MARIE: A DISENFRANCHISED WOMAN FROM KIPAWA

by

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Abstract

The Indian Act of Canada specifically targeting First Nation women has been blatantly discriminatory. In 1951 section 12(1) (b) was successfully passed and dealt specifically with First Nation women, effectively disinheriting them when they married non-status men. Conversely, Native status was not only retained for their brothers, but also passed on to their non-Native wives. It remained that way until 1981 when the United Nations, an international body, deemed it sexually discriminatory. Though challenged by Native women across Canada, there was little effort from the courts, band councils and Native advocacy groups to correct this injustice. It wasn’t until 1985, when Bill C-31 was introduced to deal with this injustice. This thesis followed Marie’s experience as she was disenfranchised. Disenfranchised women were forced to make do in urbanized communities where opportunities were few and poverty the trend. In Marie’s case poverty, loss of identity, lack of education, abuse and dislocation from her community affected her greatly. She could neither belong in the Western world, nor return to her community. Such Women fell under the full effect of colonization. Their communities crossed them off their membership lists and they were rejected not only from their communities, but often from within their own families. Section 12(1) (b), as it dealt with First Nation women had the deleterious effect of dividing communities and families from within. Though she eventually regained her status, Marie shared reflections about her journey back and acknowledged that her healing came from giving back and serving others. It is what made her resilient.

Marie was interviewed over the summer of 2016 and her experiences written as narratives and collected by Catherine Davis, her daughter and author of this study. As the stories of mother and daughter intertwine in the writing of this thesis, it became an autoethnography where personal experiences intersect with the public domain. This study has implications for any Canadian teacher who interacts with First Nation people. Experiences, like Marie’s, offer balance
and is the first step in the Truth and Reconciliation process. Stories have the power to heal and telling the truth is where we start.
Acknowledgements

Setting off down the road of an academic was a new journey for someone like me living on a First Nation, off campus and choosing this endeavour part-time. There were many times where I almost gave up and were it not for the supports I had along the way, I probably would have. It is with upmost gratitude that their names appear in this thesis. Firstly, my thesis supervisor Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapler was absolutely inspirational and the best fit for a struggling closet writer. Being an accomplished author and writer herself, she offered tremendously valuable advice. I learned so much. Her advice was clear: let the stories tell themselves. It’s the advice that would ring clear once again with Richard Wagamese. Dr. Lindsay Morcom, a kind, sharp and thoroughly knowledgeable Anishinaabe academic was introduced during the process. She inspired me to dig deeper and with greater conviction. It is heartwarming to see First Nation people like her within the halls of academia. She championed my efforts enough that I did something totally radical, totally crazy. I applied to the PhD program at Trent and was accepted. As Dr. Thomas King said of his academic team who helped “drag him through the rigors of the PhD program”, I’d like to say these two incredible women did the same for me in the Master’s program. I had a lot to learn and their patience helped me through. Along with my team, Dr. Rena Upitis entered at a critical time and helped get me to the finish line. Many thanks. Queen’s University is all the better for the people they have shaping the experiences of its students.

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abiding interest. My children, Joy and Charlie, continue to be my inspiration. This thesis is for
them; it is part of their heritage and their link to the past. Like Marie, their grandmother and
subject of this thesis, said to me: “I’m not rich, I can’t leave you money, but I am leaving my
story.” I beg to differ. Marie, your story has enriched my life in more ways that you can know.
For over 50 years, you have been an ongoing friend, confidant and mother. You have inspired me
in so many ways and have helped shape who I am. Sharing your story has given something
invaluable to my children. Something better than money. It is a part of who they are. Miigwech.
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Chapter 1

Introduction: Energy Bars and Night Classes

This story has been heard and told many times; retold, changed in nuance, perhaps a dash of bravado splashed here and there. The story, though, is still the same, its message intact. Members of our family know this as The Chocolate Bar Story. When we refer to the story, we call it this and everyone, in our family knows what’s coming. It is a fairly recent story of humiliation and a wrongful accusation. It was traumatizing for Marie. She tells the story this way:

I was out, on the go, from my house up Algonquin, heading over to Joanne’s. I stopped at Tim Hortons, you know that one in that gas station on Algonquin. It’s just a little pit stop called “Esso on the Run,” but they have a Tim Hortons in there. I always get a coffee to go. On this day, I needed to use the washroom in there, but it was being occupied by another customer. So as I was waiting, I just started to browse at what was on the shelves. I was looking over the merchandise and noticed a chocolate bar on the shelves that was priced out at five dollars. I have never seen a chocolate bar that expensive in all my life, so I went over to have a look. I picked it up, curious and
started to read the ingredients. I realised that it was what young people call an energy bar and put it back [Marie becomes quite animated each time, showing how she put it back on the shelf, moving in a quasi-comical way]. The customer had left the bathroom and it was my turn. So in I went with not another thought about the chocolate bar.

I was barely sitting. Bang. Bang. Bang! [Marie is now animated, raising her voice, sometimes banging on the table to make the story more interesting.] A man was shouting from the other side of the door, calling me a thief and telling me that he’d called the police. He was shouting at me through the door to get out of his store. I opened up the door, thinking he must have made some mistake and certainly wasn’t talking to me. In his broken English, he continued to yell at me that I was a thief and that the police were coming and for me, to get out of his store. By now, I’m shaking and upset. He was yelling that I stole a chocolate bar. You know me, I don’t even like chocolate bars and if I wanted one, I’d go and buy the friggin’ thing. I couldn’t believe that he was talking to me like this. He said he “knew all about you people.” I was mad, too. Where did he think he came from to make himself so special to put us people down? His people weren’t the crème of the crop in North Bay either. I was so embarrassed that I was crying and he kept yelling at me to get out of his store. The store was full of people coming and going, paying for gas and getting their coffees from Tim Hortons. I told him that I wasn’t going anywhere and now we were going to wait for the police together. He called them: he can wait for me to get out of his damn store now. I’m not running off like I’m some common criminal. Let him prove it. I live in the motherhouse with the nuns on the outskirts of town. People around here like to talk and gossip; now people will think I’m out around town doing stuff like this, stealing chocolate bars. So now I was going to wait and get this cleared up because he wasn’t going to listen to me anyway and I was far too upset to defend myself. I was too upset to drive out of there anyway.

So now, not one, but two police cars showed up. You’d think they’d have something better to do with their time than have two cars show up and search a seventy-five year old woman for a chocolate bar! They asked permission to search me and I was anxious to show that I had no chocolate bars on me. So I said yes. One of the police searched me and the other one went in to check the garbage in the bathroom for evidence. Of course, they found nothing, no wrapper in the trashcan that they were looking for. That
idiot storekeeper continued carrying on and saying that he had me on video tape stealing a chocolate bar. One of the police officers went behind the register to check that evidence, too. People were lingering in the store, some were even crossing the street to check out what the commotion was in the Chicken on the Run. The crowd of “customers” was definitely growing and I was the attraction. Of course, the police found nothing there too, so that was it. I was okay to go, they said. They told me to go home and forget about it. After half of North Bay saw me being searched and being humiliated like that, I was supposed to go home and “forget about it.” I couldn’t even drive home, I was so upset. Lindsay (Marie’s granddaughter) came and got me and took me home. Even after the police left, that shopkeeper continued to scream at me to get out while I waited for Lindsay. I will always hate that store and it won’t matter to me who owns it. I have a bad feeling every time I walk by it. Lindsay drove me over to Joanne’s and I was still crying.

When I told Joanne about it, she was so mad that she put it on Facebook and identified the store. After that, it was everywhere. Lots of people where threatening to boycott the store and some were even getting crazy, threatening to vandalize the store and “take care of the owner.” Those were Joanne’s friends, I didn’t even know about them doing that. It was all getting crazy and Joanne was visited by the police on what people were putting on her Facebook page. They were threatening to shut down her page and charge her. Now all of the sudden the police were interested in doing something. I get that you can’t go and make threats like that on Facebook, but the police didn’t show up at my door to say that what happened to me was wrong. They are quick on some things, but not about the wrong thing that was done to me.

