mills, that this work may be referenced in the future, but what I share with you is simply my view, knowledge I have gained from my experiences in the community, and my simple understanding of the Windigokaan itself. What I have to say and share with the reader is my own understanding.

Third, if you are an Indigenous reader, I wish for you to be able to discover yourself like I have in this work. I wish for this to happen both in ceremony and in academia, as I see the immense value in both educational avenues. For the non-Indigenous reader and researcher, please recognize that engaging in the sacred has been historically harmful for Indigenous peoples and their communities. Please do not take my work as a pass to utilize and exploit information that is sacred and fragile. I ask you to recognize and honour that these stories need to be upheld and protected.

Lastly, a significant amount of the research takes the form of story. In my view, this is an Anishinaabe way of educating, storying, and protecting. As Mills states,

> "this is deliberate and presents an opportunity for a different (and perhaps unfamiliar and even disorientating) kind of learning. Some readers may need to struggle with the form of the piece in order to find value in its substance. If this is your experience, reflecting on why this is so may prove more useful than anything the story actually says. Perhaps equally challenging, in keeping with Anishinaabe narrative traditions, I decline to reduce the narrative to express normative content" (Mills, 2016, p. 168).

Stories are like babies. They are created, nourished, harnessed, and eventually revealed to the world independently to stand alone. The risk is the judgment and ridicule, or the appraisement and adornment. What is key in this research is that the reader might interpret the story in any way. Some may need time with the story; some may come to a conclusion immediately after reading the stories; however the rate at which the clarity and meaning of the story emerges will vary among different readers.

Research as Ceremony

Story and stories of survivance are well suited for this work because they exist within an Indigenous framework of understanding. It is important to recognize the significance of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and I have taken into consideration the work of Cree scholar Shawn Wilson. Wilson goes on a "journey" to understand Indigenous scholarly work within the context of western institutions and the systems in place that are designed for research. First, he underscores the fact that there is a division between mainstream research and

Indigenous ways of research, "one of the major complaints that Indigenous people have about the social sciences (and science in general) – that researchers come from outside the community to 'study' Indigenous problems" (Wilson, 2008, p. 16). I do not feel that this is a potential problem in this work because, technically, I am Indigenous myself and this research is for me, my family, and my people. I do this work with them in mind. Wilson continues, "one of the most obvious is that researchers, no matter how objective they claim their methods and themselves to be, do bring with them their own set of biases [and] this approach focuses on problems, and often imposes outside solutions, rather than appreciating and expanding upon the resources available within Indigenous communities" (p. 16).

Wilson then moves on to providing an Indigenous framework that allows for researchers to properly "set the stage." He works in a humble manner in his book. He demonstrates to the reader that he is using Western ideals to his advantage, but also his own people's perspectives. Furthermore, he shows that he is a small, but important, piece in the bigger picture of the world, and in his research. His research journey is about himself, and discovering who he is through his work. In his journey of research, Wilson encourages his readers and potential researchers by saying "I hope you will come to see that research is a ceremony" (p. 11). He continues further in his writing using four western institutional elements that can be used and interpreted within an Indigenous framework:

> *Ontology* – "there may be multiple realities, as in the constructive research paradigm. The difference is that, rather than the truth being something that is 'out there' or external, reality is in the relationship that one has with the truth. Thus an object or thing is not as important as one's relationships to it" (p. 33).

Epistemology – "systems of knowledge built upon relationships between things, rather than on the things themselves. Indigenous epistemology is more than merely a way of knowing. It is important to recognize that the epistemology includes entire systems of knowledge and relationships" (p. 33).

Axiology – "it is built upon the concept of relational accountability […] What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship – that is, being accountable to your relations. The researcher is therefore a part of his or her research and inseparable from the subject of that research" (p. 34).

Methodology – "must be a process that adheres to relational accountability. Respect, reciprocity and responsibility are key features of any healthy relationship and must be included in an Indigenous methodology" (p. 34).

It is not my intention to conduct research, categorize each aspect, and use headings to inform my reader in regards to Wilson's framework. However, his ideas are threaded throughout the research and stories. Ontologically, the realm in which the stories are told may exist in different layers of truth. A children's story about a child's experience in the world is relatively universal, but a Windigokaan story may only exist in the context of Anishinaabe or Indigenous people. Similar to ways of knowing in the world is the way that knowledge is constructed. An Indigenous epistemology is more than simply knowing and the accumulation of knowledge. It is the relationship between knowledge itself intertwined with the sacred. A Windigokaan story is outside of the reality of the western world, but it is built on the truths of Anishinaabe knowing and being. Thinking and engaging in the sacred is one of the methods used throughout this work. Lastly, the axiological responsibilities I hold myself to are related to the accumulation of

knowledge, but also how I share it. These elements are inseparable and difficult to balance, but significant to my approach to reading and writing. It is my relationality.

I kept Wilson's thoughts and approach to an Indigenous framework in mind throughout the research process. I continually asked myself if I was being responsible in fulfilling my role and obligations to my family history in relation to an Anishinaabe way of being and knowing. According to Wilson, as a researcher it is my role to share, learn, and grow, but to also contribute and give back to my relationships with the research.

What did feel contradictory and unnatural in this process was the formal process itself. Engaging in activities such as having proposals approved and waiting for Ethics committees to critique your work is not an Indigenous way of doing things. There is an odd moment in time between doing the research proposal, completing the ethics proposal, and awaiting approval. A significant amount of momentum and excitement is lost in this liminal space. Initially, I felt like I was ready to go and was carrying momentum; I was excited to contact relatives and friends to get the process started. My mother was excited as well, and in her weekly conversations with family, she was sharing about some of my work. She may have had more questions than answers, but she was sharing nonetheless. However, I felt like I was twiddling my thumbs and waiting to get the ball rolling, while questioning my writing and intentions in the ethics proposal. This limitation is grounded in western ideology and is evidence of how academia operates. Indigenous people and culture are about connection. This western protocol works toward breaking, separating, and categorizing relationships in the research process. I understand that there are demands placed on scholars and researchers in institutions, but "many Indigenous researchers have struggled individually to engage with the disconnections that are apparent between the demands of research, on one side, and the realities they encounter amongst their

own and other Indigenous communities" (Smith, 1999, p. 5). These demands are what Smith calls "special difficulties" because they create these margins of interaction. If I had done or completed an element inappropriately, or out of order, I may not have completed this research.

Additionally, there is a level of emotion that is difficult to contain when writing this piece. Wilson explains, "there ***is*** a motive. […] the reason is emotional because we feel. […] We do what we do for reasons, emotional reasons. […] That is the gift of the Creator of Life" (p. 56). It was difficult to remove myself from the emotion of this work; I felt vulnerable and open. That being said, I felt a tremendous responsibility to my people, my culture, and my family. The thought of that kept me going, maintained my motivation, and created a sense of connection and responsibility. Scholars like Wilson call this responsibility relational, or relationality, and this is my attempt to maintain this relationality. Wilson states, "To me an Indigenous methodology means talking about relational accountability. As a researcher you are answering to all your relations when you are doing research" (Wilson, 2001, p. 177). The building of relationships and maintaining community connection was fundamental and a necessity as I transformed my research into a story. Wilson asserts that his study is more culturally appropriate because he takes on the role of storyteller rather than researcher. I had a similar objective and it was "my intention to build a relationship between the readers of this story, myself as the storyteller and the ideas present. This relationship needs to be formed in order for an understanding" (p. 6). I wanted to build a relationship with my reader, maintain my ethical relationship with my family and community, but also strengthen my bond with my children by preserving these stories.

Leadership

In this study, I wanted to understand how I have come to be the person that I am and how the women in my life have influenced me. It is their work, sacrifice, and perseverance that have helped me navigate an educational leadership role within my community. Western society has traditionally not valued Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous women's roles within the context of the Canadian fabric (Campbell, 1973; Regan, 2010; McCallum, 2014; Vermette, 2016) and I firmly believe that it is the Indigenous women in my life who have made me the person that I am today. In conducting research and drawing conclusions, I wanted to be able to retell and restory their experiences in order to make space for their narrative and rediscover how I have come to be. As much as I looked to the women and their stories, I cannot deny how colonialism and western society have had an influence and impact on their lives, and ultimately mine. There is a cultural legacy at play here and "it makes a difference where and when we grew up" (Gladwell, 2008, p. 19). In saying this, as I came to my conclusions, there was a decolonizing effect that occurred. I worked back and forth between academic writing and Indigenous-style storytelling as the voices in my paper started to come to life. Even as I wrote, I could see the characters come to life; I could envision them in their homes, working in their yards, tending to family, tending to me. I could see them working for themselves and working for others as they paved, modelled, and mentored all of the family members who watched and adored them. I felt it as I wrote it.

It is important to recognize my purpose in regards to my educational goal. My intention of course was to preserve my family's storied history, but it was my hope to be a Master in Education from Brandon University. Education in this instance is about leadership. My family, and the women who have raised my family are a great example of what leadership means in my life. I come from a humble people, the Anishinaabek. The language and the people are in tune

with the land, and land is something that we value. You will come to recognize some of these threads in the stories. My particular family members tend to be quiet and humble, yet stand with strength and honour. We value hard work and ensuring the safety of our families and communities. All of these qualities influence how I have come to define and understand leadership. Holding these values is important, despite what has historically been done to Indigenous peoples, including the Anishinaabek, and the members of my family. As negative as some of the legislated discrimination has been, I understand that these colonial laws have played an enormous role in who I have become as a leader. I do not necessarily wish to personally explain what success is here, but I want the reader to understand that "people don't rise from nothing. We do owe something to parentage and patronage. [We] are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world" (Gladwell, 2008, p. 19). These circumstances, the stories, the women in my life, where I was raised, and the way in which I was raised all contribute to how I lead. Like them, I choose to lead by standing with strength, honour, and humility.

I would also like to recognize that my knowledge of Anishinaabe language is minimal, and it is difficult for me to communicate with my parents in their first language. I understand enough to "get by," but it is difficult to carry on a meaningful conversation for any length of time. Along with language, I have also lost many traditional practices because I have very few opportunities to partake in them, nor is there time to participate in them; furthermore, accessibility to these teachings and learnings can be minimal. As sad as this makes me feel, and as difficult as it is to talk about it, it is important. I am not alone in this; many Indigenous people in North America have inherited this colonial legacy. As active as I am in reversing, and

decolonizing myself and my knowledge, I fully understand and appreciate "languages are the means of communication for the full range of human experiences and critical to the survival of the culture and political integrity of any people" (Battiste, 1998, p. 18). Often, in the Indigenous landscape, traditional language always trumps Euro-Canadian voice. I understand I have time to change this, and so do my children, but it does sadden me.

Educational leadership is critical in addressing this issue. Indigenous people have historically been devalued, omitted, ignored, and oppressed. It is my responsibility and embedded in the relationality (Battiste, 2013; Wilson, 2008; Kirkness, 1991) to my people and culture to help. Helping is what I wish this research will do. Through hard work and humility, I am giving back to my community. I am preserving the stories of myself and of my children. This is how my family has always led, and I am doing the same. The women in my life and the place where I grew up influences me as a leader. With the Indigenous worldview in mind, I also want to recognize the influence of western society and institutions. I am reading, writing and studying in English, yet I have the influence and thought process of an Indigenous worldview. I must navigate the two worlds.

Living in two worlds can be challenging. Each world has its own path and within those paths are separate values, beliefs, ways of knowing, and ways of being. Along these paths are bridges that connect the world, and moving between the two worlds is constant. As an Indigenous person it can be difficult to navigate, let alone succeed, in the two worlds. On the Indigenous path, there are direct links to traditional teachings, education, and lifestyles embedded in culture and language that have been carried on for thousands of years. On the other path are Western norms and ideals where people strive for education and economic security, and most often seek employment that will sustain their families or communities (Skyhawk, 2012).

This is not to say that people can never be on both paths, but that there is often a tension between the two worlds. It is a continuous balancing act, and I have yet to master both paths. That being said, I feel that I am successful in both, and this is the type of leadership that I provide.

With the knowledge and understanding of both worlds, I seek to understand, critique and sort out injustice (Ryan, 2006), yet bring to light the Indigenous ideals that have sustained my people since time immemorial. This position can be awkward and uncomfortable because I am privileging Indigenous knowledges while balancing the requirements of academe (Styres, Zinga, Bennett, & Bomberry, 2010). My Master's Degree in Education will honour my people, my family, and especially the women in my life, while demonstrating to my children the value of hard work, perseverance, and the value of Indigenous knowledge.

This work is about resiliency, strength, and love. This work is about honouring Indigenous women and Indigenous knowledge. Take the time to scroll through social media pages on Indigenous issues and expect to see the continued negativity around protesting pipelines, racism in the comments, ignorance around appropriation, residential schools, and missing or murdered Indigenous women. This negativity can weigh heavily on anybody. I do not want this negativity to be the focus of my study. The issues, the stereotypes, and the racism are integral to this work, but I don't want it to be the focus. It is important to recognize the issues, but it is not my motivation. Vizenor calls this preservation of stories a "renunciation of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry" (Vizenor 2008, p. 1). My stories may work as a counter-narrative to the tragedy that has been visited upon my people.

As an educational leader, I want to contribute to opposing the stereotype. I want to do this in a traditional format: story. I wish to foster the promotion of positive stories yet still recognize the horrors of settler occupation and colonialism.

Purpose

First, I wanted to conduct this research and showcase Indigenous female stories because I wish to honour the women who have shaped my life. From my great-grandmother Nancy who was a storyteller, to my grandmother Ida who was a caretaker of her community, my mother Margaret in the classroom, my wife Desiree in the courtroom and on the stage, and to my daughters, Grace and Natalie, who provide the medicine for my soul every day.

Secondly, I wish to do this work because the stories of Indigenous women often go untold. Most stories about Indigenous women are told from a western perspective. Their successes are measured based on western values and expectations. These stories through a western lens are valid, and their narratives deserve to be told, but I also want to showcase the everyday Indigenous women who dream and work hard in their daily lives and often go unrecognized. These women, in their humility, go about their daily lives as grandmothers, mothers, aunties, and sisters who are in circumstances that are considered less than ideal, but they continue to persevere and are the providers and caretakers of Canada's most vulnerable population: Indigenous children.

Thirdly, Indigenous children's stories are becoming increasingly more accessible, but it remains difficult to find literature made for young Indigenous children. I wish to provide these stories for my own children so that they will know that they can dream big and become whatever they choose to become. It will be these stories that show my children that there will be obstacles

in front of them. It may also be these stories that inspire them to overcome and persevere, while and remaining grounded and humble.

Fourth, I wish to present my findings in a traditional storytelling format that interweaves a trickster entity. Traditional in an Anishinaabek sense, but yet untraditional in the western world of academia. Presenting my findings in this way honours the storiers I interviewed, family members, traditional Indigenous knowledge, and provides a meaningful way to enlighten the scholarly world that Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing and writing are just as valid as the other forms that are usually recognized.

Finally, I am doing this for my children. As children often do, Grace and Natalie challenge me every day. They also love me unconditionally. It will be difficult to ever repay them for that, and I wish to show them that "love governs our relationship with others" (Kinew, 2015, p. 268). It is love that guides my work and it is love that guides these stories.