I never got any apology for being treated like that. I know that you can’t go and accuse someone of doing something like that. It isn’t right. If I was some non-Native person in that store, I don’t believe I would have ever been treated like that. But I’m an old lady Native woman, an easy mark. Someone that you can shove around and no one bats an eye. It’s always been that way. North Bay is full of racists and some are immigrants, too. I hate those bastards. They don’t know anything about Native people and dislike us because why? We are always resented for the tax exemption card when we use it in their businesses. I could tell that old bastard of a store keeper had a dislike for me
when he laid eyes on me, probably thinks he should be able to treat women like this.
(Dolbeck, 2006)

When Mom tells this story, she puffs up a little bit and becomes a little cocky as she counters with, “I should have said this, you want to see me strip [talking about the police search], and well I should have given them a real show [now she’s strutting around and doing a little dance].” Everyone laughs. It’s all so funny, but no one misses the punch line. Two police cars for a seventy-five-year-old woman, with a maybe chocolate bar in her purse?

This story is interesting for me because it demonstrates how Marie views herself as an First Nation woman, now 77 years old. It’s always just below the surface, a thin veneer. She knows that being a Native woman in Canada brings many unwanted reactions. The storekeeper, who we later discover is the owner, is one of many. When Marie retells the story, she leaves out some stuff; stuff that does not make for great storytelling. Stuff that really shows her vulnerability. Sure, she mentions she cried, but she doesn’t tell of her inability to sleep and how she walked around with feelings swinging between rage and sadness. It’s the deeper story, and not so much about the chocolate bar. This one is not about stolen candy and ‘kleptomaniacal’ old Native ladies; it’s about something as old as humankind, racism. It’s about the culture of hate and how we breathe life into it; thereby, giving it impetus to move freely from person to person. It gets passed around like the flu. How does someone become susceptible to it? Is it a matter of our environmental predisposition, perhaps? I’ve seen many babies and as far as I could tell, their pure hearts have yet to prey on others because of cultural differences. Racism is a low form of humanity, and one that holds us back from becoming who we are meant to be. Every day it robs humanity of its possibilities.

Marie continues to relive the story. Was it happenstance that the police received the calls at the same time? Maybe. Was it an honest mistake on the part of the owner, who to his defense, probably witnessed chronic thievery? Possibly. Still it’s hard to accept the rationale uncritically:
two police cars, one chocolate bar, and an elderly Native woman? Not in any universe of thinking can I reconcile them either. And really — what is important is Marie’s belief that being Native brings on these happenings. Marie has felt the tide of discrimination all her life and recognizes its waves easily. She is what you might call hyper-sensitive to it. Me, not so much; a so-called gift of my father’s European genes. I wasn’t publically humiliated and sent home ‘to forget it’. I somehow don’t think it would happen to me.

This incident calls to mind an episode that happened many years ago at Durham College during the 80s. I was taking night university classes in order to complete my degree. The students in the class were all predominantly practicing teachers. While they may have been practicing teachers, they did not hold the requisite degrees, and so their jobs were at risk. They were, for the most part, an indifferent group taking a night course in Native Studies. After exchanging pleasantries and idle chitchat, I learned where they worked. As the class was about to begin, in walked a very visible mature Native woman. Over the years, I have become better acquainted with this woman as she rose through the ranks of the university system. But tonight, she was a lone Native woman teaching a group of disinterested teachers who were there in body, certainly not spirit. As this Native woman went about teaching the class, it was clear that she was in touch with her culture and was willing to share it; however, it was the wrong audience. When she turned her back, there was plenty of snickering and ‘knowing’ glances were passed around the room. They were shared with me too because it was assumed that I was safe territory for this racism to land as it spread throughout the class. I’d like to say that I was the person who stood up and challenged the group, who called attention to this blatant discrimination, but I sat there angered and immobilized, lost somewhere between two cultures. A coward, a counterfeit and it wasn’t to be the first or last time that I would sit in silence as Native people were disparaged in relative collective comfort.
1.1 Thomas King Says So

Recently I’ve spent time reading Thomas King and thinking about him. During my course work, I have been introduced to many authors. Some I like more than others; some are really storytellers who hammer words to the page, leaving us caught in the weaving of their design. I imagine Thomas King this way. I think his evocative telling gives him licence to be brutal while applying a thin layer of wit. We don’t feel so bad about being slapped head on with a clever dose of reality.

Because I really like him, I imagine that he talks to me and we have conversations about this thesis. I ask Thomas, because we are now on familiar terms and he has invited me to call him by first name, if he has any thoughts on these two stories because I think that this topic might be of interest to him. Maybe my stories will spark a reaction from him.

“What do you think about the chocolate bar story?” I ask him.

“Well I’ve written about this before,” he says. “Didn’t you read about my mother? Mine is a story about the glass ceiling. It was in between all the other interesting things that happened after ‘you’ll never believe what happened?’”

“Really?” I say. “Wasn’t she brilliant, undervalued, ultimately overlooked and she learned to accept that?”

“I told her she was crazy to allow people to treat her like that. But she knew the nature of the world in which she lived, and I did not … At eighty-one, she still believes that the world is possible, even though she will now admit she never found it, never even caught a glimpse of it” (King, 2003, p. 4).

“My mother’s story is disturbing because I don’t think I’d ever be treated that way at any Chicken on the Run in North Bay, or anywhere for that matter,” I lament. “It bothers me that our mothers have been treated that way.”
Thomas continues, “Middle class Indians, such as myself, can, after all, afford the burden of looking Indian. There is little danger that we’ll be stuffed into the truck of a police cruiser and dropped off on the outskirts of Saskatoon. Not much chance that we’ll come before the courts and be incarcerated for a longer period of time than our non-Indian brethren. Hardly any risk that our children will be taken from us because we are unable to cope with the potentials of poverty. That sort of thing happens to those other Indians. My relatives. My friends” (King, 2003, p. 59-60). And, I would add, in my case; my mother.

“Wow!” say I, “that’s exactly how I feel. I can afford to be indignant about the chocolate bar incident. No one is casting such aspersion on me; no shop keeper called me out in front of a full audience of customers, no police officer frisked me looking for the ‘chocolate bar’ and no one dismissed me to ‘go home and forget about it’, like no harm done. I’m not that lone Native teacher given the task of wrestling sense into a roomful of westernized educators who would dismiss me on sight. And the reason is simple. Just don’t be Native. Be okay with the group. Forget about racial discord, push down your indignation.”

In both scenarios, the Chocolate Bar incident at the Tim Hortons and evening continuing education class for teachers, it is clear that there are dynamics at play which involve a lone, unsupported Native women challenged publically. Humiliation is complete within the public sphere and I wonder, within the group of spectators, why there was not one single person who came to aid either of these women. Certainly group cohesion formed, silent witnesses in tow, yet none of whom were able to provide any guidance. What is it about the nature of Native women that makes this acceptable?

1.2 Concrete Has No Memory

When I started on the journey of this thesis, I had lofty goals of unveiling my mother’s early reserve experiences and committing them to print. I’d have learned something of our early
family history and it would have been informative for others wanting to learn more about early Kipawa reserve life. The problem is learning happens in ways we can’t always predict. My mother was certainly accommodating and wanted to help, but desire and reality were in collision and reality won out. The year was 2015. I had taken time off work and we were both intent on this exercise in discovery. With my car packed up, hopeful and purposeful, we set off to Kipawa and as good intentions often go, we were met with all manner of disappointment. Marie’s memories may be fading, but the truth of it is, the landscapes had totally forgotten the stories they once held. When we arrived in Kipawa, Mom pointed to the shoreline dotted with fishing boats and summer homes. She couldn’t be exactly sure when the original family home stood some odd 70 years ago, but it was “somewhere over there” as she indicated with her arm outreached and her eyes crinkled, questioning herself now. Being here makes her a little sad and she was anxious to move on. As we drove somewhere in between Kipawa and Temiscaming, she instructed me to pull over down a tiny dirt road.

“I want to show you something,” she announced, almost a little pleased with herself. “This is where I met your father.” Now I was curious because father stories are few and far between and none of those have happy endings. It was a small independent saw mill, completely abandoned, overgrown with trees and patrolled by wild dogs. I would have gotten out, were it not for them. Certainly there was no hint here of a budding romance, a legacy that would develop into anything. It was truthfully a sad, tangled mess of collapsed buildings that looked like they were meant to be temporary, no thought to anything grand. Just a dot on the landscape, meant to harvest what they needed and gone once the extraction was complete. It was time to go. Next stop was Temiscaming to the hospital where I was born, now turned into a housing complex. We kept going. I asked that Mom show me where her family lived when they became urbanized. That was a trip to Callendar and the road no longer existed. Gone and no hope for looking at any homestead or early town school. Gone, all gone.
I asked Mom about the North Bay Psychiatric Hospital. That is a place of her history, too. Another story, for later on. Gone, too. I have since learned that the hospital was bulldozed in 2013. So, we had just missed its final farewell before the bulldozers moved in. The last place we passed that day was the site of the North Bay Civic Hospital, the place where my grandmother and stepfather, and many others, took their last breaths. Strange to me, how small the site actually is, so small, but gone too. All that was left were rocks and mortar, and I wrapped up the day thinking “cement has no memory.” It was also clear that Mom had a very limited bank of memories of her early reserve life. My enthusiasm was waning. The stories were not in the landscape and I wasn’t even sure that my Mom could recall enough to qualify for a thesis.

Even with all the dead ends, Marie was still interested in telling her story, but what story was that, if not her story about her authentic reserve life? But, you see, I wasn’t paying attention. Marie’s stories are coloured by her disenfranchisement experience and those are the ones she tells. Talk to her long enough and you will see. I wasn’t listening. The stories that were waiting to be told were the ones about how Marie felt about being a Native woman in Canada and her off reserve experiences colour them.

I began to think about this critically. The year was 2016 and we had a new Liberal Government with a hip, smart looking Prime Minister in Justin Trudeau. The contemporary political landscape was changing and so was the public’s interest of Native issues. We had a new appetite for Truth and Reconciliation, and we were finally getting some interest in the Murdered and Missing Commission for Native women. That was the story on the news, but what’s the untold story? Remember the Chocolate Bar story? My goals are simple; I want you, the reader, to hang in there, I want you to care about Marie and all her Chocolate Bar stories. The stories I’m telling are the ones about people like Marie, the stories about racism that leave deep scars like permanent tattoos on one’s skin. It’s those scars that keep individuals from believing in themselves and holds them back from walking out among others with confidence.
Thomas whispers that he can tell it more succinctly. Damn him, really taking liberties now. He postulates that it’s like “a damp, sweltering campaign of discrimination that you could feel on your skin and smell in your hair” (King, 2003, p. 50). It’s exactly like that, yes, but I’m not finished Mr. Thomas and it’s still my turn. Sometimes racism lies restless under the surface and sometimes it billows out like a fine black smoke which once seen, dissipates deeply into your fibers, like an overwhelming malodorous stench. It’s there every time you enter a room. When you sit beside someone, they look across and ask where you’ve been and why you smell like you do. Sometimes they move away because they can’t stand it, but what about the person who has no other clothes to change into? Marie would say that her special sweater hugs her body, and is always there. Sure, she can take it off in the privacy of her home, but it’s waiting at the door once she steps out. It’s the only clothes that she has and all she wears for her walk about town. Her special sweater was carefully crafted for her to wear, knit by others who had the fabric and tools. Once created, it became the fashion trend and perfectly pleasing to those who looked at her. Some shop keepers really like it.

Racist policies were carefully engineered. They were developed early behind the walls of law makers and around tables where great white educated men pondered issues of the day. One such troubling issue was the “Indian Problem” and how to wrestle such an issue to the ground. Policy, formed from bias, became imposed. Native women were especially worrisome because of their curious innate ability to propagate the next generation. Considerable effort had to be taken to have Native women devalue themselves. Deliberate government policy was developed, historically inimical, with the credo to place her below all other citizens of Canada. Their communities soon followed and forcibly applied rules to make them acquiesce to the will of Canada and there were many: daughters, sisters, mothers, aunts and grandmothers, all who became denizens of this colonizing order. Governments, bands and even families turned their backs on these woman and left them to ford through two worlds on their own.
What is the missing story about Native women? The untold story, the one that we aren’t talking about, is the one about what we have done to Native women in Canada. There are many of those, but I am prepared to tell one: the one about a Native disenfranchised woman from Kipawa. Through one woman’s story, I will talk about the impact of a misogynistic, racist government bent on limiting the existence of Native women through its policies and legislation. Native people have few allies in the development of government policy and Native women even less so. They were worth less than Native men and less again than any other women of Canada. The legislation of Canada bears this out to be true. So should we be surprised when Native women could be so abominably treated in coffee shops and college classrooms? I am hoping that these experiences will cause you to take notice, but sadly I am aware that “stories about racism are simply not interesting to Whites” (Marker, 2003, p. 367). I am hoping that this story is different, or maybe that you, the reader, are different. Maybe, if educational spheres are becoming more inclusive and open to Indigenous learners as it purports, you the reader are indigenous and are already familiar with such stories. Either way, First Nation accounts are valuable when discussing issues of racism because its full effect is better understood from the position of lived experience.

Marie’s story is invited to dance on the pages of my thesis because her experience has merit, though her existence was previously discounted. Her voice silenced. Anna Walters, an Indigenous writer who challenges conventional boundaries in literature, thoughtfully questions the power of what is written and, even more importantly, what is not. Silence has a quiet kind of acceptance. It is simple. What is written was important enough to document and what is not, wasn’t. Things written down become fact. Walters further elaborates as she counters in Hulan’s Aboriginal Oral Traditions, “When silence eventually moves us to speak, we know the power of silence and our own words. Remember both, we are told” (as cited in Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008, p.145). This brings to mind that how we are described by others also defines us. If that is true, then we must define ourselves. When we are moved to speak, our existence is noted. This is a
problem for societies not wrapped up in dominance. Within Aboriginal cultures, silence is valued. It is a place where thinking is introspective, but silence has been used against the Native person. We at a time in our history where we need to stand up and have our voices heard. Be defined on our own terms.

I set a place for Mr. King beside my computer. He parks on the chair beside me, all resplendent in his new black and red jacket, ready to join in the conversation. He is amused by my clumsy attempts; he knows the road I’m heading down. Don’t forget that “most of us think that history is the past. It’s not. History is the stories we tell about the past” (King, 2012, p. 3). This is true, and it is why we learn what we do. We learn the ‘important’ stories of great white thinkers. Great white, male thinkers. We are invited to their party as spectators, but they would never accept an invitation to ours. And it might be worthwhile to remember that our invitation is limited to the value of our service. We can hold their pens, pass out the papers and pay attention while they speak. If we’re lucky, we might be invited back to hear them speak on others affairs. They are not, however, interested in other people’s ideas because theirs are the ones that count. Thomas King sits and grins.

“You again?” I ask. He’s starting to invite himself in more, popping in to say this or that and always finding ways to say super clever things that I’m thinking about. He’s getting a little annoying, this clever know it all. He’s sitting on the chair beside me, pondering my story and where I’m going with Marie. Finally, he can’t hold it back anymore and says, “Stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live” (King, 2003, p. 9). They may not be particularly compelling to others, but they are our experience and frame how we view the world. He reminds me that, “the truth about stories is that’s all we are” (King, 2003, p. 2). And I might add, it’s all about the nature of truth, whose truth; “it’s all about the truth that gets told, and the truth that gets sold” (Marker, 2003, p. 364). This is part of a capitalistic society in which we live.
Marie’s collection of stories and experiences are her lived truth. It makes them my stories too. Marie’s stories are about being dismissed and rejected as a Native woman and really no one put up much resistance. So if no one cares, then what’s the big deal? It’s important to consider, though, the eddy of discontent as it bubbles up from the Truth and Reconciliation project. This is no time for stasis if we are sincere in our goal to broker better relationships.

Marie’s story is one that I know and one that I am connected with intimately. Margaret Kovach states it clearly: “if you have something important to say, speak from the heart” (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 28). Our elders teach us this: that we should speak from the heart and always choose our words carefully. It is true that the Anishnaabemwin word for truth is “Debwewin” which acknowledges a connection to the word for “heart.” Heart and truth are intertwined both in definition and understanding. A person’s experience is valued above knowledge found in books. Building knowledge comes in the form of the story from the storyteller and is shared as relationships and bonds are forged between people. I am using Marie’s collection of narratives this way. As you come to know her through her stories, you will be given a window into another woman’s world and you may find that it expands your understanding of First Nation women in general, maybe even challenge your thinking on them and connects you in ways you didn’t expect.