West

Western civilization has always been about power and dominance. Thomas King, in his book *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, masterfully weaves a trickster entity to tell a story about a sly Coyote who absolutely loves the feathers on ducks that he notices in the distance. He sees these beautiful ducks and he wants so badly to borrow just one feather to match his fur. Needless to say, the friendly ducks let him have a feather but Coyote, over the course of the story, manages to come back time after time and manipulates those poor ducks into giving him all their feathers. This takes a lot of time of course, but Coyote is persistent; he uses fancy words and makes false promises (King, 2003). As King takes the reader through the story, this type of persistence and trickery becomes familiar with the audience because the Coyote-

Ducks story is about western civilization and western governments manipulating Indigenous peoples into giving up their land and resources for the advancement of industrialized society, or progress. King relates the story poetically, but also very practically. He cites evidence from two different countries: the United States (hereinafter referred to as the U.S.) and Canada. In the U.S., legislation such as the *General Allotment Act* of 1887 set out to "re-imagine" the government's desire to control Indigenous peoples' ownership and title to land by focusing on private ownership and opening up settlement for pioneers heading west" (King, 2003, p. 130). What this ultimately meant was that ownership would be taken from the local Indigenous population, they would be placed on reservations and the resources of the area were to be broken and cultivated by the incoming settlers. North of the U.S. border, the relatively young Canadian government was negotiating and signing treaties with Indigenous peoples in Western Canada for the same purposes of settlement and ensuring that the national railroad would get to the west coast of British Columbia. In 1876, the Canadian government counter-productively passed the *Indian Act*. The paternalistic act also allowed for the creation and segregation of Indigenous peoples to land reservations, but it also defined "who is an Indian and who is not" (King, 2003, p. 132). The goal of the act was enfranchisement, which meant that the government wanted Indigenous peoples to become "Canadian citizens" under the law. They wanted Indigenous peoples to join the rest of Canadian society. So, if Indigenous peoples got college degrees, joined the military, joined the clergy, or became lawyers, they would be enfranchised into Canadian society and never allowed to return to their home reservation communities (Vowel, 2016). Enfranchisement was legislated discrimination against an extremely vulnerable population in our country, and a horrific attempt to try to get a disadvantaged people to become a part of the Canadian society as voting citizens.

My kookoo Ida was a victim of the *Indian Act* and its enfranchisement laws. She married my grandfather Abraham and lost her Indian status. Indigenous author Chelsea Vowel states:

> "One minute you were legally an Indian, and the next you weren't. Magic! This process was rather cruelly labelled "enfranchisement," a term usually positive in nature. For non-Indigenous peoples, enfranchisement was often viewed as victory over exclusion, the recognition of full rights of citizenship, including the ability to vote. For Indigenous peoples, enfranchisement was the often non-consensual process through which federal recognition of Indians was withdrawn. With that withdrawal of recognition came an end to constitutional responsibility. Enfranchisement was a concrete way to assimilate Indigenous peoples out of legislative existence, extinguish their rights, and solidify colonial control over lands and resources" (Vowel, 2016, p. 28).

My kookoo would ultimately be reinstated, but it took hard work and perseverance from such ladies as Mary Two-Axe Earley and Sandra Lovelace, who took their cases to court and exercised their gender-equality rights under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to reverse gender discrimination against Indigenous women (Quinlan & Reed, 1999).

These types of historic stories are difficult to go through and discuss. However, what they demonstrate is that western ideals are always about controlling Indigenous peoples because it means controlling the land and resources. These common historical horror stories seem so invasive. I understand that these stories are integral to the women in my life and their personal stories, but they are difficult to swallow, process, and comprehend. Nonetheless, they are extremely important. It is not my intent to just rewrite and retell "good" stories; I want to showcase through these stories the resiliency, perseverance, joy, and exhilaration that Indigenous

people live every day, in spite of what has historically been done to them. Scholar Peter Cole (2006) challenges every aspect of western society and is particularly critical of western structures of academia and education. He uses a decolonizing lens and writes in a style that is more like a traditional story being told among Indigenous peoples than a grammatically structured paper. He critiques with humour and facts, mixed with trickster stories. This act of decolonization and weaving of stories with academia helps to repatriate knowledge. Cole's book is a fascinating account, and he addresses western institutions' invasive ways and need to ask questions. He counters that thought below:

> "I avoid asking questions as much as I can knowing that questions shape answers as of course do comments […] interrogation is seen by my relations as being invasive the 3rd degree staring glaring peering voyeuring ocular snaring pampticonning as an aboriginal scholar who is sometimes caught up in the thrall of academiosis I want to be as uncoercive unmeddlesome uncontagious in my research as I can be" (Cole, 2006, p. 58).

It was my intent to write stories with this concept in mind. I wanted to not be invasive in my research, yet restory a story that is deeply connected to my heart. These stories help to paint a picture for my children so they can decide how they want to live their lives in the future. I want them to go through the same ceremony that I went through as I wrote and conducted this work.

In Wilson's Indigenous research paradigm, he suggests what is best in the ceremonial process of research and writing for Indigenous peoples (ontology: nature of existence/reality; epistemology: study of nature of thinking/knowing; methodology: theory of how knowledge is gained; and axiology: ethics/morals that guide the search for knowledge). It is Wilson's work that has helped me to navigate this interweaving of story and research. He states:

> "I believe that Indigenous epistemology and ontology are based upon relationality. Our axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining relational accountability. With a deeper understanding of these concepts, I hope that you will come to see that research is a ceremony. The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allow us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world" (Wilson, 2008, p. 11).

Both Wilson and Cole's work has helped me to feel safe in my thoughts, challenge ways of knowing and understanding, and validate that this self-reflective process is important, integral, vital, and valid for Indigenous researchers in western institutions. It is also just as essential to me as an individual, a father, a son, a brother, an uncle, an educator, and a scholar.

I understand that I am the subject of this work. This is a new position for me and I understand that I have showcased my leadership abilities via stories of the influential women in my life. I was raised to be humble, and use my eyes, ears and mouth (normally in that particular order). Most often in my family, you wait your turn to speak, and you speak only when you are ready. With honour and humility, I wish to share stories of these women, but not be the voice of their experience. I don't speak on their behalf. What I am doing is attempting to understand who I am as an individual based on the actions and love of the women who have permeated my life. I wish to provide stories that are "highly personalized accounts where authors draw on their own experiences to extend understanding of a particular discipline or culture" (Holt, 2003, p. 18). This type of writing allows me to engage in storytelling as a major focal point. I am attempting to transport the reader to a different context in order to better understand these

women in my life, and how their characteristics have influenced me. What this type of writing is doing is uncovering the many varying feelings within me as the writer (Custer, 2014). By writing, including, and transforming these stories, I attempted to restory (Regan, 2010) and reclaim the tiny tidbits of personal and cultural relevance. This restorying and recreating is a delicate weaving of story, idea, and worldview (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

"It is our Ojibwa tradition to recall our history or obtain our history in an oral manner. It is important for our children and others to benefit through the process of continuing to recall and make history." – Norval Morrisseau

Newin – Method

Storytelling as Method

I am a storier. I tell stories. We all do. We are all storiers. I conducted this research and wrote this story, for my children, and my grandchildren. Storytelling is a gift and I have been gifted an opportunity to read stories, write stories, and conduct research to honour the ancestors and traditions of the Anishinaabe people. It is essential in my work that I give voice to these survivance stories so that they are present in the dominant discourse of the institution but also to enrich and enliven the conversations in the living rooms of my family. It was my intention to bring to life the beauty of my people, and my family.

Storytelling is my method. I am telling stories; I am rewriting stories, I am creating stories, and I am listening to stories and using all of these dynamics to transmit knowledge from one generation to the next. Settee states, "Storytelling as a methodology is about reclaiming and honouring Indigenous ways of knowing, understanding, and passing important life stories on to future generations [and it] focuses on life as it is lived. It assumes a dynamic living past, a past open to interpretation and reinterpretation, to meaning-making in and for the present" (Settee, 2013, pp. 80-81). Storytelling is an Indigenous way of being and knowing, and I want to balance being an academic with being a storyteller.

The extraordinary and charismatic Anishinaabe artist Norval Morrisseau is an icon in the Indigenous community and within the Canadian art world. He is an iconic figure because of his extraordinary talent as a painter, but also as a recipient of the Order of Canada, a highly sought-after artist, and a survivor of residential schools who struggled with a transient lifestyle on and

off the streets. Many of his works were imitated and sold by forgers (Garnet Ruffo, 2018). His paintings are wondrous and captivating.

In the early 1990s, Norval Morrisseau painted *Story Tree on the World* (see Fig. 2). He used this story tree on many different works to go along with his many other pieces. He used art to showcase the stories he was told as a child; the story tree image really resonated with me and the work I was doing. Morrisseau's story tree image includes a beautifully vibrant tree with a multitude of birds attached to the branches to go along with what looks like circular leaves or fruits. The tree is attached to the earth but also to the roots that lay underneath with similar images of birds and butterflies. In some of his other paintings, a human or several humans are also present. They too are attached to the tree, typically through the hands or feet. They are all connected, always.

Figure 2: *Story Tree on the World*

In his 1987 piece entitled *Norval as Shaman Telling Stories and Legends*, he paints himself holding a child with one hand, and with the other hand he is reaching and plucking a small piece of that story tree. He is only grabbing one circular object, but the adult character is taking one of the many stories that form him, his child, and his people. This is what I wanted to do by using storytelling as method.

There are so many stories that make me. I wanted to decipher who I was and who I am by gathering stories, retelling and restorying them, so my children can symbolically reach and pluck the stories of themselves as they grow older. These may be the stories they need as they navigate their way through the circles of their lives.

Conversations

As this work was beginning to take shape, and in the early stages of creation, I interviewed my mother Margaret. We talked about my work and my goals in doing this research, we set a date for an interview, and I sent her some initial questions about who she was and how she was raised. I brought my phone and I explained that I would record our interaction. I though this would be best, and it seemed like the "researcher" thing to do.

I see my mother and father 2-3 times a week. I am very lucky to live near them. I gain the most knowledge about them, their past, and my own past by having simple, contextual, and reminiscent conversations at their kitchen table. When it came time to interview my mom, we went downstairs to where she does her sewing, I hit record, and we went through the questions. It seemed very formal and something did not sit right with me. It was not as genuine as having a conversation in the kitchen or living room, or even on the comforts of talking on a home phone

while sitting on the couch. Her answers were not as contextual as the ones I would hear during kitchen or living room conversations, and we didn't laugh nearly as much as we normally do when everyone is around upstairs.

As my phone recorded the conversation, I also took informal, short, anecdotal notes as she spoke about things from her past. Although the notes were short, precise, and symbolic of our conversation, they were vital in my reflection process of that interview. Since that interview, I have never listened to that recording. It didn't feel natural and it felt like my mother's voice and demeanour changed slightly. She was who she was, but the context and comfort level was simply "different."

As I conducted this research, I fully intended to have in-depth discussions with my storiers, in hopes that we'd be able to gather in close proximity. My plans changed with the Covid-19 global pandemic in the spring of 2020. Every interview I conducted was over the phone, which ultimately expedited the process, but I felt I did lose some close and intimate interactions and information in the process. Being face to face is really the ultimate human connection. However, the interviews were wonderful. I contacted the storiers prior, set up call dates, and set aside between one to two hours to speak. Some conversations occurred over the phone, and others were conducted via Facebook Messenger or iPhone Facetime. I made arrangements via mail or email to gather signatures for the consent forms, explain the purpose and process of my project, and to share some potential interview questions. The questions I provided may seem direct, but that was not my intent in the process. They were starting points to orient our conversations to particular topics and themes. I wanted my storiers to have a starting point and to have the chance to think about the subject matter prior to the call. I ensured the storiers were aware that the questions were simply starting points for recollection.

These planned, topical conversations were with a wide variety of friends and family members who I felt knew, and know, Nancy Ida Maytwayashing (nee: Swan), Ida Mary Monkman (nee: Maytwayashing), Margaret Ida Houle (nee: Monkman), Desiree Blaine Dorion, Grace Blaine Houle, and Natalie Claire Houle. I had a notepad with me and I jotted down ideas and themes, but my main focus was simply listening and understanding what my storiers were telling me. I did this intentionally, knowing that Anishinaabek customs call me not to intrude, be invasive, write every single detail down, or to decipher the information for my own personal learning.

Before I move forward in this paper with my list of participants, structured time allotments, and list of interview questions, I wanted recognize the tension and problematic internal struggle I had with regards to using the word *participant* for my storiers. I certainly prefer the word participant over western invasive terminology such as research subject or interviewee. For me, these words felt invasive and this was certainly not my intent in conducting conversations and speaking with people I highly respect. I could use the term "relations" which would derive from the Indigenous idea of "all my relations," but it does not flow grammatically in an academic paper. The word "contributor" is less intrusive and allows for the reader to feel that everyone had/has a contributing piece to offer to these stories. I thought "storyteller" might be the right word and fits an Indigenous framework, but the word storyteller invokes the idea that it is a hereditary gift that has been passed down to you among your people. In an Indigenous worldview, being a storyteller carries a weight, an expectation, a responsibility that you are to preserve the traditional stories of the people. In this instance, the stories I wanted to elicit and restory are only from my family lineage and are not representative of the Anishinaabe people and culture. That is why I settled on the word *storier*. Everyone has the ability to retell and recount

a story, whether they are Indigenous or not. A storier is simply a teller of stories, a person who knows a small history related to a given context, culture, and people. Each person is a storier; we all come from diverse and complicated backgrounds and offer multiple ways to look at ideas and stories (Berglund, 2011, Krupat, 2008, Vizenor, 2008).

The list of storiers had the potential to be exhaustive but I looked for representation of friends and family who know my relations best. The list included brothers, sisters, parents, in-laws, aunties, uncles, and cousins, but also traditional believers and practitioners, storytellers, elders, children, teachers and close friends. My mother and I informally started a list and I fully expected that some may not be comfortable, that there might be cancellations, or that some potential storiers may not want to talk over the phone. My potential storiers were:

1. Marlene Edwards – cousin and elder
2. Linda Chippeway – cousin
3. Valerie Edwards – cousin
4. Emma Edwards – cousin
5. Vivian Duthie (nee: Sutherland) – family friend
6. Lena Dunning - cousin
7. Brian Monkman – cousin
8. Evelyn Swan – family friend
9. Rhonda Monkman – aunt
10. Larry Monkman – uncle
11. Doreen Paul – aunt
12. Russell Monkman – cousin
13. Winnie Stasiuk – family friend
14. Jerry Saunders – family friend
15. Keith Lundale – family friend
16. Rita Monkman – godmother
17. Georgina & Raymond Larsen – family friends
18. Raymond Pelletier – family friend
19. Elaine Malcolm – sister
20. Kelly Houle – brother
21. Kim Dorion – sister-in law
22. Karen Dorion – mother-in-law
23. Don Dorion – father-in-law
24. Pam Hoover – aunt-in-law
25. Margaret Houle – mother
26. Russell Houle – father

27. Kevin Monkman - brother

As I started to make my phone calls, I made my storiers aware that due to Covid-19, our conversations were going to be conducted over the phone and not in person like I had planned. I also honoured the idea that the giving of tobacco and gifts was important to me, but due to the provincial and federal regulations at that time, did not allow for us to meet in person. I was able to conduct 16 conversations over the phone or via video call.

In Indigenous culture, an offering of tobacco is important to any ceremonial process or a person's journey to seek knowledge. I consulted with my mother, who is always been there for cultural guidance, on how to do this correctly with the storiers who agreed to participate. I will offer tobacco to the Creator, to my mother for her continued guidance in this work, and to my storiers for their knowledge. The ceremonial process in Anishinaabe culture is relatively private and sacred, and done with the self in mind, but also shows a respect for the relationships with others and the land. The offering of tobacco is an axiological process and helps to guide our minds in a good way, and demonstrates a respect for the attained and gained knowledge in this research.

Using Wilson's Indigenous paradigm, I grounded my interpretation of what I was hearing from the storiers in his interpretation of ontology. Ontologically, the stories I tell might toe the line between fiction and reality. That being said, it will be my reality and my children's choice how to decipher the threads and seeds that are within the teachings of each story. These seeds and threads are the themes that emerged from this work. Yes, I was looking for perseverance and resiliency, but I knew full well that humour and laughter would emerge, but also tears. To reminisce, remember, and bring these stories creates a happy sadness because we are so connected to our people and these happy memories bring the medicine of tears to our bodies. It

was a web with many varying connections. It is not my intention for my children to wonder if the stories are real, but to interpret them through the eyes of survivance stories of their relations. As stated earlier, Indigenous stories have historically been ignored, omitted or written out (Donald, 2009), and my intention was to write them back in.

In my family, when we gather, we laugh. It seems to be a natural way of being. It is universally understood among Indigenous peoples and families that laughter truly is medicine. We laugh and we love. But we also cry and laugh as we navigate our meaning and understanding of the world and "we know that laughter and tears are pretty much the same thing" (Alexie, 2007, p. 166). It is our way of surviving, understanding, coping, and recognizing the world around us. It is not the entirety of our epistemology, but it is vital to who we are as a people. It was my plan to have conversations and gather stories, but it was also my full intention to laugh and cry. These small, but important, pieces of each of my storier's stories will be used to create and recreate, rewrite and reright, their importance in my life.