I’m brought to reflect on the power of the narrative. Could this make the bones for a powerful telling and produce knowledge in the process? Margaret Kovach’s essay, “Emerging from the Shadows” in the book entitled Research is Resistance says that indeed it can since the stories are “capable of grasping the messy complexities of people’s lives. Especially since the lives of those on the margins, involves reclaiming these knowledges” (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 11). To my way of thinking this means a Native woman, like Marie who lived her life in the shadows, has the ability to challenge our views by virtue of her lived experience. She challenges what we think we know about Native women, and not in a cursory way. Her experience, and
others like hers, widens the canon of knowledge of First Nation people across Canada. There might be a new knowledge waiting to be told. Telling one’s personal story is contextual and the telling is shaped by experience. We can learn much by examining another life and Marie’s life is about thinking thoughtfully about a suppressed voice. Narratives which involve ourselves bring us more fully into the work. Personal stories and lived experiences offer “support for marginalized researchers attempting to cleave to the truth of their own experience” (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 11). Marie’s narratives uncover a meandering of her truths which involve me, the writer of this work currently before you. One involves the other.

In a sense Marie’s stories, while unique, are a part of a substratum of dismissed First Nation women from whom you haven’t heard much before. You might consider her story to originate from an oppressed collective and possibly see it connected to an agenda. Her voice is her own, but her voice emerges from a periphery shared by other Native women. You might even consider it political, and you would not be wrong. The personal is always political and women, Kovach elicits, are “the subjects of research and that making this visible and developing knowledge about them constitutes a political act” (Brown & Strega, 2005 p. 74). In their case, as we consider the impact of The Indian Act of Canada, we are able to determine that First Nation women were a trying presence for Canadian policy makers of the day. Considerable effort was made to stamp out her contumacious will and have her acquiesce to the ways of non-Native society, ushering in her offspring likewise. Her claim to Indigenous values and communities erased as though they never existed. Jo-Ann Episkenew likens the growing body of Indigenous voices as having the “ability to shape history, politics and public policy” (Episkenew, 2009, p. 186).

Marie’s collection of stories have the ability to reassemble that which was fractured. Jo-Ann Archibald refers to as “squelqwel”; stories that are “true” describing a person’s lived experience (Archibald, 2008, p.84). Marie’s narratives are stories about her lived experience and
they are, “true stories… describing experiences in people’s lives” (Archibald, p. 84). Her story work evolves into story telling because there is learning from her stories. It is a significant role because in addition to teaching and making meaning, the stories offer an opportunity for healing. Its potential for educative understanding also provides a forum for emotional wellness. So there is that for Marie. Her stories are a benefit for her too. Being the owner of the stories, she becomes the hero and by design resilient to the core. Who doesn’t like the story where the underdog triumphs? In her narratives, though, she can take you by the hand, on her sojourn, and you are enriched by the experience. That is the power of the personal story. It works both ways: for her and for you. In Marie, we locate a voice which speaks specifically to her individual, historic, regional and ethnic perspective, and one that can be examined following significant postcolonial reflection.

A lived life has knowledge and in some cases can, as Jo-Ann Episkenew states in Taking Back Our Spirits, “mend us when we are broken, heal us when we are sick” (2009, p. 70). By challenging a settler’s perception of First Nation experience, a healing story such Marie’s, can help the traumatized recover from their personal trauma. The interplay between personal experience and collective myth are played out and personal experience, by way of their compelling nature, can seize your attention, making it difficult for you to turn away. You cannot unknow something once you’ve been touched by it. It is like unseeing what your eyes have witnessed because turning away deliberately makes you into something else.

Canada has generally shared a collective myth about being an exceptionally compassionate country and that her citizens enjoy an equitable existence. Canada could boast about being distinguished in areas of life expectancy, education and income; in fact, one could claim that Canada ranked first. That would be until First Nation people were weighed into the statistics since Canadian Native people rank 48th, using the same criteria that placed them ahead
of the pack and off reserve numbers would drive their ranking further down (Episknew, 2009, p.71). It is a convenient myth that is well crafted and part of the ‘made in Canada’ industry.

Within our Canadian landscape, Native people are often viewed as impediments to progress and are therefore presumed to be authors of their own misfortune. If only they’d accept progress and behave as other Canadians. They are accused of being an enduring trying presence which have brought the rest of Canada down. Native people have quite a different view. They see Western methods as pernicious in nature and coming at too extravagant a cost. They were built on the suffering of others. The march towards progress essentially left the Native person in an unwanted inescapable orb of inadequacy. Inviting Native experiences, like Marie’s, offer balance and IS the first step in reconciliation because they are the Truth part, a reconnaissance before restructuring can begin. Their stories are an appeal for justice and can inspire us to Moments of empathy. Stories and experiences of the disenfranchised can heal not only the storyteller, but may inspire healing of our country. Before there is justice, something new must happen for persons positioned in the centre. This is, after all, the purpose of this study. By having you listen to Marie’s narratives, we are on the precipice of new understanding that comes from considering the experience of others. Silenced voices serve a specific agenda as Jeannette Armstrong cautions, “these are voices that have been kept silent and hidden, and now is the time for them to be heard again” (Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008, p.146). With this in mind, I imagine that Marie’s stories are an effort to “write back” (Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008, p.141). Marie’s story reduces the scope of what is unknown.

These are noisy narratives not so passive in delivery and comfortable in the regions of provocative interplay. There is a constant dance between talk and text, especially in the case of dismantling ideals. It is worthwhile, though, to consider a quote found in Wilson’s Research is Ceremony when he discusses putting stories to print as he says, “it is like writing bread on the paper and eating the paper instead of having the bread” (2008, p. 103). After all, it has been the
Westernized way which has elevated the importance of the written word over the spoken word itself. It is the words formed into compelling stories that I serve, not the academic from which continually hovers demanding conformity. It is why I have taken Marie’s lead and have written her narratives from the position of a storyteller and less so as an academic student in pursuit of a Master’s degree. It is perfectly natural to resist the structures of academia because it houses the very production of ideas, shapes what is to become knowledge for others, then develops wide ranging practices for dissemination. If not challenged here, then where? Academia is the very place of privilege and decolonization is part of the discussion.

Life writing, as it is called by Michele Grossman in Aboriginal Oral Traditions, revises the colonial narrative since it challenges and turns our focus to the other side, the part that was previously untold (Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008, p. 114). Since its practice originates from an unconventional standpoint, this form of retelling can include oral history, testimonial writing and auto-ethnographic memoires. As it challenges the very core of knowledge, it can and should challenge the tools by which knowledge is transmitted. It can be resistant to Western forms because it is dealing with individual lives and individual voices. In the telling of Marie’s stories, it is appropriate to not make her stories fit into the traditional engine of academic writing and by that end, not fit into the boundaries of what I hoping to unravel. Her stories, in themselves, require an authenticity that will be honoured. To this end, life writing may be perceived as a hybrid where speaking and writing converge, where form and content conjoin and where history ceases to be an inaccessible artefact. The purpose of writing down stories is not to replace the experience or alter it. The act of writing and recording must honour the message. The point I am making is this: I could have written a postcolonial paper without including narratives and I could have excised myself personally and occupied a position as a third party dispassionate observer. That would have been the academic thing to do; however, the topics would have neither been deeply felt for me, nor for you, the reader. It is more important that I look deeply and very
focused to one experience; rather, than casually at several as I bow to a form of homogeneity that is deductive.

In taking on the story format, I intend to fulfill several objectives. First of all, it is a format that plays homage to the Native tradition of storytelling. My mother’s stories follow the traditions of orality; she can spin an intriguing yarn filled with simultaneous humour and despair. It is the mark of a gifted storyteller. Including these transcribed stories, I honour the format in which they were given. Picking up the cue from the stories imparted to me, I feel a sense of duty to preserve the stories and carry them for others. Where telling leaves off, duty begins. Stories of a personal nature are not superfluous entities, flights of fantasy or charming vignettes; rather they are relevant to us, seize our emotions and enlighten our spirit. From them, we are guided and purposeful in our actions; we are given glimpses into a myriad of life’s lessons; and we are edified by a wisdom of a life lived. Once knowledge is shared in the Native tradition, we have a duty to share.

It is important for the reader to know about the methodology of the study. It is within Chapter 2 that I establish my presence and make no effort to deceive the reader on that point. The study was conducted with Marie’s interest and cooperation. She is my mother and I, her daughter. There is no teasing out this reality and really this is what the topic is about after all. Narratives were collected, but from a fully Indigenous paradigm which is about establishing respectful relationships, not empirical preoccupations which disconnect us further. The knowledge we are collecting here is aimed at reaching your heart. That is not to say that westernized forms should be summarily dismantled and tossed out; rather, that brand of knowledge is limited when discussing marginalized peoples. Tuhiwai Smith puts it this way: we are not always asking ourselves about “whom” the research is about, but also “for whom” (Strega & Brown, p. 229). I would even add and for what purpose? There is certainly an element of desired transformative thinking required if we are to do anything with this kind of knowledge. Personal narratives can be
agents of change, as Ross Chambers states, “the study of narrative has invited investigation of social life as an interplay of different positioned actors and different moral and persuasive voices” (Episkenew, 2009 p. 75).

In Chapter 3, I introduce the family: Marie’s and mine. Through Marie’s recollections we are given a window in the early beginnings of her family as they existed on their First Nation in Kipawa. Gleaning from her stories, we learn about their early exodus and how this paved the way for further dislocation experienced among her siblings, specifically her female siblings. It speaks to the reality of urbanized First Nation people since more First Nation people live off reserve rather than on. Urbanized First Nation people drifted to areas where they found low paying jobs and cheap housing. This guaranteed their perceived inferior status because they were visible, in the sense that they were marked by their distinctly Native features and shabby living conditions. Often they were without supports and vulnerable to rampant racism widely shared by dominant cultures. They were like a pool of scattered jetsam washed up on the outskirts of urban communities.

Once Marie had relocated off the reserve, she began her adult life completely fractured from her First Nation. Chapter 4 discusses how her dislocation became complete as she eventually married and became a cast out First Nation woman. My mother would be the first to acknowledge the presence of feminist thinking, though she would stop short of calling herself a feminist. She understands that the Native female experience to be quite separate and more complicated than that of Native men. She has often said that Native women had fewer choices more specifically because of their rejection from Native men. Certainly, without challenging Marie too much on this point, it is feminism which has given occasion for us to be able to include a voice such as hers and it is feminism which contributes to the burgeoning movement of inclusion, such as this study.
Marie’s narratives drift in the politicized realities of the status and non-status issues and the inevitable fallout from marrying out of her race. I recall a slogan that I read at a demonstration rally recently, and it read, “You are born political when you are born Native” which uncovers an uneasy truth. Once politicized, Native people are caught in a conundrum designed by the structures of colonialism. Brayboy suggests, in *Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education*, that Native people have become highly politicized by definition, yet without any useful power or autonomy to control the arc of their colonizer. Moreover, their political status is mystified and ignored by the larger society because First Nation people are tied to a complicated struggle for legitimacy (Brayboy, 2005, p. 433). Their energies committed to finding relevance. Native people are immediately distinguished by their status or non-status ranking and a dreary discussion about blood quantum inevitably follows of which the average Canadian could care less. Canadian history reveals a government obsessed in its decree to control Native people at every level and never was their purpose more evident than with First Nation women. Throughout Chapter 5, Marie shares her narratives about the repercussions of Bill C-31. As a legislative arm of the Canadian government, Bill C-31 effectively amputated these women from their communities, families and then from themselves. They lost their cultural inheritance, often trading them in for failed marriages and desperate attempts to belong to urban communities. Marie’s story is one of them. She will introduce you to women like her, living on the margins, and with the effect of their dislocation. Isolated from her community, she experienced instability in many forms. Belonging within an urban space was not an option for her. Many of her experiences centred on issues of poverty, lack of education, resulting poor access to suitable employment and unavailable coping skills that would have helped her deal with life’s disappointments in a healthy way.

Educational spheres harboured no immunity. In Chapter 6, educational influences of the day will be discussed as they were received by Marie and her mother, my grandmother, who is a
curious addendum to this discussion, and finally myself. A braiding of three interplay: three generations and three women connected by blood and disconnected by education. First Nation people, as presented in Canadian curriculum, have had a long complicated presence. There, when represented at all, they were wild relics of the past, a precondition to the march of progress; but always from in position of a completely conquered race. That was our strident enduring Canadian history taught everywhere in provincial schools. I know this because it is what I learned in the provincial schools I attended, and I attended many as our family hopscotched around neighbourhoods, never successfully laying down roots anywhere. Not included in the curriculum were the injustices done to First Nation people and the legacy of residential school. That particular part of history was as if it never happened. It wasn’t until I was past high school that I heard of such things and never imagined that it might involve a family member of my own. Not only was mainstream Canada kept in the dark about their real story, so were we. This was another great injustice done to Native people: they were prevented from learning about themselves along with everyone else. The great project of assimilation, however, failed and failed because a yearning about the truth persisted and reached across several generations.

Marie’s stories are reactionary, resistant to a generalized understanding of a Native person’s social failure and subsequently their inability to thrive in the regular classroom. The presence of post-colonial thought places colonialism at the centre and perhaps that is the point of this thesis. I am able to reflect on practices following Marie’s educational experiences. We now occupy a landscape of post-colonialist enlightenment where we may examine colonialist fallout. Old ways of thinking are challenged as we question many practices and ways of being in the world. Indigenous thought coexists with many detractors who occupy the periphery. From their place as ‘other’ they maintain their presence and demand to have their voices heard as well. Their voices often fill an angry space as they fight to have relevance. It is, as Kateri Damm claims a
way that...“we can fight back with words” (Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008, p. 141). The colonizers and their apparatus haven’t left and now we must negotiate new territory.

This perspective calls to mind the situation of Warlpiri women as summarized in Michele Grossman’s *Fighting with Our Tongues, Fighting for Our Lives*. Indigenous Australian women are challenging previously accepted notions of Aboriginal history and doing it by capturing their life histories and committing them to print. As they share the narratives inter-generationally, they close the divide between talk and text; they dismantle icons of knowledge. History and power are challenged as they say “pipakari manu pipakarirlalpa warrulpa wangkaji” translating to “on paper we spoke out” (Hulan & Eigenbrod 2008, p. 118). Collected narratives are elements of shared testimonial texts intended for multiple audiences. Their purposes are ambitious and pervasive, a need to preserve stories, transmit history and impart societal change. The Warlpiri women have a goal of recording these histories for their children, not unlike my own purpose. By speaking out in this manner, it provides better understanding outside their community and promotes healing from within.

Throughout Chapter 7, themes of survival and resiliency emerge. Since all regulation of Native women left them in a position of being utterly helpless, it is important to consider that any review of their experiences should leave them feeling more in the other direction, an effort to rise from helplessness toward empowerment. Marie has stated this. The power of compelling narratives speak viscerally to us. They seek to reach us, bypass our heads and enter our hearts. When done from their perspective, we are closer to achieving a fuller understanding, a truer truth about what we thought we knew. Marie’s careful retelling of her stories is an effort to offer her a seat at the table from a position of triumph.

Being able to speak out is a form of talking back, or even taking back, as she reclaims her space. With Marie’s story, a new healthier version is created within a safe environment. Marie is able to appreciate what she has overcome and celebrate since she triumphed over great adversity.
It is in this process that they are remembered and appreciated. She has discovered over the years that hers is a shared story among her sibling sisters and then again in the wider sisterhood of Native women. Their stories recount forgotten personal histories about being dismissed as they ventured beyond their ancestral lands and into the arms of men not from their communities. It is the goal of this research to devote safe space and passage of her voice. Once achieving the goals of the Truth part of Truth and Reconciliation, we are better equipped to delve into the Calls to Action outlined within the Truth and Reconciliation document.

The impact of colonizing education, rampant racism and dislocation from one’s home are topics which permeate Marie’s lived experience and subsequently my own. They are worthy of scholarly reflection. Since more First Nation peoples live off reserve than on (by Indian and Northern Affairs own estimate, close to two thirds), it is, therefore, of critical value to discuss how provincial education has failed them (EKOS, 2006, p.iii). First Nation people know that the data has always been used to support a disadvantaged view of how they arrived at their current predicament. Questions abound and theories aplenty explaining away the conundrum of the Native person lost in a contemporary world. When fault is handed out, it is always the Native person who is expected to line up and accept their failure.