Before I had the conversations, I generated and sent a set of questions to the storiers because I did not want any potential storier to be surprised. It did not necessarily want to rely on these questions but I certainly wanted to pre-engage everyone prior to the meeting and conversation. My hope was that the conversations would feel like a visit rather than an invasive interview. I made a commitment to be flexible in letting conversations go where they wanted to go.

How I engaged in the conversations was part of my relational responsibility to the people who trusted me with their knowledge. I believe the conversational approach created the best stories. I let the storiers know that the interview was designed to be conversational on purpose, that they were not being recorded, and that the questions would probably lead to more questions

and I did not want anyone to feel like I was being invasive or attempting to make them uncomfortable. My relationality is to honour their voices, not to record them, sift through them, and hang on to every single detail. I listened intently, laughing, crying, and finding the threads in an attempt to elicit the most vivid and striking nuances that I could use to rewrite and retell. I was reminded that conversations are stories and they move fluidly depending on the speaker, and with that, they can shift over time, over different speakers, and can relay multiple messages and meanings as they evolve (Kovach, 2009). Every single storier was prepared and addressed many of the questions I had sent. Some storiers were even kind enough to send me their answers. The best part of the conversations were the unscripted discussions when storiers went off on tangents and shared those small but cherished memories. I am forever grateful to both my storiers, and for the stories themselves.

I had my notebook there to record anecdotal comments because I knew they would be vital to the nuances of the survivance stories. In many instances, there were minimal notes because I did not want them to feel like I was not paying attention. The researcher journal I kept allowed me to recall impressions or nuances in what the storiers' shared and how they shared it. The questions I had ready for them were starting points to a bigger conversation. Indigenous scholar Margaret Kovach (2010) is an advocate for conversational method in Indigenous research. She states,

> "the conversational method is of significance to Indigenous methodologies because it is a method of gathering knowledge based on oral storytelling tradition congruent with an Indigenous paradigm [and] Indigenous methodologies have categorical units [ontology, epistemology, methodology] that are not simply more elastic, but shapeshift to accommodate a worldview outside of western tradition,

> […] the conversational method aligns with an Indigenous worldview that honours orality" (p. 40 & p. 42).

With the gift of stories, I took on a great responsibility in honouring the voices of the storiers, but also honouring the people they were talking about. I wanted to draw out those maps, landscapes, and geographies of remembrance, and show an active presence and resistance. They are my family and it was vital that I respected and validated their importance in the world, especially for my own children to understand who they are. I will pass this knowledge down to them just like my storiers did for me. Kovach, in discussing her own conversational method research says, "in all cases, participants shared stories from their lives resulting in a highly contextualized, powerful source of knowledge. In receiving the gift of story, I was ever mindful of the responsibility inherent in research and the reciprocity it entails" (p. 46).

I conducted 16 conversations over the course of November 2020 to February 2021. I did this for two reasons: Covid-19 rules and regulations changed on a monthly basis, and wintertime is the perfect and proper time to tell stories. I thought it was a reasonable timeline and it ensured people were available. Winter is a great time for stories due to the cold and long evenings; additionally spring and summer is a time for gathering. In normal times, Indigenous folk all over North America gather at powwows and days that honour the signing of Treaties.

After making contact and confirming participation, I sent questions and waiver forms to the storiers to think about and to potentially discuss. They were starting points, and depending on the subject matter, the contextual topic, and whom we were talking about, the storier was able to go anywhere they would like. Many of the questions led to prompting as I identified key concepts and ideas that came out of the conversations. I wanted to follow the storiers in the

direction that their stories took us, because stories are multilayered. The questions are included in Appendix A.

These conversations and stories were absolutely amazing. I want to clearly state that this paper is for me and my self-discovery, but it is ultimately for my children, my children's children, and any other generations that may follow. My people and my children need to know where they come from. I made this explicitly clear to my storiers, family members, and for anyone else who may read this. It was vital to me that I wrote and restoried these survivance stories so that it transports the reader to a context and era, and they are not intended to teach an explicit lesson. The stories are intended for my children, but any reader may be able to infer and interpret them. My children and grandchildren will need to interpret the stories for themselves and apply them to their own lives.

These stories are about creativity and creation. The creation of me, but also the liberating nature of creativity. These stories are both born and borne out of the women in my life. Along with my children, the essence of honouring the women in my past is essential and fundamental to my being.

These stories are about survival. They are practical. The stories are intended to create what Vizenor calls "situational sentiments [,] a sense of presence" (p. 11). Survivance is an escape but also a preservation and practice, and I wanted to memorialize the past, present, and future. In writing these stories, my story, I attempted to both save them for future generations, but to also understand who I am in Canada's fabric. I do this work with love and I hope my children come to learn about themselves through this process as well.

Shadow as Discovery

Consider the history and stories of my ancestors as a shadow. The word shadow may conjure a dark and negative image but that is not what I am trying to do. In this case, a shadow is something that is there, it is present and obvious, it follows you at all times as long as you are standing or moving, and as long as there is light. But shadows also contain an unknown element. This unknown element has beauty and harmony, and it is filled with love and strength. This is what I am trying to draw out. Historically, this shadow, this Indigenous story, has far too long been in the dark of the Canadian fabric. In discovering and writing who I am through survivance, I attempted to take pieces of this shadow, this vulnerability, from my life in order to make sense of the world.

I wanted to draw upon my own experiences and interactions with the women in my life, but not all instances and stories necessarily involve me. The majority of this work is written in first person, but the stories that are threaded and woven together are not first-person accounts. Using Vizenor and his idea of survivance, I am retelling and restorying experiences of women in my life via a fourth person. I am providing an experience of the experience.

I can recall particularly my kookoo Nancy almost coming alive as people spoke about her. I knew her, and I remember her vividly. I know how she looked and how she moved. With that image, and the stories that storiers shared with me, I came to see her again. It was incredible. I could simply picture her outside her home speaking to the thunder, the Thunderbirds. I could explicitly see her in her gardens working and harvesting; I could see her tapping the maple trees by her home and boiling the maple down into muffin pans to make maple syrup cups. She stashed them in her pocket to snack on throughout the day. I could see all of these things as she moved about her day with her long skirt, wool socks, gumboot rubber boots, long grey ponytail that she often tied into a bun, and a handkerchief wrapped around her head.

That is what my shadow is. It is her. It is her and how she moved. That is who I am. That is how I move, that is how my children will move. We'll move with today's instruments and clothes, but the same work ethic, humour, love, and power will carry through them, because of her, because of our shared shadow.

Providing these small vignette-like experiences was integral to this paper. This survivance strategy is intentional and intended to demonstrate relationality, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences of a culture and history. What this type of writing is also doing for me is confronting the dominant forms of representation in our society. I wish to provide voice. I am attempting to "reclaim through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalized those of us at the borders" (Holt, 2003, p. 20). This method was empowering, emotional, and extremely rewarding. I used the Windigokaan as the vehicle to share, but it is also a reclamation of sorts, especially because I do this work through a western institution. The reader may notice that, much like Peter Cole, I reference scholarly work, but I do not use an APA style of citing and referencing. Much like Cole, I recognize the authors and scholars and storiers in brackets simply to the right of the statement, quote, or acknowledgement. I wanted to recognize the work and the storiers, but having APA beside the format did not do the Windigokaan story justice.

Going Home

In the beginning, I introduced the reader to me, *Wasii'aa Giizhigo Inini*. I am the character in the story, and this work, and in it I feel like I am on the cusp of something important. I am standing on the land and at the edge of the water. I am looking out towards the water and the sky. I am looking to the world, my world, for guidance, recognition, connection, and hope.

That is my interpretation of that story. It is contextual and it represents where I stand at this moment in my educational journey. As much as I am looking for answers in that story, I realize that I am connected to it all. I am connected to my past, but also to the unknown, which is what I hoped to re/discover. This connection is important for me to understand, preserve, and provide, even if at times I do not always see it or feel it, it is there and it dates time immemorial.

With this work and this journey, it was my hope to go home. I wanted to go back to my home communities to seek answers, to seek stories, to seek laughter and connection. These stories, this honouring of women in my family, was beautiful. The story that follows is meant to honour those women, but in an Indigenous way. It is my intention to take the reader through a journey. As unorthodox as it may feel and sound, this is what has come to be. This is what has emerged from the shadow, and I hope I have done right.

"Maybe meeting the Windigokan means I am where I'm supposed to be, and the path I'm on is still the right one." – Colleen Simard

Naanan – A Story of Stories

I went for a walk in the bush

It's good you know, to go for a walk into the bush

That bush is good, good for you

A walk in the bush can change your life (Wagamese)

Got to breathe in, laugh it in, smell it in, feel it, hold it, walk it, run it, share it,

Own it?

It can do all kinds of things that walk in the bush

You can do all kinds of things

Adds depth, clarity, makes you healthy, health, good for you you know

Allow you to reflect, reflecting, thinking, contemplating, think about things, thinking about things in life, the journey, the road, that red road, mino-pimatsiwin

All the good things, the bad things, the future things, the things that need thinking about

When you sit around at home and think about all the kinds of things we're talking about, that isn't always healthy, that's why you need to get up, stand up, and go

Stagnant and stationary at home thinking about things can drive a person crazy, anybody, real crazy, but not all the way crazy you know

That Anishinaabe crazy, like uncle crazy, like aunty crazy, uncle is crazy, aunty is crazy, like your favourite cousin's crazy

It can drive me crazy, it can drive you crazy

That's why it's important to go for a walk in the bush

When you go for a walk in the bush, and you will, take a look around. What do you see?

Take a look at the path, have a peek at the dirt, the rocks, the branches, the curves, the hills, the stumps, the deadfall, the birds, the chirps, the squirrel, his nuts, nesting, prepping, preparing, always working, that guy, works hard that guy, boy I wished I worked like him sometimes

Notice that

The branches, look at the branches, the ones that are both dead and on the ground, the branches that are on the big and small trees, the new growth, the bark on the trees, the mould, the medicine, the twigs, the leaves, big leaves and small leaves, the mushrooms, the chaga

Does it look like it burned? Does it need a burn? Regrowth is good you now, but people around, always

Did it burn? Was there fire? Maybe, should have been, would have been good for it, burn, regrow, refresh, bring life, take life, maybe it should burn, maybe it shouldn't

Look at it, look at it closely

Look at how big some of the trees can grow and imagine, just imagine, the sound those trees make when they thunder to the ground, think of the sound, think of the power, think of that thunder, those birds, the birds, the thunderbirds, the thunderbirds can come like that, fast, fast like that tree can fall

Powerful

Count your steps every once in a while, just do it, do it for no reason, measure how far you can go, and how long you can count

Or don't

Watch your steps, watch your feet, stay in rhythm, simply watch, don't fall, boy that'll hurt, geez that'll hurt, watch your step will you, don't hurt me

If you fall get up, its important to get back up, always

Getting up after you fall can be tough, it hurts sometimes, I cry sometimes having to get up, I watched you fall and get up and cry, that's tough too to watch you cry, to watch you fall, I want to catch, hold, secure, but I can't always do that

You have to learn to fall on your own and then get up, resilient, strong, persevere, tough, tough street (Dorion)

I even remember watching you tumble into the weeds, the willows, the rhubarb, the ivy, kind of scary though, but kind of funny too you know

Scared at first, you, giin, breathing, crying, your body doing its healing immediately, the blood, the cuts, the scratches, the nicks, the bruises, the anger, the fear, and then the laughing

We always laugh, it's medicine, it's your body healing, heard that all my life

When you leave the bush make sure to think, think, about more things

Think about how it feels, how it makes you feel better about yourself, what you accomplished, clear your mind, it clears your mind, it refocuses your mind, it retells the stories of your day, and the stories to come, it restories (Regan, Starr, Starblanket, Hunt, Vizenor)

It balances you, pay attention to the balance, you're going to need this, you're always going to need this

Sleep

Sleep well after that walk in the bush

So that's why I went for a walk into the bush, needing, wanting, finding that feeling, that balance

It wasn't a long walk, it wasn't short either, kind of tired, kind of lazy, kind of excited, kind of ready to go, time to get going, time to start thinking, talking, writing

I was by myself, thinking, talking, listening, watching, hearing, paying attention to the balance of it all

I stopped to rest at a tree, I touched it, I felt it, I looked up to the top and saw the sky, blue and bright, I sneezed

We sneeze, all of us

You know that, we sneeze, see who's first to sneeze, look to the sky, the bright sky, the Bright Sky, always sneezing, laughing, wiping, teasing

Mino-giizhigat

Had to look up, way up, way up that tree

When my glare and my stare moved back down, after the sneeze, I looked at my hand, and saw the white dust of the aspen, the poplar

Good wood that poplar, always white, always green, white and green

Good for heat, good for nothing, always kept us, kept us warm that wood, that poplar, beautiful tree that aspen, aspen family you know, always good to us that family, families should be good, good to others, always

I was looking, touching, feeling, rubbing that tree, looking up

Shouldn't've been looking up, should've been looking down

That's when I saw him, quick, out of nowhere, sort of scary, but also calming, not sure why

That's when I saw him

Windigokaan

I remember the day you were born, the hours leading up, the days, the hours after, the days after, the drive home, the nerves, the hospital, the nurses, the doctors, the creases on their face, the look in their eyes, the certainty, the normalcy

Your mom

Beautiful, powerful, resilient, scared, worried, excited, elated, relief, happy, tears, protector, singing, connected forever, giver of life

You

Beautiful, powerful, resilient, scared, worried, excited, elated, relief, happy, tears, protector, singing, connected forever, giver of life

You were so small, so tiny, so beautiful, so tired, so hungry

Misko Mikanakoons Ikwe Red Turtle Woman

Gaabiidabang Ikwe Rising Sun Woman

You are Anishinaabe Anishinaabek Anishinaabekwe Anishinaabekwewak

And you come from a long line of some of the most beautiful, inspiring, caring, giving, powerful women on Turtle Island

That line, the blood, the family, it runs like roots deep in the ground, connected, forever, time, time immemorial

How long does it take to become Indigenous [s]he said [s]he couldn't remember (Cole, Momaday)

Those roots predate contact, predate your birth, predate me, predate Desiree, predate mom, predate Margaret, predate kookoo, predate Ida, predate kookoo, predate Nanshee, before all your kookoos

Those roots, they are like lightning and thunder, the thunder booming crashing, the lightning, brightening, flashing, connecting across the sky, connecting like roots of a tree

That's why you must go to the bush, heard it all my life, go to the land, watch it, looking, seeking, listening, becoming part of it, becoming part of the life

Honour, recognize, remember, retell, talk, walk, listen, restory, balance

It's who you are

Ojibwe women

Anishinaabe women

Anishinaabekwe

Anishinaabekwewak

Of earth, the mother, Mother Earth, whole, enduring, nourished, giving of life, protector

No man can own, no man can own his mother.

Men and ages linger, and then pass on. Mother Earth remains whole, indivisible, and enduring. […] Men do not outlive the earth; earth outlasts man. (Johnston)

Remember that, remember this, teachings, they're there, they're there in front of you, find them, seek them, listen, tell them, teach it, speak it, restory

I don't recall being scared

I saw a Windigokaan, I went into the bush and saw a Windigokaan, I should have stayed out of there, but

Boy he was sort of beautiful you know, beautiful but kind of ugly, sort of dancing, sort of walking, sort of talking, sort of looking at me, I think

It looked like me, it looked human, unassuming, unflattering, boring, sneaky, conniving, thinking backwards, opposite, opposite people, people who do backwards things, contraries, healers, jokesters, clowns, tricksters, teasers

Those were my thoughts

I knew it was a Windigokaan (Simard)

He didn't say anything, smiled with a smirk, one side of his smile went up, his eyes staring, glaring, watching, seeking

We both said hi, or did we? I don't know, can't remember, maybe I did

We passed each other, he moved on, I moved on, I never looked back, I didn't want to, he wanted me to, he wanted to say something, he wanted to take something, he wanted me to talk to him, give him an opening, chase me, make me laugh, notice him

That's how they are you know

They want, they take, they seek, they're hungry, they move fast, giant steps, moving quickly from place to place, human to human, void to void, pain to more pain, laughing, seeking, crying, tricking, taking advantage, healing, providing balance

But we need them, they need to be here, scary, human, energy, particles, balancing

Most people don't even know what a Windigokan is – and for good reason. (Simard)

I wanted to talk to him, so badly, I had questions, he's tricky you know, but he has knowledge, he provides balance to the world, he provides death when there is birth, birth when there is death, healing, seeking, laughing, all consuming

I would ask him about the old ways, the old talk, the new talk, hybrid Anishinaabe talk, I'd ask him about Lake Nipigon, Lake Manitoba, Hudson Bay, Agassiz, Lake Superior, Lake Winnipeg

I'd ask him about the people, I'd ask him about his story, tell me your story I would have said, the winter, the cold, the village, the beavers, the guilt, the shame, the blame, the hunger, the fear, the relief, the family, the families (Johnston)

I'd ask him about the history

What did he see? Columbus, Cabot, Chartier, Champlain, Canada, all the C's, all the seas, why did he greet them with a smile, you should've sent them back I would have told the Windigokaan

Donnacona, Stadacona, Pontiac, Ohio, Tecumseh, USA, Geronimo, deserts, Crazyhorse, Little Big Horn, Sitting Bull, Black Hills, Wounded Knee, Riel, Red River, Montana, Regina, Big Bear, Stony Mountain, Poundmaker, Qu'appelle, the valley, Cardinal, Sucker Creek, Ottawa, Harper, Red Sucker Lake, Winnipeg, Meech Lake, Horn-Miller, Oka – heroes

I wanted to ask him about all those people, all those places, what did he see?

Boy you know lots, I would've said to the Windigokaan

Boy you've been everywhere huh? You saw those things, you saw those people, you started those events, you met those people, and more

Why did you tell them those things, why would you talk to both sides? How was that balance? How is this balancing?

You should have sent them back

Women, where are the women I would asked the Windigokaan, heroes

Name them all!!! Name them, tell me, say their names, the world needs to hear their names

I need to know

I need to tell everyone, the heroes, the women, their names, rewrite the HIStory books, retell, restory

They were there too, Windigokaan, you should've lifted them, held them up, showed the world, showed the world the heroes, the real heroes, the lifegivers

We should have never forgotten the women, I would have told that Windigokaan

But you see, he's backwards him, that's what he does, backwards things, sometimes on purpose, with purpose, and sometimes not

But I didn't talk to him

That's what they want you know

A Windigokaan wants you to recognize him, acknowledge them, smile, laugh, ask him questions, revel in their mystery, tease you, trick you, balance you, give you water when you're thirsty, not give you water when you're thirsty, challenge you, make you go with them, backwards of life, splash you, splashing, sprinkling, have some of my water he'll tell you, the dancers, the fasters

They come in all forms, sizes, animals, animals doing human things, entering homes, trying to drive cars, going left when it's supposed to be right, trying to fly when they're meant to walk, walking when they're meant to fly, going counter, going opposite in the circle, the circle of life,

the circle way, the talking circle, the honouring circle, the lodge, the sundance, the powwow, circle, circles, circles everywhere (Simard)

Backwards, almost like an artist, thinking differently, thinking creatively, all kinds of kinds

A Windigokaan is a giant, giant steps, giant appetite, all consuming, seeking, thriving, tricking, scaring the people, scaring the children, eating, taking, teasing, it's just the way they are

They will not walk a straight road to get somewhere but will go off in all sorts of directions but get there at their time. You know those guys. (Ojibwe Confessions)

Windigokaan bring balance, they bring wealth, they bring poverty, happiness, sadness, love, anger, they bring rules, law, politicians, genocide, rules, laws, Residential Schools, colonialism, oppression, power, disease, sickness, viruses, medicine, healing, vaccines

X marks the spot, touch the paper, pen, paper, touch it, touch it, touch it already, touch the pen to the paper, it's over

Sometimes they consume all of this, fat, eating, eating too much, taking too much, turning humans into beavers, backwards

They lose their balance

Colony

Colonies

Colonial

Colonialism

All consuming

The Windigokaan are there at our worst times, our biggest challenges, our biggest obstacles, the hard times, the hardest times, starving, hungry times, challenging, persevering, reminding us, teaching us to be resilient, when it's cold, when coldness enters our lives, reminding (Fleming)

The Windigokaan knows, comes, asks, laughs, talks, thinks, teases

They bring balance, to teach us, to teach us to overcome

Balance

My girls, you come from strength, balance, balance and strength

You come from women who have persevered, suffered, overcame

Beauty

Beautiful

My girls, you come from dreams, from songs, from words, from prayers, you come from the stars, the sky, the earth, Mother earth, mothers, kookoos, the Anishinaabe, the water, you come from the waters, life, lifegivers, you are a lifegiver

You are the sky

You come from the Thunder

You come from the sky

You are the sky

My sky

Your kookoo Nanshee, she came from the sky, just like you, she was Thunder, she was powerful, spoke her truth, told it like it was, like it is, stories, storyteller, telling stories like the people were there in the room, standing beside her, sitting there on the floor, listening, learning, laughing,

crying, medicine, medicine times, the way of the Anishinaabe, Anishinaabekwe, Anishinaabekwewak

Just like you

She sat on the side of her bed, feet together, gumboots on, piss rubbers on, or off

Wool socks, one pair, two pairs, whatever, don't matter

Stockings

Hairnet, buns, grey hair, long hair, bunned up, tied up, held up

Sitting, watching, listening, talking, telling stories, watching the weather, watching the wind, watching the trees, the rain, the darkness, lightning, the flashes, the thunder, the booms

She was telling stories

She was telling stories this one time

Weaving them, like her blankets

Weaving them, on the floor, like her blankets, on the floor, spread about, patched, patchwork, storywork, Indigenous storywork (Archibald)

Just like her, just like her blankets, sewing, patching

Sitting, beautiful, waiting, watching

Long grey hair, tied up though, always tied up, bun, bun like, always in a bun, sacred moment to see her hair down, especially the long strand, that lone strand, the one that falls, the power strand, down the back, down her back, falling like that

The dress, the skirt, always on, the stockings, always on, the dress shirt, the button shirt

The beauty, she looked like that

Beautiful

She was telling stories

She was telling the children, learning, listening, scared, as the thunder booms, the thunder booming, flashing, outside

But you see, she knew the weather, she spoke to the Thunder, she spoke to the sky, she knew the ways, the old ways, she walked it, lived it, mino-pimatsiwin

The children were scared, crying, wondering, house shaking, that small house, the one with the ramp, the outhouse, the wood stove, the cook stove, the axe, the wood, the woodpile, the kitchen table, the tablecloth, the tea, the lard, the bannock, the salt, the sugar, the kettle

The Thunder scared the children

Scared, sacred

Sacred, scared, same thing

Standing, scared, she stood, worried, concerned, she stepped out, in her skirt, her long skirt, her beautiful long skirt, hair tied in a bun, that long beautiful, grey hair, the knowledge, the wisdom, the language, the experience, the history

She carried that with her

She carried that with her when she stepped out the door, walking down the path, the path to the front, the dirt path, standing, talking, screaming, yelling, the language, calmly, firmly, kindly, asking the Thunder, speaking to the Thunder, respecting the Thunder, protecting

She spoke to the Thunder you know

Kookoo Nancy raised her hands like this, I could see her silhouette, it was dark out, her hands were raised to the sky like this, she was speaking Ojibwe, speaking to the Thunder, the Thunderbirds, asking, requesting, telling them to stop. (Edwards, Chippeway)

She spoke to the Thunder

She only spoke Ojibwe, Saulteaux, Anishinaabe, Anishinaabemowin, she had that way about her, the way she was, she spoke her truth, she spoke in her way, heard that all my life

She spoke to the Thunder to protect the children and on that day the Thunder listened

It was gone next thing

That Thunder my girl, those Thunderbirds my girl, that power runs in your veins, that power is in you, that's the power you use when the Windigokaan comes, that is what you use, you think of, you access, you ask for, you cry for, when they come, to take, to consume, to eat, to step on you like giants, you're the giant, use that power, use the Thunder to overcome, speak to them, speak truth to power, speak your truth, be a giant

Those Thunderbirds run in your veins

Your kookoo Ida was a Thunderbird

White Thunderbird Woman Waabishke Animikii Bineshikwe

She was given that name, in ceremony, naming ceremony, sacred space, spaces, similar to how you were named my girls, remember that time, try not to forget that time, you'll need to remember that time, to know who you are, where you come from, where you're going – heard that all my life

She was given that name when she was ill, when illness came, those hard times, difficult times, she was given that name, the power, powerful name, at a time in need, when it was needed, and it came from the sky, it came from the Thunder, that same Thunder

White Thunderbird Woman was her name, say it, sound it, let the world hear it, let your world hear it, both worlds, the two worlds, the two worlds you must walk in, the balance (Skyhawk)

You know, when my kookoo Ida died, your kookoo Ida, she left that power here, even when she left, when she left us, forever, she left it here on Earth, Mother Earth, the mother, the water, the sky, the heavens

She left it because it carried power, that power has to carry on you know

She left that power with your mom, they all did, Nanshee, Ida, they left that power with your mom

Your mom my girl, she carries that power, she carries that truth, she speaks her truth, you know that, you heard, the way she is, she speaks her truth, she sings her truth, the world knows her truth, all the time, that's who she is, powerful

White Thunderbird Woman Waabishke Animikii Binesikwe

She was given that name, in ceremony, naming ceremony, sacred space, spaces, similar to how you were named my girls, remember that time, try not to forget that time, you'll need to remember that time, to know who you are, where you come from, where you're going – heard that all my life

It was passed to her you know

She carries that power, that name, that voice, she speaks to the Thunder, the sky, Sky Woman, sky women

Ida, kookoo

Desiree, mom

They share that name

They are all from the sky, they fell from the sky, that power, their power, it came from the sky, the skies, the heavens, both big and small, that power, that heaven, the Creator's space, Gichi-Manitoo

They all came from the sky, the heavens, just like your kookoo Margaret, your kookoo, she carries that power too, you know

Little Heaven – Kiizhigoo-inens

Your kookoo Marge, comes from the sky

She was given that name, in ceremony, naming ceremony, sacred space, spaces, similar to how you were named my girls, remember that time, try not to forget that time, you'll need to remember that time, to know who you are, where you come from, where you're going – heard that all my life

Say their names

Speak their names

Say your name

Say your names

Speak the truth

Truth to power

Misko Mikanakens Ikwe – Little Red Turtle Woman

Gaabiidabang Ikwe – Rising Sun Woman

Say your names

They lived in log homes you know

Boy that must have been tough, real tough, tough living, tough living that way, being on tough street

Small those homes, back then, not like now

Didn’t need much then

Don’t need much now

Built from scratch, Swede saws, falling trees, spruce, tamarack, oak, ash, poplar, good wood that poplar, community builds, friends, family, labourers, hard, difficult work those times, everyone helped, that’s what they did, that’s what they did back then, they helped each other, the community, they came together, built each other’s homes, built with love, built with hope, built with warmth, built with warmth those homes

Log by log, nail by nail, climbing, and sitting, and pounding, and centering, and eyeballing, strings all over, lining them up, making sure they’re straight, centered, safe

Single room log house

Sometimes two rooms, two rooms if you’re lucky

Extra beds, extra beds for visitors, always people coming over then, can’t just leave, so you have to stay, spend the night, that’s the way it was, that’s the way it was back then, heard that all my life

Have to finish them before fall, get the plaster up, the clay, the lime, the white colored plaster on the walls, mixed with hay, mixed with hay to strengthen it, to seal it, to ensure the bugs, the mice, the birds don’t get in, make sure the Windigokaan don’t come, especially before the winter, before the cold, before the hunger, that’s when he likes to come, the cold, the cold times, tapping on the door when you’re not supposed to tap on the door

Your kookoo Nanshee had a log home, built from scratch, built with love, built on the shores, the shores of Lake Manitoba, the great spirit’s lake, where the creator sits, god’s country

Small house, but big warmth, had to extend that house, built an extra room in that house, had an upper floor too, but not like today's upper floor, just a few feet up with a short step, but big deal, big deal back then that extra room, that upstairs

Beautiful place, beautiful on the shores, beautiful behind the church, the only church, the church on the reserve, Dog Creek Indian Reserve 46, Lake Manitoba First Nation, 46, always with the numbers, always with the numbers keeping track, government, government officials, Indian agents, Indian Act, acting Indian, always trying to be Indian, always assigning numbers for Indians, what's with the numbers? Whats with numbers and the tracking, the lurking, the counting, the system, the control, the patriarchy, the Windigokaan

Indian

What's this word, never heard it, never spoken here before, never said before, that word Indian, that was never said here, we're older than that concept, that's because we're the people, we're the human beings (Trudell)

Always trying to control

Kookoo Nanshee was never like that, she had power, the control, she was power, her life, in charge, always making decisions, always working hard, always telling stories, always helping, always looking after people, the children, her husband, your grandfather Charles, Shaal, Shaalaban

She had love in that home, that log home, that log house, the log house with the plaster, the home behind the church, with the dirt path, the dark dirt path, the colourful dirt path, the adventure path, boards on the ground, boards on the ground in the spring, beautiful, powerful

Had to walk those boards through the bush to get to the home you know, trying not to get dirty, mucky, muddy, balancing

Powerful that home, that log home

Just like Centre Lake

Centre Lake log house

That's where kookoo Ida lived, Abraham built it, built it with Uncle Albert, Abraham's son, my uncle, your uncle, my funny, crazy, uncle, called me Ashern Fridge

Ashern Fridge because I like to eat, when I was a kid, looking in the fridge, finding food, finding snacks, always eating, playing, running, burning energy, but there's nothing in the fridge, that time, nothing to eat, just like Ashern fridge

They built that home, warm, beautiful, always had horses, always had a team, always hauling stuff, always hauling stuff for the community, helping the community, Vogar

They built that home on the shores, the shores of Centre Lake, not far from Dog Creek, not far from Dog Lake, not far from the Narrows, the sacred Narrows, not far from Lake Manitoba, the Creator's lake

Lots of room at Centre Lake, not in the home, not in the log house, it was small, they were all small then, not like homes now, heard that all my life

There was bush everywhere, water everywhere, beach, beach before the weeds, beautiful, powerful place, beach before the Water Conservationists, Ducks Unlimited, taking, observing, protecting, putting up signs for thanks, thanks for the land, thanks for the water, thanks for nothing, thanks is all you get, thanks is sometimes all the people ever got back then, but not so much now

Always taking, always consuming

Hard work those log homes

Had to build another one, this time closer, closer to family, closer to people, closer to the community, but this time had to build a barn too, for the horses

This time in Vogar, built in Vogar, by the same hands, but closer to others, so you can share, all share, build the gardens, share the rewards, help the community, provide for the community, borrowing out the horses, ensuring the people were protected, needed, received, were helped

Your kookoo Ida lived for the home, always cooking, always having a cookhouse, the cookhouse outside, always outside, especially in the summer, cooking for the people, always cooking, the smells, the wonder, the bread, the bannock, the baking

Summer comes, the stove gets moved outside, moved to the cookhouse, winter time, time to move it back in, back into the house, cook in the house, on the cookstove, but in summer, cooking outside in the cookhouse

Hard work those log homes, hard work building, plastering, lifting, painting, protecting, providing

Same with another log home

Another log home in Vogar

Lots of log homes those times, those times in Vogar

Your kookoo Marge had one too you know, bet you didn't know that, had one in Vogar, with papa Russell

Small home, small white home, near the school, first home, first home together, early times, earlier before me, I didn't live there, but Elaine was there, Aunty Elaine, in that log home, living with them, Elaine moved in with them, staying with them, in Vogar, learning to live, learning to live again, learning to live again with papa, hard times those times, difficult times, changing times, learning times, tough times

Hard times on all people those times, but good times too, that learning, that listening, that living