What is about the enigma of First Nation women which make her incomprehensible to others? How is she not better understood? How can we better understand these women and the communities they come from? Canada’s vehicle for definition has been the Indian Act. Through educational arms of the government, they attempted the task but they failed miserably when their preoccupation turned suppression. Much learning can come from hearing one person’s story: that’s what we believe across First Nation communities. It is the power of the narrative; the power to enlighten by touching your heart. Marie’s stories are central to the discussion of First Nation women, especially disenfranchised ones; the ones who were ultimately cast out. The time is ripe for inclusion as we traipse across this great land of Canada armed with a new appetite of
sincerity. There is no better place to start than here; one story, one thesis, one woman, at a time; but, before we can move onto Marie’s story, there is another story that needs to be told first. Mine.
Chapter 2

Thalidomide Babies and Selfies

Figure 2: Picture of Author (1960)

While telling Marie’s story, I am thinking about mine. It is impossible to tell her story without me somehow creeping into the periphery and it starts right at the beginning. The vitriolic marriage Marie found herself in had little escape because marriage for a young woman, then, especially a Native woman, was all about surrender ‘until death do us part’. To this day, Marie still jokes about my impending arrival: that I was born with a job in place and my job was to save a crumbling marriage and for which, I failed miserably. She tells it like this:

I was so immature, just a few months past 17 years old when I married your father that I believed a baby between us could solve the distance. He was 30, Polish, wildly different and then there was me. He showed very little interest when he learned that you were on the way and even less when you arrived. He never even saw you until days after I gave birth to you. My brother came and got me at the hospital and drove
you and me home. I had a very difficult pregnancy all the way around; in fact, it was a complete nightmare while your father floated along in his drunken state completely unaware of what I was going through. He was always acting like he was a single man with no cares in the world. I was completely alone and because I practically forced my parents to give their consent to allow me to get married underage, I couldn’t go back to them and tell them what a terrible mistake I had made. My dad was downright angry and, though he didn’t know everything about your father like all the heavy drinking and abuse, he warned me that he was far too old for me. But I persisted and told dad that I was in love with this man and that I would run off with him anyway, whether he gave his consent or not.

In those days, a parent’s focus was on the unthinkable, an unwanted pregnancy, so with that threat overhead, they agreed. They had already chased down the impregnators of some of my older sisters. In those days, it was a mother’s responsibility to keep an eye on their daughter’s cycles and any boyfriends who were turning up. That was easier to do when personal hygiene products were routinely washed and reused at home. I guess, for my parents, it was the lesser of two evils to consent to an underage marriage rather than deal with an underage pregnancy. I don’t want to paint a picture that we were bad girls here and that we were without morals, but I don’t want to pretend that women from my generation were all virgins when they married because it just wasn’t so. Many things change over time, but many things are the same. What is always true is young people have powerful desires and this was no different in my day for me, as it was for you and now as it is for your daughter too. Just keep that in mind and let’s not judge each other on it and women are not less for it. We just had more restrictions on us to control it in my day and the restrictions rarely worked in our favour.

Anyway, shortly after marrying your dad, the inevitable happened, I found myself pregnant and I say it that way because that is how it was. It was like a surprise that I found and it was all mine to keep. It was like your father had nothing to do with it and he kept it that way. He would run off for days drinking his weekly earnings away while I was at home. My pregnancies were always tough because the morning sickness was unbearable, but this being the first one was especially difficult. I couldn’t keep anything down. And that went on for months.
My family doctor recommended early on that I consider taking a drug used for pregnant woman, but I felt it was not unusual for an expectant Mom to have trouble keeping food down and your Granny really was clear on that. Native girls were often sick when they were pregnant, probably most women were, so why reach out for a handful of pills to drive away what comes naturally. I left the doctor’s thinking that the symptoms would soon settle down, but they didn’t. Repeat visits to my doctor proved worrisome when I was more than five months along with you and was not gaining weight. The doctor thought that I was at risk for miscarrying or possibly might be putting the baby at risk for all kinds of other problems. He advised me again about that wonder drug and it was helping women like me. He wanted me to give that it a try; to see if the medication could ease the sickness and help me gain weight. Granny had raised us out in the bush to not rely on pills and things that were not natural. We even had some of own remedies for dealing with health issues, so I didn’t feel that popping pills was something I should do.

When I was past my sixth month and people were unable to tell I was even pregnant, I decided to go back and see the doctor again since the sickness was getting no better. The year was 1959 and the drug was Thalidomide. I started taking the drug and was starting to feel better almost immediately; but almost as I was starting to feel better, news was beginning to circulate that women who had taken the drug were having deformed babies. I quickly went back to my doctor and he sadly confirmed this. Although it was highly unusual, he offered to end my pregnancy, since there was a good chance that you were going to be born with defects and the extent of defects were really unknown. What seemed certain was that your arrival was going to be difficult and your future was something of a gamble.

Back then, anyone considered ‘not normal’ were often tucked away ‘out of sight, out of mind’ and if you were born with something wrong, being institutionalized was a real possibility.

I had a big decision to make, and went home to think on it. It was obvious that my marriage to your father was not working, even though I held out hope that you could be the thing that would make a difference. Now that was all different because if you were going to be a deformed baby, how would that turn your father around? A deformed
baby would not make him want to be home more and maybe you would even need more specialized care. It could be a crushing blow financially for us because we were already struggling paycheck to paycheck. It might be the final thing to end our marriage. And I was totally on my own, no education, no decent job skills, not employable. Even if I were to work, what about you? Daycares didn’t exist then and women had such limited option when children came along. As bad as your dad was, I couldn’t imagine life without him.

Where would I go? How would I take care of you? I was so ashamed that I had been weak and had taken this drug and may have ruined your life, so I suffered in silence. Anyway, with the odds stacked against me, a rotten marriage and potential for a high needs child, I decided to keep you. You were growing daily and I had already grown to love you. I was hopeful about so many things and was naïve enough that I wanted to believe in so many things. I wanted to call you Faith or Hope because I just wanted to believe so badly in happy endings.

And so every day, right up until your arrival, I lived in a mix of fear, hope, shame and happiness. And I did this alone, except with you growing in me, because even then, you were a presence, a determined presence. And then, you arrived! The day finally came and the first thing I did was count all your fingers and toes and check you over from top to bottom. There was no denying it, you were a healthy ten pound baby girl, perfect in every way, but there was only one problem that none of us could change. You were a girl and your father had a distinct preference for a boy. He made his disappointment known. He didn’t realize what we had overcome together to get you here. The doctor felt that it was a good thing that I resisted taking Thalidomide as long as I did. It was likely that you were all well formed by time that powerful drug entered my body and it had no impact on your development.

And so that was the beginning of the end right there for me and your father and he started to mean less and less to me every day. There was something deeply wrong with him. I began to look upon him with disgust and his trips away from us meant less too. His returns were becoming a routine disappointment and I began to expect them with dread. When he eventually returned, he was broke, hungover and mean and threw his abuses in our direction. There were times he was sorry and they felt sincere, but his
sorleys would always end in the same way. He would get all dressed up and go out and come back whenever he pleased, his pockets empty and moods foul, like it was somehow my fault. And he even had the nerve to say it was. The really sad thing about that, is I began to believe those things, too. His selfish addiction meant that we had to live poorly. We lived all over North Bay in the poorest, smallest apartments, sometimes small bachelor flats without our own bathroom. The love I felt for him disappeared and all that was left was a feeling that I was trapped with no way out. I even began to hate him. (Dolbeck, 2016)

As Marie recounts this story, I am reminded of a bachelor apartment we had on Worthington Street in North Bay. It had a small kitchenette and a bed sitting room with a pullout couch butt up against the foot of the bed. The couch was my bed. I have a few memories of that time, memories of my father emptying out his alcohol stashes down the sink promising to change his ways. Like Marie said, though, the sorleys were always a full bottle away. Once, when I was around seven, I remember coming home from school to find a burnt out bed mattress on the front lawn. It caused quite a bit of commotion in our small neighbourhood of about ten houses. As it turned out, the mattress was from our unit since my father had fallen asleep drunk with a cigarette and almost burned down the house. The fire department had been and gone. Even at that young age, I had a few friends with whom I played in the neighbourhood, and I recall the feelings of shame and embarrassment when I returned to play with them. Normalcy was always at someone else’s house, never mine. That’s how we lived. We were evicted, of course, and had to move and start the cycle all over again somewhere else. If we weren’t evicted, Marie and I were, as she commonly alludes, ‘on the run’, a euphemism for the quick pick up and go required when my father’s alcohol rages were fueled.
2.1 Claiming My Place

When beginning the final leg of the Master’s program, I was in a quandary as to how I would approach the requirement of research which demanded unchartered ideas intended to offer something fresh to academia. I ended up feeling burdened and defeated before I began. First of all, being First Nations myself and living in a First Nation community, I would routinely bear witness to the influx of university types attempting to ingratiate themselves into the First Nation community, all in the name of completing some requirements for their educational journey. It is quite common to approach graduate work in the form of questionnaires and interviews and it all began to feel a little hollow, a little meaningless. Another questionnaire, another interview. I couldn’t bring myself to a place where I would suddenly be the one passing out such materials and asking an overly analyzed community to suffer through yet another survey to satisfy my needs. This kind of investigation, in my view, lacks depth and has the potential to drain the community further. It is deceptive since such inquiry claims to harness something which is difficult to contain. Community members often looked upon these investigative inquiry attempts with disdain and some would even purposely provide misleading information. No one really believes they are particularly enlightening.

Native people have been an over-studied, ‘researched to death’ group and have grown wary of such things. All too often general assumptions about Native people find a well occupied space within a deficit analysis. We’ve all seen them. Native people are overrepresented in every unfavourable statistic there is: poverty, high school drop-out rates, drug and alcohol addiction, crime, abuse, poor heath, low literacy rates and the list goes on. During the implementation of standard research in Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s New Maori community in New Zealand, one member groused to her: “we’re sick of hearing what’s wrong
with us, tell us something good for a change...why do they always think by looking at us they will find the answers to our problems, why don’t they look at themselves?” (2012, p. 230).

Perhaps investigation requires a different point of view, a different set of eyes; for instance did the Native child fail in the educational system or did the system fail the child? You see the problem; we might be turning the lens inward if we asked a different question, but seldom do. If I were to have any satisfaction from the completion of a Master’s degree, I would have to attempt to do it in a meaningful way. For it to have meaning, I would have to do it as though I were present and a part of the discovery. I couldn’t pretend to take on the researcher’s hat and set off to coax my community into participating. I had no interest in following the path that western researchers took when approaching First Nations. I had to be honest. Unlike some First Nation peoples who are well entrenched in their people’s traditions and language, I was anchored in a different experience. My access point was different and was formed roughly from the perspective of non-access. The idea of non-access became intriguing because it is commonplace among First Nation disenfranchised women. This was something that I could write about with feeling, understanding and conviction.

The inquiry I was prepared to do began to sharpen in focus and I accepted that the business of my Master’s thesis would be positioned in the context of the autoethnographer. I was hopeful that academia was perhaps willing to make room for this kind of discovery. Stacey Jones argues in *Autoethnography* that autoethnography or the autoethnographer “writes a world in the state of flux and movement-between story and context, writer and reader, crisis and denouement. It creates charged moments of clarity, connection and change” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 764). To my way of thinking, the personal narrative achieves this and is even more fluid when the author is a part of the story. I choose to let my reader know that I am here muddled in among the meanderings and I am not leaving. I accept complete responsibility for any errors, misinterpretations and mistakes. It was my goal to claim my space here on this page
and own it, for better or worse. I will leave Vine Deloria’s thoughts here: “it basically asks scholars to develop an identity as concerned beings and move away from the comfortable image of ‘scholar’ ” (Marker, 2003, p. 373). I have crossed this chasm and Marie and I are in this together, a partnership of sorts, an equitable arrangement built on familial trust.

Marie told her stories to me and expected that I would connect with them on a visceral level, not as though I were some distant removed observer. Our connection makes the stories present and meaningful. As she shared, I learned that some stories were new. Though they were not confessional in nature, they did bear the mark of an insight that needed understanding. We were bound together in the exercise. There was no way to avoid the inevitable truth that I was a part of the research, and the research was part of me. Untangling either was difficult and impossible to decide where one began and where the other ended. Shawn Wilson had a firm grasp on this as he discussed the ever present niggling bias. Extraditing the author never moved one closer to a purified form of truth because “researchers, no matter how objective they claim their methods and themselves to be, do bring with them their own set of biases” (Wilson, 2008, p. 16). Biases is formed from a well-developed sense of self and though; the individual attempts to be impartial is not possible since bias mingles freely with thought. Thought and bias occupy a similar territory in the individual.

The bias within this thesis is informed by an Indigenous perspective. I am deeply connected to this research and acknowledge that any knowledge gathered has been through Indigenous means. McIvor reminds that “when conducting Indigenous research (it is important) to ponder the following questions: What brought you here? What do you feel you have/need to contribute to your people/community/nation? From what ‘place’ do you speak?” (2010, p. 140). In other words, claim your space, be honest and have confidence that your Indigenous methodology is valid. For all intents and purposes, bias fails to completely disappear, though we desperately will it so, since it has always left its mark by making the subject less accessible.
Wilson (2008) further argues that as the researcher moves along the scientific continuum, they experience a loss of meaning because “the closer you get to defining something, the more it loses its context” (p. 8). I began to agree that the subject, the thing that we are trying to define is a slippery devil indeed. If we over examine the subject, isolate it from its environment, it becomes disconnected from its relationships. It’s the relationships among these things which define the subject completely.

When I am sharing Marie’s stories, I attempt to do it in a way which is true to her voice. Marie was given to the vagaries of any human imparting their long interesting history, often disappearing down this tangent or that as the story would take her. It was not my intention to limit where the stories would take us, or evaluate their relative value to my needs. I was cautioned early about this and felt that staying true to this method would unfold a wisdom in itself. I had to learn to wait and was not disappointed. I was presented with a life lived that offered clarity, connection, the importance of relationships and hope. It was about making the personal political. The world is always in a state of flux, ever changing, always moving. When considering an alternative transformative view, it may challenge an individual to the point of disequilibrium, but the personal story told here is intended to touch, ground and eventually anchor the reader. Our elders are careful to tell us this, to never leave the person open, and send them out into the world without their spirit protected. Sometimes part of sharing means opening ourselves up to pain. Care is taken to make the person feel safe and supported, even after they have moved away from intimate sharing. Balance is achieved in an environment of respect. Our traditions take care of these things and when sharing is complete, we take the time to close the ceremony properly, to sit with one another and usually break bread together. It’s all about the community of relationships and strong communities are run by strong people with strong ties to one another. We are responsible to each other and it is our duty to care. Even with this thesis, no one should leave feeling worse than before; it should work the other way and that includes
all of us, Marie, me and you. I am brought to reflect on the ethical review process of academia as I write this thesis. While I was eventually given the cursory academic nod, I did run into the typical obstacles of the Ethics Committee. They exist because of overly ambitious academics who exercise their will at the expense of the First Nation communities and being from the group of colonized, they saw no ill with what they were doing. The Indigenous person is bound to find this Ethical Review process a little pedestrian and possibly patronizing, as though they hadn’t thought or heard of these things before.

With my imprint here, I am moved closer to the studied and begin to close the gap of the studier. Sometimes Marie and I, we exchanged roles. I became the studied and she the studier. She watched my reaction closely and was careful that the weight of her words didn’t become too heavy for me to bear. It was a cathartic process. Sometimes it was the other way; I was mindful of the terrain we walked and careful that the questions were not turgidly laden with intrusion; rather, they were open ended and she would choose the path where we walked. Our histories can be a crushing burden and they can grind into every step we take, but she and I agreed to take this journey. I am reminded of Wilson’s words: “It is time for Indigenous peoples and Indigenous research to break free from the hegemony of the dominant system, into a place where we are deciding our own research agendas” (2008, p. 17). He builds an argument that Indigenous research assumes the development of relationships and that researchers from this paradigm consider that “methodology (is) based upon maintaining relationship accountability” (p. 11). Because I have a relationship with Marie, I am accountable through that relationship. It is important to honour her experience and I have a responsibility to present her honestly, yet in a way that causes no further damage. It’s a respectful arrangement which guides the process.

Relational accountability is what keeps me grounded in this work. Cora Weber-Pillwax suggests that “a researcher must make sure that the three R’s, Respect, Reciprocity and Relationality, are guiding the research” (as cited in Wilson 2008, p. 58). Research requires that
we approach our efforts with an open heart and a heart that deeply listens with the third ear. From this view, communication always moves in more than one way. These three R’s open the work up and hold the researcher accountable, not just to the university, but more importantly to the individuals involved. Approaching this type of research requires that I accept my role and responsibility and be accountable to my relationship with Marie as she shares her life story. The research does not live outside of us.