One time, they caught a weasel, yes, a weasel in the house, a white one, a white weasel, papa trapped it, skinned it, dried it, stretched it, sold it

Imagine a weasel in the house, shingoose, Shingoose, papa Abe's name, him

Aunty Elaine told me she got to keep the money that time (Malcolm)

Those small stories matter, those little stories matter too, add layers, add depth, demonstrate the simple but fun times, the innocent times, the hard times, but the good times too

Hard work, hard work living those times, hard work building log homes, hard times moving back in with the family, especially when you've been away, been away a long time, too long, too long for Aunty Elaine, hard work to build, build log homes, build relationships, repair relationships

Hard work

Important work

Forgiving work

Heart work (Archibald)

Takes time, takes healing, takes understanding, takes community, takes understanding, takes a village, takes everyone to raise a child

Hard work, just like a home, a warm home

Tap, tap, tap

What was that? Kind of late for a tap, a tap on the door

Tap, tap, tap

Eyes looking, but head not moving

Who's there

The Windigokaan came again

This time it was a surprise

I didn't understand, didn't get it, it was revealing, never heard it before, never heard that story before, Aunty Elaine's story, it's a difficult one, a telling one, a healing one, still healing, still trying to understand her, and me, still trying to figure

Surprising, surprised me that story, consumed me

That's when he comes, that Windigokaan, when it's cold, when you're vulnerable, when revelations come, when you don't expect it, when it's not supposed to be there, when it feels backwards

It came though, it was supposed to

Can't tell you here, can't reveal that one

Came to centre me, to centre us, to bring balance, to reveal, to tell the truth, to speak the truth, and to figure, figure it out, digest it, to piece together my story, our story, your story

It's not always easy

Life is not always easy, brings challenges, difficulties, hardships, perseverance, resilience

Those are important stories too, some need to be told, some don't, can't always share everything, but still part of the story, still there to provide the balance

Difficult times, those hard times

Many of your kookoos had to grow up fast, take on responsibility, raise babies, raise homes, raise families, mom too, your mom, Des, had to grow up fast, too fast (Hoover)

Not many good stories to tell, your mom, her home, mountain home, not always a safe place, space

The yelling, the drinking, the backwards, the wrong way, tough times, those times

Got to be tough

Just like your kookoos

Kookoo Nancy, boy she was tough, tough woman that kookoo Nanshee, that's what they called her, not Nancy, but Nanshee, tough woman, they all were, all those women in those times, had to be tough, tough world to be in

She raised many kids, all kinds of kids, all kinds of kinds, not just her own too, always had kids to look after, that's what she did, she looked after her community, it was her job, necessary job in those times, to be responsible, to help the community, to help other families, other women, other children, other people's children (McCallum)

Wasn't just her too, lots of women, Indigenous, Anishinaabe, Cree, Dakota, name them all, name all the tribes, bands, Natives, Indians, Native Americans, Indigena, Indigenous, First Nations, First Peoples, Metis, name them all, thousands, Turtle Island, all over the place, impossible, impossible task to name them all and remember

They were tough people back then, different times, but still tough

Your kookoo Nancy had it hard at times, but she was tough too you know, she had a way about her, she spoke her truth, told stories, teased, laughed, commanded, demanded

Times get tough in the community, no vehicles then, not as many, not like today, had to use horses, use a team, saddle and strap, take the reins, or walk, make the journey, pack up and walk to where there needs help, someone needs it, pack a bag, plan to stay long, plan to help, plan to

cook, lots of planning, lots of thinking, much thinking involved when you're responsible for the community

She looked after the community

She looked after many kids, not just her own, took responsibility, made sure they were looked after, raised them, Anishinaabe way to do that, look after the community, raise em up, all of them

Always providing

Always sacrificing

Deaths, births, your kookoo Nanshee packed up and went, she was gone, just like that, had to go, had to go help, had to go cook, had to help the birthing, had to prepare for the deaths, she packed her stuff

I can just see her walking away with her bundles (Edwards)

She nursed

She was a nurse, the nurse, of the community, that was her job, not like now, not like how they do nurses now, the training, the schooling, the education, the degrees, the certificates, the licenses, not like that

She was a nurse

Taught and learned by living, by breathing, by watching, learning observing, following the ways, learning from community members, family, all the women, they knew lots then on how to take care of the community

She nursed families, she helped them birth babies, bringing life into the world

She nursed families, she helped to prepare the bodies, the death, the wrapping, the cleaning, the combing, the coffins, the services

Incredible

Incredible selfless sacrifice

Not just her though, you see, those are those stories, the stories that get lost, that don't get told, they're not in books, rarely in books, but some are

A form of Native women's domestic labour occurred in private homes […] stories about Native women and domestic work are often told in relation to family responsibilities. (McCallum)

Her training wasn't in school, cities, professors, researchers, travelling, moving from home, her training was on the land, in the community, it runs in her blood to take care, to look after, to nurse the people

Same blood as you, same, just like the Thunder

Those are the stories, these are the stories, they need protecting, to be told, to be retold, to be remembered, to survive, survivance, to pull from the shadows, the depths, to pull up from the grounds, to pull down from the thunder, these are the stories of who you are

Incredible

Kookoo Ida, kookoo Marge, same way those two, same too, all the same, all the same those women, strong, forgiving, always welcoming and ensuring everyone had a spot, a space, is not forgotten

Christmas

Boy your kookoos loved Christmas, just like you, just like your mom, just love Christmas

Not kookoo Nanshee though, Ha! she never liked parties, never decorated, always had food, always had people over, always had kids there, on the floor, listening, watching, learning

But didn't like Christmas, or any celebrations, no anniversaries, no birthdays, no decorations, nothing

She liked Christmas, of course she liked Christmas, the celebrating, the fun, the gifts, but not really, thought those are White man ways, European ways, what about the Anishinaabe ways?

That's the way she was your kookoo Nanshee, spoke her mind, let it be known

Kookoo Ida, kookoo Marge, different story, still a story though, still worth keeping, telling, collecting, remembering

Lots of gifts, too many gifts, for what? Why so many? For who? For whom? For hoom, for home

Always had gifts under the tree for everyone, even surprise guests, even people in the community, people I didn't know, or didn't remember, always had gifts for everyone, even spares hidden in the bedrooms, closets, under beds, in shelves, wrapped, unwrapped

Kookoo Ida never forgot about me (Monkman)

Really helped to have those gifts, for the kids, make someone feel special, not everyone had a good home, warm home, sober home, especially Christmas time, Christmas is great, not for everyone though, it's time for celebrating, and partying, but sometimes people can't control themselves at those times, party for days, party for long nights, that's why they visit, that's why the kids came around at Christmas, to come visit, to play, to be warm, to eat, to get a gift

Kookoo Marge, same thing

Lots of gifts, too many gifts, for all the kids, the grandkids, the neighbours, the cousins, the uncles, the aunts, the relatives, just in case someone pops in

Just like mom, always planning, planning parties, staying ahead, planning ahead, getting the gifts ready, wrapping, decorating, cutting, peeling, serving, mixing drinks, ensuring the kids are

eating, playing, having fun, controlling, not bad controlling, but controlling outcomes, controlling the party

They're all like that, just like you, caring, thoughtful, considerate, understanding, kind, excited, playful, like she's a child again, reversing her story, reversing her childhood, mom, so that you don't have to see what she saw

Christmas is fun and exciting and beautiful

Wasn't always that way for mom, hard times those times, Christmas brings uncertainty, unsafe, the drinking, the partying, the up all night, the yelling, the screaming, the trashing, the crashing

All her life

I was there too, I saw it, not meant for people's eyes, not meant for your eyes, but still important, those stories, that is what makes you what you are, we are you, we made you, we raised you, that's the way you are, maybe because of us, the protecting, protection, confusion, misunderstanding

There's a reason for everything, the protection, the short visits, the stories, the stories told and untold, the stories that need telling, hard stories, difficult ones, difficult stories at a time where they should be good stories, not uneasy, not uncertain, shouldn't be that way, it shouldn't have gone that way, but it did, and it's one of those difficult ones to tell

Uneasy times for mom, mom and her sister, aunty, difficult to comprehend, difficult to protect

Remember that, remember where you come from, remember the women, the ones that laid the path, the ones that persevered, the resilient ones

And remember, the Windigokaan always comes, always tapping on the door, keeping you straight, reminding you, reminding you that it's always there, always waiting, lurking, ensuring you recognize the balance

Care for people, care for yourselves, first

Care for people, because people need caring, looking after, attending to, love, honesty, medicine, laughs

You never know when illness comes, never heard of Covid, never heard when I started this, this work, thesis, Masters, supervisor, supervisory committee, Brandon U, interviews, research, findings, conclusions, reflections, implications

Covid, now you can't, now you can't know it, can't not, cannot, it's everywhere, a virus, a virus has taken down the world, the Windigokaan is laughing, crying, trying, running around all over, giant steps from place to place, he's spreading it, but he's trying to put it out too, with his big feet, but he can't, it's too quick

Never heard of Covid-19, coronavirus, the panic, the masks, the worry, the health of our people, being tested, swabbed, closing schools, economy, businesses, everything, even visiting, pushed to the limits, our limits, your limits, it's tiring, all consuming, backwards

Is this balance, is this our world, is this our world telling us to stay in balance, a message, the message sent, are we to listen, slow things down, stay home, stay present, pay attention, bring balance back to the world, is this what the Windigokaan wants?

You never know when illness comes, sickness, viruses, diseases, but sometimes you do, and sometimes it can't be stopped, Covid, small pox, flus, tuberculosis, cancer, AIDS, HIV, Alzheimer's, diabetes, sickness, sores, breathing, lungs, attacks everything, anything, anybody, everybody

Never heard of Covid, or AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna, never heard of those terms, Johnson & Johnson, well I've heard that before, but not this way

Have to be careful out there, it's tempting, want to go, have to go, go out, go out and visit, see people, we're humans, we need interaction, but that's what he wants, he wants you to pay attention, fight with each other, offset the balance so it balances again, got to watch, be careful, listen to the science, the research, there's value in that, there's value in western education, universities, colleges, schools, exams, labs, papers, essays, poetry, plays, studying, data, quantitative, qualitative, balancing, understanding, expecting, predicting, theorizing, presenting, writing, essays, punctuation, capitalization, mechanics, MLA, APA, OCAP, references, literature reviews, works cited, chapters, quotes, knowledge and methods, there's value in those western places you know, so do it, go to places and seek that knowledge, but do it your way, own it, write it, write it like you see it, harness your kookoos

Disease comes, it comes fast, unexpectant, unexpectedly, when you're not ready

Kookoo Ida, she had Alzheimer's, tough disease that one, hard to watch, hard to see, hard to witness, tough to be there the whole way, to watch it, the deterioration, the quietness, the anger, the confusion, the sense of direction, the cooking, the cleaning, the smoking, the yardwork, the gardening, it goes, it all goes, slowly, but rapidly, you know, the time goes by quick

It creeps, it starts, slow, it's the small things, it's the glasses, losing glasses, all the time, misplacing cigarettes, forgetting to smoke, going to the bathroom, forgetting to go to the bathroom, cooking, organizing, cooking large meals, organizing the big dinners, but forgetting, starting all the meals and courses, but forgetting, and not having anything ready, not having it

ready on time, and for everyone, especially because she always thought of everyone, her whole life, how she was raised, to look after everyone

But she forgot

She forgot she smoked, forgot her purse, forgot her jacket, forgot where she was going, forgot she went for a walk, walked on the highway with no jacket, papa Abe worried, looking, calling, phoning (Chippeway)

She got picked up, on the road, on the highway, she was confused, she was lucky, it was cold outside, she laughed, she was jumbled, her mind was not in balance, she laughed, pretended she was okay, got driven back, lucky it was her niece, her niece picked her up, just happened to be driving by, saw her outside, in just a shirt, not a warm jacket, kind of cold that time

I watched it

It was hard, made me realize how lucky I was to grow up with a kookoo, so strong, so resilient, she had this aura, she had an aura about her, a presence, gichi-Ida, gichi-Ida they called her, she was good, she looked after people, welcomed them into her home, beautiful

I watched it, I watched her deteriorate, I watched her misplace things, get mad, sit down on the couch, on the corner, near the window, and stare out, staring at the TV, watching Abe, uncertainty in her eyes, I watched her forget, randomly laugh, call me by name, call me by another name, same breath, second breath, it was hard, hard to watch

She forgot things, it got worse, progressively worse, even forgetting to step, directions, she headed to the stairs, not sure for what, probably to do the laundry, just your cousin Clint was there, my cousin Clint, cousins I grew up with, raised up with, he was there, when she started

heading down stairs, she forgot there were stairs, she forgot her steps, she crashed, and tumbled, to the bottom

Clint found her, she was alive, she was there, but not there, he ran next door, ran to uncle Albert's, called the hospital, the ambulance, they came to get her, stayed in the hospital, scary times, I was scared, scared I lost my kookoo, didn't visit, couldn't visit, hard to visit, hard to see your kookoo like that, it was her, but not her, you know

She made it out, finally came out one day, but came with four wheels, had a wheelchair, had to build ramps for her, had to get care for her, respite work, to look after her, help to clean, tidy the house, prep meals, look after our papa, hard times, hard on kookoo Marge, she took the brunt, she had a lot of responsibilities, had to grow up fast, grew up fast when she was young, but it prepared her for this, caretaking, keeping, watching, looking after her own mom, her lifegiver, now she was returning, returning the responsibility, had to move back home, right next door, to help to look after her, in her wheelchair, and papa Abe in his age

Not easy times, difficult to see your own mother, your strong, powerful, resilient mother in that way, but your independence, resilience, perseverance, it'll prepare you for it, even though you're never prepared for that

Disease, it comes slow, it comes fast, goes by fast, your kookoo Ida died, died early because of her illness, an illness your papa Charles, papa Shaal they called him, had the same disease, kookoo Nanshee's husband, he had same thing, the forgetfulness, the anger, the unpredictability, the confusion, the lost memory, memories

Had to go to Selkirk, the hospital, the mental one, forever

It isn't fair, it's not fair what happens to people

Covid isn't fair, it took your cousin Lena, just recently, just a few weeks after I write these words, these words right here, write here, it isn't fair, it's not fair our world, she died, my aunty Lena, your aunty Lena, she died, lived in Vancouver, moved there when she was young, raised up by Ida and Abe, Covid took her

That's when he comes, the Windigokaan, you might not see him, but he's around, been around a lot these days, he's thriving, but he's also hurting, he sees the damage

Death comes, it always comes, everyone dies, doesn't make it easier, makes it harder, especially people we love, it lurks, it lingers

Death comes, it always comes

It came for your kookoo Ida, it'll come for all of us

It came for your kookoo Nanshee too, but she's crazy that one, not crazy like asylum crazy, but Indian crazy you know, like your crazy uncle, my crazy uncles, Anishinaabe crazy, it's not real crazy, it's actually a compliment, a tease, an honour, your kookoo Nanshee she was crazy like that, Anishinaabe crazy, say whatever to whoever whenever, she was crazy

She saw death, she was there, Christmas time, you know everyone's favourite holiday except kookoo Nanshee

She left this world, her spirit, it left, she was in hospital, in bed, lots of people there, lots saw

It was Christmas time, the time she died. In Eriksdale. She was barely breathing, long time between breaths you know. Next day, she was sitting up, yelling at the nurses, she was mad, then she smiled, and we all sat down. (Edwards)

Boy she was mad when she got up, happy too, she told the story, told it soon after, told it after she died, she was flying, flying around, she's from the sky remember, she can do that, she was flying, flying over everyone, she went to Brandon, Dauphin, Winnipeg, that's what she said, that's what she told them when she got up, got up from dying

She said to everyone, "I heard you guys crying, so I said I'm not going yet"

She said this in the Anishinaabe way, she told them, she said *newmaa*, that's where I am going, that's what she said, that's what she told everyone, even in the sky she said that

She wanted her bag, two hours later she was home. (Chippeway)

She was in charge of her life, the way it should be, hard to do that, hard for women to do that, hard for females, ikwe, ikwewag, Anishinaabekwek to do that, but you can, take charge, say your piece, your peace, your power, say it, say it like your mom says, like your kookoo Marge says it, like your kookoo Ida said it, like your kookoo Nanshee said it, take charge, speak your truth, power, own who you are

When there's hard times there's good times too, you know

The times when the Windigokaan isn't around, he's busy, he's out, he's gone, gone shopping, gone hunting, gone to tease someone else, gone to eat, consume, find water, he needs that water him, he's always thirsty, always trying to tease everyone at the powwow, the sundance, splashes them when they're not supposed to have water, drinks it too, just to tease, so he's probably gone to other places when the good times come around, others need balance too

Lots of good times

Your kookoos were wonderful people, still are, still working, always working, there's always something to do, stuff needs to get done, you too, you too should be working, doing something, maybe reading, maybe reading this is doing something, be productive, either go to school or go to work, heard that all my life

Your kookoos loved lots of things

Getting dirty is one of them, a good dirty, getting in the dirt dirty, planting a garden dirty

Boy they loved planting gardens, big ones too, sometimes one, sometimes two, two gardens

Kookoo Nanshee had two gardens, one by the lake, Lake Manitoba, and one near the bush, along the bush, the bush trail, the wooden plank trail, the trail that leads to the church, the trail that leads back to the community, and not towards the lake, she had a garden there, big one

Planted lots her, always in there cleaning, plucking, weeding, digging, pulling, lining, watering, picking

It's exciting when the weather warms, rains, dries out, spring winds arrive, she'd go out there, all her seeds, seeds she dried and stored, shovels, strings, sticks, have to line them up, just right, make sure they are sowed properly you know, be strong, strong plants when they grow up, provide for the family, harvest in the fall, grab more seeds from them, can them, seal them, jar them, sell them, preserve them, save them, provide gifts to visitors, snack on them, all kinds of things you can do with your garden

She shared lots too, shared her garden, reaped for others, helped her community, you know that

First thing is to look after it, plant it right, tend to it, ensure there's water, haul pails from the lake, hope for the rain, talk to the Thunder, pray for a good harvest, avoid the cold, the hunger, avoid the starvation times and stories of the past, when winter comes, those ones, those stories are scary

Second is to tend, watch, pick, weed, clip, clean, pick bugs, potato bugs, gross, put them in a jar, show your kookoo you picked them off, sacrifice your body, your blood, to the mosquitoes, dirty the fingers, get right in there, get into the dirt, scrape the knees, on the dry dirt, wipe your hands on your pants, the sweat from your brow

Third, is to harvest, pick 'em, pluck 'em, dry 'em, clean 'em, wash 'em, boil 'em, blanch 'em, can 'em, store 'em, eat 'em

Used to have to dig a big hole back then, that's your fridge, keep it cool, below the ground, that's what people did, kept their food down there, damp, but cold, grab ice, cut ice, haul ice from the lake, keep it cold, lasts long down there, just like a fridge, simple times, people say that, but they weren't so simple, aren't so simple, couldn't live like that now, I can't, can you?

Kookoo Ida, her too, she liked to garden, had two gardens too, one behind her house, the big house, the big yellow house, her last house, where she died house, where papa Abe lived, she had a garden behind there, just a small one, small because she had a second one, a shared one, shared with Uncle Albert, he had a big one

I remember playing in that garden you know, boy it was big, boy was it big, we used to get in trouble, yelled at, could damage the corn playing in there, but the corn was the best, the best to play in, tall, fanlike, but narrow enough you could see through, see through the rows, row on row, running up and down, as fast as we could, but we'd get yelled at, or get in trouble, or

damage the crop, that means less food in winter time, the harsher times, the quieter times, the storytelling times

Kookoo Marge, she gardened too, but times changed for her, she had a bit of the old ways, the language, the talk, the dialect, Anishinaabe, Anishinaabekwe ways, but she also had the new ways, went to school, went to university, got a degree, teaching, travelled all over, travelled to teach, different communities all over the place, all over Manitoba, she had the new way of living, but keeps the old ways alive too, balanced, that's how you balance that way, you got to walk it, walk the two worlds, one foot in one, and another foot in the other, White man ways, Anishinaabe ways, balanced

So she gardened, but not like Ida, not like Nanshee, but she gardened, you remember, you remember don't you? She had a garden behind the house, by the field, looking out towards the mountain, the park, the canola fields, remember, the bench, the trees, the spruce, the poplar, the trees that papa planted, right there, remember, she had a garden there

Now, mom, she's a different story

Lots of skills and talents that mom of yours, singing, schooling, writing, bossing, planning, lawyering, loving, laughing, teasing, lots of skills, diverse she is that one, but no gardening, can't garden, tries all the time, every year, but her eyes move too much, she's always moving, thinking, planning, what's next, can't focus, can't pay attention, forgets about the plants, the gardens, the weeding, the watering, can't remember to do those things, needs reminding, prodding, pushing, teasing, then she gets to it, but sometimes it's too late, you know that

That's fun too though, to laugh, to tease, to remind mom, of her garden, it's loving, caring, fun, medicine, she brings the balance, forces us to balance

You know what your mom can do….. sing

Boy, she can sing

Always singing, every minute, every second, every portion of her day, when she can, she's singing, always seeking new songs, finding old ones, traditional ones, new style ones, country mostly, but open to good songs, good stories

That's what she is, she's a storyteller, always spinning, weaving, writing, moving, thinking, creating, like an artist, crafting, piecing, placing, placing them together, those words, lyrics, songs, sequences, choruses, verses, always honing

Started writing young your mom, wrote songs when she was small, 6 years old, writing poems, poems are songs, songs are poems, same thing, vice versa, always writing, and singing, but shy, scared to share those songs with the world, pretty young to share, but granny Karen always told her, encouraged her, share those songs, sing those songs, sing other people's songs, so she did, she sang, and sang, and sang, travelled all over, place to place, singing, laughing, the thrill, exhilaration, rewarding, addicting, it gets addicting to sing and perform, your mom, she's addicting too, has that way about her, speaks her mind, speaks her truth, it's addicting, remember that

Sing your songs too

Tell the world

Speak your truth

Speak your power

Tell the world who you are

Where you come from

Where you're going

And why you're here

Go out to the world, go to the land, go to the schools, go to school, go to work, go work, there's only two choices, you either go to work or go to school, heard that all my life

Go outside, go to the bush, go to the streets, feel the dirt, touch the concrete, listen to the wind and water, listen to the traffic and trains, find the balance, find your balance, remember that

Don't run

Some people run to these places, they hide, they seek, pondering, figuring, wondering, thinking, finding, seeking, hiding, walking, running

Don't run, just walk, find your way, your path, it'll come, it'll find you, just watch, wait, patience, patients, find them, who needs the help?

Reflect back, think, restory, think about where you are from, where you came from, the shoulders, the strength, what are you standing on, ask those questions, think about those things

Go to the bush

Always go to the bush, go to the land, the land has the answers, it's where you belong, where you come from, where we all belong, where we all come from

Our kookoos went to the land

That's where they got their answers, the land, their food, the land, their health, the land, their wealth, the land, that's where it comes from, that's where answers come from, but also questions, it all comes from the land

Your kookoos love the land, loved the land

Think about them, always

They took us to the land

Kookoo Nanshee went to the land, on the land, she was the land, earth, mother earth, mothers, and grandmothers

She went to the land, always, she tapped into it, sought, seeking, it had the answers, the food, the health, the wealth

Tap, tap, tap

Windigokaan na?

No, not that kind, not that kind of tapping, off centered tapping

She tapped trees, tapping for answers, preparing for winter, the cold, the darkness, the stories

She tapped maple trees, sugar, sweets, sweetness, bundles, cans, jars, boiled, boiling, rendering, creating tapping, pails, pail after pail, day after day, spring time, new year, new start, the earth provides when the earth is ready, when the land is ready, when the warmth, growth, fresh, new start arrives

Sometimes it's too cold, the trees, the sap, the sugar, goes back up, runs back up, returns to the land, it's not ready, teaches you, telling you, to be patient, to wait for our mother, our mothers, the answers will come, with patience, when they're ready, like the maple trees, listen to them, they know, the cycles, living, water, lifegiving, running, up and down, when it warms, it cools, back and forth, back and forth, dripping, leaking, tasting, sucking

The maple tree will tell you when it's ready

Just watch

Tap it when it's ready, when the mother, the mothers, are ready, the earth, the land, the sap, saplings, the old ones, the ancient ones, been there a long time, and the roots run deep, heard that all my life

Tap the maple tree and wait

Wait, be patient

The sap, the sugar, the sweetness, will come, for the pail, dripping, accumulating stickling, tasting, tap, tap, tap, as it fills our buckets

That's what life does, that's what the land does, it fills our buckets

Boil it when you're done, thank the land, give back, offer, pray, think, reflect, share, tell the story, protect the story, the stories, tell the young, tell them what you did, how you did it, taking, and giving back, restory, retell, over and over, make sure they know

Kookoo Nanshee tapped maple trees

Best maple cups around, everyone came to get them. (Edwards)

Maple cups, that's what they called them

Had them in her pocket, little snack, tasty treat, but good for you, you know, came from the land, then it's good for you, worked and created it yourself, then it's good for you, you know

Tapped those trees near the shore your kookoo Nanshee

Loved the bush your kookoo, all your kookoos, loved the bush, went there all the time, seeking answers, seeking food, picking food, tapping food, medicine, medicine picking

Kookoo Ida took me

Took me to pick berries

Hard job when you're small, important job, got to pay attention, got to fill the bucket, but it takes long, so long, when you're young, when you're small, don't always appreciate those times, those

lessons, those laughs, those words, medicine words, medicine way, Anishinaabe words, Anishinaabe ways, appreciate them now though, appreciate them now more than ever when I think back, reflect, rethink, retell, restory

Got to watch

Got to watch the pail, watch it fill, takes forever to fill when you got young eyes

Can't eat them either, but they're so good, so tasty, sweet, sugary, fresh, blue, red, black, staining, staining fingers, and mouths, and teeth, and tongues, and chins, hard to hide, hard to sneak, when you're eating what you picked

Boy, got to watch too, got to watch your pail, watch your kookoo, watch her yell at others, but not you, until she does, until she sees what you've done, then you're done, get yelled at, not mad, not serious, yelling, but she's still kind of mad you know, still mad for eating berries, not picking, not saving, collecting, for canning, jamming, cakes, pieces, toast, bannock, pancakes, bread, boy she got mad that time

Yelled at me you know, but yelling with a smile you know, never got asked again, too much work, too much work picking berries, watching kids, same time, hard work to do that, and not laugh

Boy those were good berries

Good to eat too, lots of risk, eating those berries, might get yelled at, but kind of fun too, getting yelled at is sort of fun you know, laugh, laughing, laughing about it after, giggling, teasing, risking, running, remembering

Never too old for a lickin' you know, but worth it, risking, running

Fun to remember, fun to tease, to belong, to look back, reach back, protect, pull out, grabbing them as they fall from the sky, the stories, remembering

Remember

Remember when kookoo Marge takes you, picking berries, got to go, got to go to the land, find those berries, pick those baskets, buy more baskets, lots, lots to do, lots to cook, lots to freeze, last all winter, those berries, mmmmmm, those are good, taste good, feel good, look good, good times those times

Got to remember those, they go quick those times, the memories, those remembrances, the survivance, the shadows, got to put them in the back pocket, plant them like seeds, in the ground, in the blood, in the earth, the blood memory, memories

Throw them up too, those stories, throw them to the sky, keep them there, pull them down, pull them when you need them, pull 'em down when remembering time is here, storytelling, winter time, thinking time

Keep them in the sky, they're there, always, remember that

Throw them up, maybe they'll catch a tree, plant a seed, help it grow, the leaves, the vines, the stories, the storytelling tree. (Morrisseau)

Pluck, pick, bury, throw, find, catch, grab, tell, keep, savour, always

Go to the land, go to the bush

Watch

Listen

Got to watch and listen too you know

Never know when times are going to get hard, tough, peak, bow, valley, up and down, back and forth, got to be ready, sometimes

The Windigokaan comes, always comes, always seeking, always challenging, always ensuring you stay balanced

Be ready always

But you can't be ready, that's the thing, crazy that guy

They bring plans, systems, barriers, institutions, schools, all kinds of schools, good ones, bad ones, not schools really, grades, scores, tests, ceilings, assessments, all kinds of things, all kinds of kinds that Windikokaan brings, that's his way, comes when times are tough, when they're needed, when they're not needed

School is like that

School is fun, school is hard, fun in all kinds of ways, friends, projects, teammates, games, sports, scores, grades, certificates, diplomas, degrees, BAs, BEs, M. Eds, theses, Ph. Ds, doctorates, dissertations

Fun turns to hard, difficult

The system too, it's hard, the navigation, the finding, the seeking, hard like the land, but harder, hard to balance, hard to strike it, to walk the two worlds, but you will, have to, one day, some day

The Windigokaan, that's what he does, he brings the land, brings it to you, but he brings the schools too, he brings the systems, the structures, the classroom, the nuns, the priests, the teachers, the strap, the church, the cross, O'Canada, land acknowledgements, for what, the land, is it coming back?, patronizing, patriarchy, appeasing, empty, empty those words sometimes

But seek it, take it on, you can do, not everyone could

Kookoo Nanshee never had a chance to go to school had to raise a family, had to raise others, be a wife, be home, forge her own way, her way, worked her whole life

Kookoo Ida went to grade 8, had to stop, had to raise a family, had to raise others, be a wife, be home, help the farm, become a farmhand, worked her whole life

Kookoo Marge, did good in school, hard though, hard to go to different schools, White schools, got treated different then, different times, hard time, difficult for Indigenous people, Anishinaabe people

Prejudice, discrimination, socialization, intersections, intersectionality, culture, cultures, hegemony, oppression, power, patriarchy, normalcy, racism, supremacy, blinds, colourblind, aggressions, aggressive, micro, macro, microaggressions, racism. (Sensoy, DiAngelo, Saad, Oluo, Kendi, everybody!!! Everybody screaming to change the world)

Lots there, lots of racism, hard times, for your kookoo Marge

But she did, they all did, takes a community, takes a family, a unit, to overcome

She overcame, adversity, diversity, resilience, perseverance, courage, the bear, the strength, the turtle, the wisdom, the knowledge, she did it, she did it like that, with those teachings

Became a teacher your kookoo Marge, good one too, protecting, practicing, keeping the language, working in the communities, the grassroots, in there, getting dirty, just like a garden, planting those seeds, telling those stories, protecting, practicing, restorying, the survivance, the shadows, the story tree, the sky, the thunder, the ground, the earth

IMPAC, she was in IMPAC, impact, impacting, learning to become a teacher, Brandon, Brandon University, lots of them, lots of them like her that led the way, the path, the teaching path, just like the boards on the ground, kookoo Nancy's boards, hard to balance, hard to focus, but you got to go, go to the schools, learn to balance, learn to teach, to protect, to overcome, to persevere

IMPAC did that for her, supported her, set up for her, for them to succeed, lots of them, from all over too, the role models, the leaders, the teachers, in the community, doing the work, the hard work, the heart work

The system, the institution, the Windigokaan, couldn't do it, couldn't stop her, just like you, it's going to come, it's going to try, stop you, block you, tease you, splash the water in your face

Keep going, enjoy it, cry, learn

Learn their ways, know their ways, be the best in their ways, western, institutions, institutional, systemic, systems, systematic, hallways, four walls, professors, teachers, professors and teachers, papers and deadlines, proving and assessing

But learn your ways too, Anishinaabe ways, language, customs, culture, spirits, spirituality, thoughts, thinking, reflecting, inner work, inner learnings, observing, listening, not having to prove to anybody that the Anishinaabe way is as good as any way

Learn the language, protect it, speak it, say it, Anishinaabemowin, giigidon, ikidon!

These teachings run through you

Cover you like a blanket

Like lightning

Like roots

Like Thunder

Like prayers

Like the sap

Like truth

Like hair, like gray hair, flowing, flowing down your back

Like blood, blood memory

Time immemorial

Forever and always

Like the creases in your kookoo Nanshee's face, like the harden skinned lines of your kookoo Ida's hands, like the gentle look in the eyes of your kookoo Marge, like the words, poems, songs that float out of your mother's mouth, eyes, and lips

This is who you are, where you come from

Now use it to figure where you're going, why you're here

Heard that all my life

Miigwetch

"My education was a renaissance, and I know what comes after discovery."

– Therese Marie Mailhot

Ngotaaswi – In Closing

Inspiration

When I started my Master's thesis journey, I was loaned a book by my friend, colleague, and academic Katya Adamov Ferguson entitled *Coyote and Raven Go Canoeing* by Peter Cole. She said to me, "I think you'll like this." It was one of the first books I picked up. I started to read it, not expecting to find what I would find. I was absolutely blown away by Cole's writing style. It was free wheeling writing in nature, and its conversational approach to research and academia was something I had not yet come across, and have not since. It was certainly scholarly in nature, but to me, it had both depth and breadth, it challenged your thinking, it felt daunting at times, it brought into question what truly is knowledge, and its Indigenous like nature was fascinating. It felt like I was there with him, laughing and crying, getting angry and feeling joy, or maybe there was an aunty and uncle or two, and Coyote and Raven were just in the bush behind us, but I was part of their conversation too, and they were a part of ours. It was incredible and inspiring.

I have always had an odd relationship with educational institutions. I grew up in Indigenous communities and was taught by mostly Indigenous teachers. Playing sports allowed me to travel, go into other Indigenous communities, and meet new people. I used to love how my parents would interact with the differing communities, and the people they would see and introduce me to. Indigenous communities and sporting events, like tournaments, were always the most fun and safest places to be. Meeting other kids like me and their parents, and being asked where I was from, and who my parents were, was all normal to me back then. We were all connected, from community to community. As I got older, living in an Indigenous community

became difficult and I had easy access to things that no young child or adolescent should have access to. As a middle schooler I moved in with my father to a rural town permanently and my world changed forever.

Sure, I was good at school, but I challenged teachers. I could do the work they gave me, but the lack of relationship building and community in those schools was deeply entrenched. I was never loud or obnoxious or rude with teachers; I was simply indifferent. I did enough to get by, go unnoticed, and dove deeply into competitive sports. So much so that it started to become my only identity. Sports became my outlet and I worked hard to become one of the best players on the team. As I became a young adult, the professional sports dream faded quickly and I realized I had to go back to school, which is when I entered university. Once again, I did "okay." I did enough; I did enough to get into the Faculty of Education, where I started to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I started to work more in schools for practicum purposes and the kids I saw started to give me a new purpose. I discovered myself again back in the same institution I was always indifferent to. Becoming an educator has been extremely fulfilling and I am passionate about working with children, especially Indigenous children.

When I was handed Peter Cole's book, it was really the first time that I heard all those voices, and conversations, and stories that I heard growing up in Indigenous communities, but this time it involved my new and current world of academia. The humour and sadness in the same sentence; the connections to land and being in the bush and on the water; the resource extraction, land acquisition, and racism; the stories of, and about, animals as if they were living beside me; the questions and casual conversations between people that look and talk like my parents; that was all there in Peter Cole's book.

When I started to gather stories and have conversations with my family, I realized I wanted to honour them in a good way. Something simply did not feel right when I used proper grammatical structure with periods and commas, mechanics and form. Something felt lost in the translation. I struggled with doing and setting things right both with myself and with the stories. My participants, my storiers, they gifted me with information that I was not privy to. They enlightened me, they preserved my history, and now my children will be the beneficiaries of that knowledge. As I worked through these struggles with writing, erasing, typing, deleting, I kept coming back to Cole's *Coyote and Raven Go Canoeing* (2006). I wanted to do something similar and blend the institutional world with the orality of Indigenous cultures, while preserving the history of my family via survivance stories.

In writing the section A Story of Stories, I wanted to blend, balance, and honour the stories that were shared with me. Those simple, yet humbling, stories of where I come from. I wanted it to have that similar blend of imagery, humour, sadness, frustration, excitement, humour, intrigue, and pride that Cole shares, but also that my storiers had shared. I was attempting to merge my intersecting world and realities, but still provide and show cultural understanding and responsibility in an Anishinaabe way. That is why I introduced the Windigokaan.

Similar to Cole's trickster figures Coyote and Raven, I wanted to introduce a character I always heard stories about growing up. Being raised with Anishinaabe values, I always heard about the Windigokaan, and there were always murmurs and talk of family members having that gift, that entity, in them. Or I heard stories of people in the community who carried that burden with them. As a young child, I always sort of knew who these people were, but they looked like me, and talked like me. They had a certain aura or way about them, but they looked just like me.

Blanket

Kookoo used to go down the stairs, one step at a time, one foot at a time. No rush to get down there, and always lots to learn from somebody who's patient like that.

She made her way down there one step at a time because she sewed you know. Loved to sew, always sewing, always weaving and drawing and laying out the plan. Piecing it together. The plan for the blankets always had purpose. The patches, the diamonds, the stars. Blankets cover; they keep people warm, safe, and protected. She had to do one for each grandchild you know. Not sure why she felt that way.

Got to be careful when you are down there, downstairs. Don't touch the order, the material, the scissors, the machine. It's good to go down there and check, check the blankets, check Kookoo. That's the best time to listen, and to play, and to listen more.

"Okay Kookoo, I'm going outside, I'm going to go play in the bush."

"Haam sa, don't go far… it's going to be dark soon… the Windigo might get you."

Going to need that blanket after all. Going to need it to watch me, keep me warm, protect me.

Windigokaan

A trickster is a common entity in Indigenous lives, cultures, and stories. I don't think the English language portrays or explains what a true trickster character is. An English-speaking person may hear the word trickster and think of it as a jokester or jester who's simply there to entertain, sneak around, and play jokes. A trickster is that, but in Indigenous culture, it's more.

The idea of a trickster is much more diverse than that because it can encompass medicine, absurdity, balance, prankster, logic, magic, shape shifting, human in nature, enchanter, goof, scary, transformative, humour, satirical, self-deprecation, self-confidence, mockery, ignorance, brilliance, vanity, greed, foolishness, humility, child like, wisdom, humanness, and education (Archibald, 2008). There is no word in English that summarizes this thought or idea. The trickster, the Windigokaan, is all of those things and more. It is a powerful spiritual being with much respect, but at the same time, it is a regular human being like you and me, especially with all of our faults.

I always heard stories of the Windigokaan. I heard stories of the Windigo as well. Those stories were both the same and different. As a kid, you were not too venture to far off into the bush or stay out too late because of the Windigo. It was common throughout our communities as youngsters to listen, stick together, never whistle at the Northern Lights, and "do right" or the Windigo would come get you.

In Anishinaabe culture, the Windigo is an integral figure through a multitude of stories and he is symbolic of greed, hunger, and selfishness. In traditional stories, the Windigo is often in precarious and desperate situations that require him to find food. He is typically a regular being, pitiful in nature, and comes upon great and powerful medicine that saves him, but he becomes overindulged in the benefits of that medicine. He gains supernatural powers (Johnston, 1995) and is able to travel far and wide, consuming food, animals, and sometimes people in his destructive journey to satisfy his hunger. His all-consuming attitude and behaviour grows and grows, and typically very quickly, because his thirst and hunger are never satisfied. As he travels and haunts the Ojibwe countryside, he gets bigger and stronger, terrifying his very own people. He haunts the people with blood curdling yells and sounds in the far-off distance, and

"the bigger he grew, the hungrier he became" (Schwarz, 1969). He is so powerful, that in return, it takes even more powerful medicine to defeat or subdue him. It takes collective power. As much as he consumes and grows, he never fully looks like a being, and he becomes more dishevelled in nature, with gangly arms and matted fur. He is truly a scary and terrifying being.

It takes a giant to defeat a giant. In one tale, a warrior by the name of Missahba, on behalf of his people, also uses powerful medicine to take on Windigo. He too grows and grows, but uses his powers to defeat the Windigo. Of course, this is not an easy task and Missahba and Windigo battle for weeks on end hurling rocks, mountains, and glaciers at each other. Windigo is defeated and the people he consumes are set free; they return to their communities (Schwarz, 1969).

In another tale, acclaimed Ojibwe knowledge keeper Basil Johnston weaves a tale of Megis, who comes to the aid of his people, after they were transformed into beavers and eaten by the Windigo. Megis also uses powerful medicine in order to grow giant-like to take on the trickster. He is able to defeat the Windigo, and the beavers are set free, returned back to human form, and restore the village once again (Johnston, 1976).

It is in Johnston's account that I see a connection to my current world. Johnston goes on to further explain that, "Weendigo himself, though dead, continued to live on as an incorporeal being, the spirit of excess" (p167). It's this subtle note where I see how the Windigokaan stories and people I see in my life are representations of that traditional story. These powerful beings are the representation of the spirit of excess, and they are here to remind us all of the humility needed to live a good life. The Windigokaan embodies the fear that we all have, and if we are too preoccupied or overwhelmed with things like work, sleep, play, drink, or hunger, then that is how that spirit comes to visit. It comes to take advantage, but it also comes to remind us that we

need to have balance in our lives. In some of the stories that were shared with me via the storiers, there were multiple times in different conversations where the basic human nature of making mistakes and poor choices led the people I know and love ultimately to better health. It was the mistake that provided clarity. Specifically, in one conversation, it was revealed that one of my subjects was simply given too much leeway and stretched every possible avenue to participate in risky behaviour and be in unsafe situations on a consistent basis. I couldn't help but see the Windigokaan lurking in the background, looking to take advantage and prey on the vulnerable. There were other conversations when my family were in precarious situations, and experiencing hard times, where once again, I could only see the Windigokaan lurking. He's there to provide balance. He's there to take advantage because of his natural tendency to be selfish and egotistical, but he provides the lessons we need to survive the future.

As much as the Windigo and the Windigokaan are on the fringe of Anishinaabe culture, they are integral to our health. The health of our individual being, but also the health of our communities. Johnston states, "though Weendigo was fearsome and visited punishment upon those committing excesses, he nevertheless conferred rewards upon the moderate. He was excess who encouraged moderation" (p. 167).

The Windigo and the Windigokaan conjure a freightening image, and rightfully so. To be consumed by something is a scary thought. I believe we all fear addiction, hate, chaos, loneliness, isolation, viruses and more, but the Windigokaan, or the idea of the Windigokaan, is extremely important to Anishinaabe culture. They remind us of the proper path in life and artist Scott Benesiiaabandan says, "Windigokaan use their backwardness to teach others" (Stephens, 2011, para. 2). Their contrary nature is an oddly powerful reminder that we must live life in moderation and be wary of greed in times of scarcity and hunger. The Windigokaan are still a

powerful and important part of our current world, especially for Anishinaabe people. I do tread lightly at this point, because as much as I love to write and tell stories, this one is not mine to tell. Much like my small and limited knowledge of the Anishinaabe language, I do not wish to overly engage in the sacred nature of the Windigokaan. There is much I still do not know and I certainly don't want to speak too much, cross lines, misinform readers, and upset any Indigenous people, especially Anishinaabek, or, of course, the Windigokaan itself.

Leadership

I grew up surrounded by comfort, consistency, structure, and love. Honestly, this is what I know. This is how and where I learned to become a leader. It feels odd writing those words. I know and understand my role in my community. I have watched many Indigenous people become tremendous and powerful leaders and role models in our community and it has always been in my nature to watch, observe, listen and react. In a way, this is how I lead. Remember, I was asked my entire life who I was, where I came from, and where I was going. I heard those questions in school, at sporting tournaments, at powwows and graduation ceremonies, when people came to visit my parents or grandparents, and when I read Indigenous literature.

It can be an overwhelming space for an Indigenous person to be thrust into a spotlight, no matter how big or small. There are certainly people built for those roles, but I often wonder if I am. To often, I see Indigenous leaders succumb to ego, power, and control. Maybe my social media news feed influences this thinking, but I have heard my parents speak about their disappointment in leaders in multiple communities, and at multiple times in my life. Not in a negative or demeaning way, but more in the disappointment of a hope I believe we all share as Indigenous people, that maybe this is the right person for the job. Much like the Windigokaan,

our egos can get in the way. We all carry Windigokaan elements within us and working under duress, and high levels of stress, creates those small openings for Windigokaan behaviour. The need to control and micromanage every detail of our lives can be all-consuming and dangerous.

I think this is why I like to sit in the back. Both literally, and metaphorically, I take a seat in the back. I like to watch, listen, and observe. It helps in my preparation, it centres my humility, and if I feel it necessary to speak or act, then I can. I believe this to be an Indigenous way of leading. I lead from the back, I lead by contributing to the collective, and I lead by looking within myself first. Answering those essential questions is key in my decision making. I believe a "leader must be grounded in his or her experiences, and able to draw from a skill set that will assist in navigating through difficult situations. [Leaders] who are not grounded might have difficulty performing the finer skills required for effective leadership" (Forest, 2011, p. 2). This style of leading is an ever-growing and continual process that requires reflection based on a firm foundation of one's own identity. I consider this leadership an investment, in both myself and in my children. My children's personalities, character, and choices will determine the kind of leaders they will be, but it is my goal to be able to assist them in their family foundation, and ultimately provide them with comfort, consistency, structure, and love. I want my children to also look within themselves because "people who are effective in their lives tend to evaluate the paradigms that form the foundation for how they interact with the rest of their life" (Campbell, 2009, para. 5). My children are Anishinaabe, Cree, Finnish and Metis, and attend a French Immersion school program in Dauphin. They live in this new-age mosaic and diasporic world that has emerged with the migration of so many peoples to North America within the last four hundred years. They are the beautiful result of that transformation. They will be equipped with many more tools than I was, but that also means there will be more stressors on them as they

evolve and become adults. We have all inherited this, and after they know more about themselves, they can decide whether they want to lead from the front or the back.

To be able to situate myself in leadership scenarios provides my purpose and direction. It allows me to evaluate myself, but also to evaluate the situation. We all carry our histories with us, but not everyone knows, brings, or recognizes that history in the contextual situation. I consciously bring my history with me because I choose to be introspective, but not everyone realizes, or even knows, how important their stories are to every single situation. The conversations I had with my storiers only helped to solidify that history and preserve it for my children. It was life-changing, and helps me to navigate the western institution I work in, furthermore, it is important to recognize that, "Indigenous educational leaders lay claim to the phenomenon of interest by naming their place in relation to the phenomenon and by situating themselves through a mission orientation" (Martell, 2016, p. 229).

As an Indigenous educational leader, I draw upon the past in the present moment, which is an investment in the future. I think this is how Indigenous people have always done it. As the lone, visibly Indigenous educator in my workplace, I make a conscious effort to connect with young Indigenous students. I understand my role. I lead from the back, but I do have to be out and visible. I also need to still demonstrate the humility needed to help Indigenous students succeed, but to also show that we deserve to be in Eurocentric spaces, helping to decolonize and uplift. This only makes young Indigenous people stronger in advocating for their own education. Personally, being able to reach back into my history, our shared history, is liberating. A person who can reach backwards, working within a Eurocentric institution, who has accurate, current, and positive skills, knowledge, and understanding can truly improve the outcomes for Indigenous young people in our schools (Sarra, 2011).

Teachings

With the emergence of the Covid-19 global pandemic, it is safe to say that this work got derailed. My trajectory changed quickly in March of 2020 and I was unable to have one-on-one and group conversations in person. I still had access to my mother, who lives three miles from my home and remained in our bubble, but it certainly wasn't the same as going into my communities, visiting locations, and talking to people face to face over tea and bannock at a kitchen table or around a fire. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

Covid-19 has been devastating for the world, and like many people, I too lost a family member to the virus. She was also one of my storiers. Her name was Lena Dunning and she lived in Vancouver, B.C. I was fortunate enough to interview her a few months before her passing and I will be forever grateful for her words and teachings. Aunty Lena was always a familiar voice and person in my family. She always phoned the house to talk to my mom and they were always laughing and gossiping about the ongoings in the community. She lived a long way away but she committed several weeks out of every summer to fly home to Manitoba and visit family members. She would stay a few days at our house before she visited other places. She was a joy to be around. She often spoke Anishinaabemowin with my mom, and she was a kind soul who was always ready with a smile, laugh, or giggle.

Lena wasn't truly my aunt in a Eurocentric family lineage way, but I always referred to her as my aunt. I know many different families refer to older relatives or friends as aunts or uncles, but it is very common in Indigenous communities to refer to all older family members as aunt or uncle, or kookoo and papa/mooshum. I think the only difference in Indigenous country is

that we rarely have to share or explain how we are truly related to that person, because we simply just are.

Lena was my mom's cousin and she grew up in Vogar. Lena's mom was named Christina, and she was the sister of my kookoo Ida. Lena moved away from Vogar as a young teenager to work and eventually moved to Vancouver in the 1960s. She shared in our conversation, "we were like gypsies," and I know she struggled with addictions most of her life. Lena's sister Hazel was our relative who lost her children to the care of Child and Family Services in the 1960s and 1970s, as mentioned in chapter one.

Lena, her sister Hazel, and her brother Brian all grew up in a small house in Vogar where alcohol made it hard on the children. I understand that alcohol can sometimes define a person, and that is not my intent here, but it does play a factor in Lena and Brian's memories (whom I also spoke to). As children, they spent a lot of time at my kookoo Nanshee's and my kookoo Ida's homes. Both storiers shared that with me in an honest and open way. They had fond memories at Ida and Nanshee's, and by all accounts their homes were often safe places that offered refuge from the weekend chaos. As children, they would be sent there on weekends and they had some great descriptions of my kookoo Nanshee's gardens, her log home near the church and lake, the way she looked, and the clothes she wore. What stood out the most in some of the stories was the way kookoo Nanshee sounded. Everyone I spoke to seemed to have a short laugh when asked about some of the things that Nanshee would say or do. My kookoo Nanshee seemed to have a way about saying and doing things, and people admired her for that.

My kookoo Nanshee was a short but powerful woman. When she spoke, people listened. She was smart, quick witted, and was not afraid to speak her mind. She only spoke Anishinaabemowin, and was not afraid to tell you where to go, what you looked like, and

whether you were useful for society. She was sly, had a dry sense of humour, and was "crazy" in that Indigenous/Anishinaabe way we speak about people who are great storytellers, and unafraid to crack a joke at the most inappropriate time.

Lena and Brian described the way her home looked and the way the land looked and moved as they would often walk to kookoo Nanshee's home. As I reflect, they seemed like simpler times, but they truly were not. My kookoo Nanshee kept two large gardens, maintained her home, looked after an ill and unpredictable husband, tapped and prepared maples trees, skinned and prepared animals, helped to birth babies, and helped to prepare bodies for death. She was simply incredible. All of these little stories, they are gifts. There is no way to return what was offered to me in these conversations.

Lena, Hazel, and Brian all lived near my kookoo Ida's in Vogar as well. The descriptions of the land in the places they lived, the warmth of my kookoo Ida's home, the refuge it offered, the smell of her food, it was all very heartwarming to hear. Ida was a stable and consistent presence in their lives and Ida and Abe were looked at as role models in the community, as people who always offered to help. My kookoo Ida helped to bake and cook, and my papa Abraham always made his horses and sons available for community labour in the assistance of building homes and barns, fixing cars and motors, and assisting on farms and with animals. It was fulfilling to hear these small and humble yet powerful stories that show the foundation that I grew up on.

I am forever grateful to have been part of this process. In getting to know more about myself and the women in my life, it also offered me a short glimpse into the lives of my storiers. A chance to talk and reflect with other family members and friends about people we were all close with and love dearly was extremely rewarding and reassuring. In speaking with people

such as my cousins Marlene, Emma, Linda, and Vivian, some very clear themes and threads emerged.

The respect my kookoo Nanshee had was high and it was evident that she was one of kind and many people miss her. Her work ethic and stubbornness were second to none, and people said she was firm, and a bit bossy. Nanshee lived in a log house that had a second room, which was not always the norm then. It was described as a warm and loving home and there was always lots of food available. My cousin Linda described it as "always warm, the fire was always going, and she was cooking steady […] I always treasure that place." As loving a place as it was, you never went there to complain or mope around, because there was always something to do. People had to work or contribute, and there was always food to be cooked and prepared, wood to pile or haul, a garden with weeds to be plucked, or berries and vegetables to be picked and canned. "My granny worked hard," my cousin Marlene told me one night and it really resonated with me. I know people work hard, because you're supposed to. I remember distinctly being told over and over again as a young child that, along with giving back to your community, hard work was integral to success.

My kookoo Nancy had a lot of responsibility. Scholar Mary Jane McCallum goes through the history of Indigenous women and their often unrecognized and unrelenting contributions to the labour force in Canada. She mentions women's roles precontact, the early days of the fur trade, the contributions made as Canada started to confederate and their early contributions to the workforce after suffrage. McCallum says, "stories about Native women and domestic work are often told in relation to family responsibilities" (McCallum, 2014, p. 24). When I learned about my kookoo Nanshee, who raised my kookoo Ida, I could envision her small yet powerful frame moving about her day as one of those unrecognized, yet contributing,

citizens to the fabric of Canadian society. She brought historically unrecognized Anishinaabe values, and I would consider her a major contributor to the founding of this nation. It's women who raised many of those men who sit on top of the societal ladder and receive the accolades. Many women, including the women in my life, sacrificed and worked extremely hard. Lots of women did, and still do. They often go unrecognized but are the foundational pillars.

Mino-Pimatsiwin

There is a statement in the Anishinaabe language called Mino-Pimatsiwin. The Cree language has a similar term and spelling. *Mino* meaning good and/or beautiful, *pimatsi* meaning to be alive and *-win* a suffix that makes something animate into a noun. The term typically translates universally to "to live a good life." Living out this term usually involves a choice, and Indigenous people are often in pursuit of it, or are currently living it. It is animate, it is alive and organic. To live this way you have to make a choice to live a good life, however that may look in today's modern world. It is an introspective term and requires you to look into the mirror. Typically, it is associated with connecting with the land, and learning the traditional ways and language of the Anishinaabe. I wish to recognize here, that as we move through our current society, this choice is not always available and/or accessible for young Indigenous youth.

Living a good life is a constantly evolving pursuit. I feel extremely lucky to have access to those supports naturally. I had access to my grandparents consistently, I had access to land, I had access to extra-curricular sports, I had access to my aunts, uncles and cousins, I have access to parents who speak Anishinaabemowin. I know many kids these days do not have that access, and attend schools that promote individualism and "children are urged to 'get ahead' and 'be the best'" (Settee, p. 7). Although I am relatively successful in the two worlds, I always knew the

value of extended family members, and that they were always accessible to me. These people were often like surrogate parents and my community was like an extension of my family (p7). This has all fostered my independence and learning, and allows me to live a good life, mino-pimatsiwin.

The hard work mentality of the generation(s) behind me plays a huge part in my current success. I am an extension of that hard work, the humour, the shyness, the stubbornness, the work ethic, the humility, the sweat, the tears. I did not truly realize that until now, until I went through this process. I am who I am because of what my grandmothers did, and probably what their grandmothers did before them. My children will be the same, because they are being built on that current foundation, and my wife and I work extremely hard to live a good life. But, we also understand that living a good life can be difficult. It is easy to get off balance, to sway to the left or to the right, during our multiple pursuits in life and employment. This is part of the process and we try to model that with our kids, just like my grandmothers did. Like my mother did.

Living a good life is about balance. Being in balance is an everyday challenge, and much like Senator Sinclair states about "who I am," it "is the one that we are always challenging ourselves to be, the one that we are always trying to figure out" (Sinclair, 2016). I may never strike the right balance; I don't think anybody can. The challenge is in the pursuit, and maintaining that focus. By living a good life, and by being a visibly Indigenous teacher and teaching a large number of Indigenous kids, I try to be honest about this constant pursuit of mino-pimatsiwin. It is okay to make mistakes. I want my students to make mistakes. I tell them this all the time and they typically tell me that I am the only teacher in their lives who

consistently tells them that “I need them to make mistakes.” This is how we learn; this is how we find mino-pimatsiwin.

Animikiikaa

Animikiikaa means the Thunderbirds are here, the Thunderbirds are coming. The word is powerful, it carries power just like a thunderstorm carries rain and lightning.

But it’s okay to be scared, it means that you have respect for that power.

Kookoo Nanshee used to speak to the Thunderbirds. One time, when the Thunderbirds were singing, she went outside to speak Anishinaabe to them. The language. The children in the house were very scared of the loud sounds and the bright flashes. She stood there underneath them as they surrounded her. They spoke back to her in flashes and booms, she raised her hands in the air, silhouetted in the dark with the white flashes all around her.

She came back in after, soaking wet, and everyone was calmed. Powerful. Girls, my girls, you carry that power with you.

Gitchi-Miigwetch

I cannot express how much I appreciate everyone who participated in this work, and how much respect I have for each and every one of you. This feels like it is closing, but I assure you that the door is just starting to open. In this time, you and I are witnessing an educational renaissance where traditional western institutions are shifting and opening and protecting space for Indigenous learners.

I want this research to challenge, inform, and transform institutional norms, and I hope that an introspective approach and the sharing of stories can stand alone, and alongside, traditional western research that focuses on both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Indigenous research and knowledge systems are valid and beautiful. Priscilla Settee states,

> "We must continue to acknowledge, celebrate, revitalize, and entrench the tremendous range of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and do all that is possible to claim our place in the academy. We must listen to voices of our ancestors to create a path of hope for the […] children in our city, in our country, and in the world. We must gather our courage to challenge systems of knowledge, including research and development that threatens or undermines our very existence. Therein lays the answers for the seeds needed in the collective survival of humanity and the natural world. *Pimatsiwin* […] our interconnectedness and survival, in the good life, require it" (Settee, p. 171).

Living a good life, being an Indigenous person, and educator, you have to give back. You are often required to give thanks. Gichi-miigwetch in Anishinaabemowin means "big thank you." I am accountable to my words in this research, my world, and my relations. The people below have given me a piece of their lives, a piece of their own story, and good words always stick. I wish to give big thanks to:

Dr. Alysha Farrell – your guidance and open mind have transformed my thoughts and beliefs about western institutions. You have created space for me, my words, and given me hope that many others will follow. You told me once, "double down … describe things, details, odd

connections, going between things, describe it in such a way like you're breathing the same air […] activate the senses."

Dr. Jackie Kirk – your kind smile and eyes and guidance, I cannot thank you enough. You once told me, "write those moments and honour all those voices."

Dr. Trudy Cardinal – your honest and critical feedback from an Indigenous female lens was integral to this work, and you said it was "near and dear to my heart."

My aunt Rhonda Monkman – growing up, you were like my second mother, and I am forever grateful. You told me one time that kookoo Ida used to say, "if your hair doesn't look good, you don't look good!"

My uncle Larry Monkman – your sense of humour, wit, and "crazy" is something this entire world needs, and I love that about you. You told me a story one time and said, "I dreamt about her [kookoo Ida], she was there waiting for me … with a strap."

My brother Kevin Monkman – I owe you everything! You have taught me so much, more than a brother can ask for, and much like a father. You told me, "we used to skate before school, at recess, lunch, and after school."

My sister Elaine Malcolm – my beautiful sister, whom I don't see regularly enough. Your smile, eyes, and personality are infectious. You said, "Ida always thought about me, especially at Christmas, and when she was really sick, she even remembered me and got all excited."

My cousin Emma Edwards – there was always something special about you when I was growing up. You have an infectious and kind personality. You vividly recalled kookoo Nanshee "would get up in the morning, open the curtains, sit there looking out the window, watching, she'd yell from the from the window! I can still see her sitting there."

My cousin Linda Chippeway – your words about kookoo Nanshee and kookoo Ida were beautiful. You said, "she was a wonder! I call her Wonder Woman. They all were. She walked that road [Anishinaabe life], and we followed her."

My cousin Marlene Edwards – I owe you the world, and I cannot thank you enough for guiding and supporting my daughters Natalie and Grace to their spirit names. I love how you told me about when your husband Arthur drove kookoo Nanshee one time and she sat in the front seat and said, "this will be the first time you're going to sit with a real woman."

Family friend Keith Lundale – I could feel and hear the admiration you had for my family, gichi-miigwetch. You said, "Abe and Ida were salt of the earth [and] it was a sad day when they moved to Vogar."

Family friends Georgina and Raymond Larson – I remember you both fondly as a kid and you were always a welcoming family. Your kind words were much appreciated, "Abe and Ida were always pleasant and fun to be around, and they were so proud of all their grandkids."

My cousin Brian Monkman – the stories and information you shared with me showed a lot of vulnerability and trust, gichi-miigwetch. I cried when you told me, "Ida never forgot about me, there was always a gift for me under the tree."

Vivian Duthie – I learned that we were not actually cousins by blood, but how family does not have to mean by blood. You said, "I remember when she used to make maple sugar, she'd come back and make fire outside, let us put it in the snow, sometimes she would let us do that […] my grandmother, I feel her. I had a hard time when she passed."

My "aunt" Lena Dunning – I always admired your bravery and tenacity, to move so far away from your family, now I understand why. Your laugh and stories were always fun to listen to.

You told me about when Abe and Ida got married, “I remember my dress, Ida was fixing it, then the priest got drunk and got lost in the bush.” May you rest in power.

Aunt Pam Hoover – you are like a mother, a mother to us all, and especially for my wife Desiree. You said, “she had to grow up fast, but was strong willed […] she always had a microphone in her hand playing dress up.”

My sister-in-law Kim Dorion – you’re like a sister, we’ve known each other for so long. Your stories took a lot of courage and showed a lot of vulnerability. You shared that your mom “never ran dad down, even after he left us. She would send us to go see him.”

My daughter Natalie Houle – what an absolute ball of energy you are, what an absolute challenge you are, thank you for coming into my life to provide balance. I am afraid I cannot use many of your quotes here because they are not appropriate, but here is a beautiful one: “kookoo goes downstairs and sews with us.”

My daughter Grace Houle – my first-born baby will always be my baby. Your inquisitive, quiet, yet sharp mind is a joy to be around, and always will. I asked you about what you love about your kookoo Marge and you said, “it’s funny when she gets mad at papa because he always doesn’t do things right.”

My wife Desiree Dorion – you are an incredible human being. You are relentless and fearless and your lyrics describe it best when speaking about our girls, “we might walk and talk and look and sound the same…. she’s going to break the chain” (Dorion, 2020)

My mother Margaret Houle – I cannot express how much I love and appreciate you. You are a great mother and a great grandmother. I adore you. Desiree adores you. Grace and Natalie, and all your grandchildren adore you. Your work ethic is second to none and you said “people worked all the time, there was none of this waiting around for welfare.”

My kookoo Ida Monkman – I miss you and I love you. I can still smell your home, the food, the way you tucked me into bed, the blankets laid out in the basement. I remember you taking forever to get ready, waiting in the car, you coming in to sit in the vehicle, and then getting out quickly because you "forgot something."

My kookoo Nancy Maytwayashing – I miss you and love you. I wish I spoke and understood Anishinaabemowin. You were small yet powerful. Your words cut, but were right. You both literally walked the roads of your community, and you walked and talked an Anishinaabe way of life. By each and every account, you were one of a kind.

"I put this story together over the last ten or twelve years, and it is still full of holes. It is a true story in the same way that an old vase that is broken into pieces in the sink and glued back together holds water. Maybe, maybe not. But it is no less beautiful to look at. This is what I think I know." – Ivan Coyote

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Appendix A – Interview Questions

Interview Questions

a. Describe your earliest memory of _____.

b. Walk me through your/their childhood home(s).

c. Walk me through _____'s home.

d. What was something she would always say?

e. Do you have any pictures of _____ that you are willing to show and tell me about?

f. Can you describe a typical day spent with _____?

g. Can you give me an example of a time when _____ worked really hard at something?

h. How did _____ make you feel when you were with them? Is there a story that comes to mind that reminds you of how _____ made you feel when you were with them?

i. I wonder what makes them special?

j. Tell me about a time where _____ may have had to overcome adversity.

k. Can you remember a time when _____ was upset or angry?

l. I'm interested in _____'s humour. Can you tell me something funny they may have did, or said? Can you tell me a story about a time they made you laugh?

m. I am wondering if you have stories or memories of me (Wade) as a child?