I was deeply connected with the direction this thesis was taking and it felt very personal. In fact this is how the Master’s program worked for me. In order to understand esoteric rather complicated ideas from theorists, I had to connect with the ideas and sometimes, given the application of the austere, theoretical language, I had to dig down deep. This is where meaning eclipsed everything. It’s probably the single simplest lesson that I learned. If I were to learn anything, I would have to understand it, feel it, connect with it and ultimately have a relationship with it in some meaningful way. Shawn Wilson explains it like this: “Indigenous epistemology is all about ideas developing through the formation of relationships” (2008, p. 8). This isn’t to mean accepting and agreeing blindly, but rather for me, it meant playing conversations in my head and then conceptualizing the ideas, thus framing them around a conversation that I was potentially having with the author. It was never passive and that’s why I chose early to invite in favourites like Thomas King. It was like having tea with a respected uncle who has much wisdom to impart. I carry some of his words around with me every day and play them in my head like favourite songs that resonate ideas and feelings.

I mention feelings here because that is what is left out with empirically ordered ideas. Shawn Wilson offers his thoughts: “the idea that knowledge is approached through the intellect leads to the belief that research much be subjective rather than objective, that personal emotions and motives must be removed if the research, results, are to be valid” (2008, p. 56). When knowledge is treated this way, it is presented as something purely distilled in form and objective.
It can be arrived at through scientific means and the researcher is removed. Wilson invites Tafoya (1999) into the debate as he introduces the idea of the researcher being asked to amputate identifying characteristics of themselves. Researchers are effectively asked to check their identities at the door: their race, sex, age, language, orientation and anything which might identify them. The work they’ve done is curiously separated, a thing that can be owned in its final purified form and passed along as a separate entity. It curiously becomes a thing of ownership. We are taught that valid research is written in an objective voice and that is what makes it available to others. Perhaps, though, having a subjective voice might bring us closer to work and then all previous conclusions are challenged. What we thought we knew evaporates leaving us challenged to construct new meaning.

For the Indigenous person, this is a difficult process and quite possibly a feat akin to Coyote not having his eyes. We need more than our eyes; we need our ears, our “three ears: two on either side of our head and the one that is in our heart” (Archibald, 2008, p. 8). I have approached my thesis this way. It seems that our hearts hear, see and feel; our hearts are our third ear. It’s important since our intellect may map out the course; but our feelings on the other hand, drive the boat and take us on the journey. Eber Hampton (1995) says it way:

One thing I want to say about research is that there is a motive. I believe the reason is emotional because we feel. We feel because we are hungry, cold, afraid, brave, loving, or hateful. We do what we do for reasons, emotional reasons. That is the engine that drives us. That is the gift of the Creator of Life. Feeling is connected to our intellect and we ignore, hide from, disguise and suppress that feeling at our peril and at the peril of those around us. Emotionless, passionate, abstract, intellectual research is a goddamn lie: it does not exist. It is a lie to ourselves and a lie to other people. Humans-feeling, living, breathing, thinking humans- do research. When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous, to ourselves first, and then to people around us. (Wilson 2008, p. 52)
Objectified methods for collecting knowledge fly in the face of how knowledge is treated among First Nations peoples. Knowledge, for the Indigenous person, is meant to enrich lives and if it enriches, then there is a duty to share it widely without expectation of payment or reward. Holding on selfishly to anything does not serve the community and knowledge which might benefit others is no different. Sole proprietorship of knowledge is poorly understood since Native people with oral traditions have a duty to pass knowledge from person to person, generation to generation. I have learned this living in my First Nation home of Alderville. Years back, I began the path of learning Ojibway. I had always focused my energies as a teacher towards perceived conventional notions of education. What was in the provincial curriculum? How must we prepare students for provincial testing? I started feeling that I was a teacher assistant of the average classroom teacher and that I was more willing to help them with their role and was not so much serving the needs of my Native community and their children. My vision was like a short lived ephemeral bloom since it was tied to this unit or that test and truly lacked anything of enduring quality. I was occupying a contrived smaller role, but it was valuable in so much as I was able to see myself as a link between the First Nation and the school. At the time, this was comfortable territory since, truth be told, I didn’t see myself belonging in either place. When I began the classroom work in this Master’s program, I made a decision to commit and have aligned myself with my home First Nation ever since. I began a journey of self-discovery which paralleled my academic work as I moved closer to meeting the needs of my community.

As I delved deeper into adult community night Ojibway classes, I began attending historical and traditional events with an open heart. It was a broadening focus for me. Prior to this, I had been reticent because it wasn’t my original Algonquin community from which I was affiliated and I felt somewhat of a fraud to pretend otherwise. The entire definition of Algonquin is predicated on weak ground, one that was not Indigenous in orientation. Many
years ago, when my grandmother was still alive, my mother and I had taken her to visit some old friends in Kipawa. A conversation followed about language. It seems that my granny and her friend understood Ojibway and although there were significant differences among the languages, they could understand Ojibway and communicate with its speakers. They claimed that the languages were similar. I remembered this and recognized my connection to being Anishinaabe. I was tentative at first and it was from a position of respect: I really didn’t want to misappropriate that which was not considered mine to pass on. It was clear, though, this new attitude, a post condition from my Master’s program, was welcomed on all levels. I grew to love the classes; yet I was careful not to appear as though I were misappropriating Native language and culture for my benefit. Almost immediately I was met with all manner of questions regarding the nature of my role during the process and how my language learning could move closer toward meeting the goals of the community. While I was certainly no expert in cultural/language matters, I was expected to share what I was learning with whomever might benefit and it so happened that was the students. Time and effort was invested in me by the language teacher and I was expected to do the same in return. Perfection, thankfully, was not expected.

As a result, I have found greater satisfaction in my role within the community and I have seen that my efforts are meeting success with students eager to learn more about their language. I always preface what I am about to share with the very real possibility that I may be making mistakes because I’m learning too and that we are all at a good place and where we need to be for our individual learning. It’s okay to be a little shy, to say something not quite perfect, to even laugh at our efforts when we feel a little clumsy; but we need to remind ourselves about the most important thing is that we try. We always have people who may know more and who can help us if we run into roadblocks. It offers us licence to try and, ultimately, frees us to make mistakes.
Every night in the After School Program that I oversee, we dismiss to our various study groups by: introducing ourselves, announcing where we’re from, what clan we belong to, the date, our age, how we are feeling, and the weather. Then we thank everyone for asking or listening to us. It important for Native people to introduce themselves and their relationship to the group. Relationships are sometimes established at the time of introductions so that you are aligned in some way, most often within familial connections. It offers a reference to others, framing relationships and a sense of belonging. It’s not unusual to hear elders ask children who they belong to. Though awkward at first, students in the After School Program quickly overcame their reticence and began to rattle it all off their in Ojibway language quite effortlessly.

I apologize if I haven’t introduced myself more clearly, though I will do that now in the language that I am learning: Catherine Ndizhnikaz, Alderville Ndoonjibaa, Mkwa Ndoodem, Naamidana ghi Nshwaaswi Bboon Giizis, Nabakde. Miigwech gii gwej miiyan, Gegiin? My name is Catherine. I am from Alderville. I am from the Bear Clan. I have survived 57 winters, and I am hungry. There are plenty of contradictions here, but I will try to correct a few of them for you with my limited knowledge. I am from Alderville now, but have spent most of my life as a nomad living all over the place with no one place to call home, until now. My mother’s reserve is Kipawa, but we never lived there and that is part of the subject of this thesis. I don’t identify much with my father’s European roots, which are Polish; not because I am ashamed, but more because his early exit rendered it that way. I am sure Polish culture is very interesting and perhaps one day I will learn more about that one. I am proud that I am a Native woman and identify with my mother’s Algonquin lineage. We have been told she belongs to the Bear Clan and so that is good enough for me. I have also been told you can identify with your mother’s clan or perhaps identify with more than one clan at a time, so Bear Clan it is. I consider myself a survivor since I survived a bout of cancer as a child and was
carried in utero with the presence of Thalidomide coursing through my barely formed veins and so I feel that my 57 winters are well earned. Finally, I am hungry; I am hungry to learn, discover and experience: this final leg of a Master’s program being one of them and who knows where that will take me. And finally thanks, Miigwech, for listening, Miigwech gii gwej miiyan, Gegiin and you? Perhaps you, the reader, have some better idea of who is the author of this work, her Indigenous paradigm and the lens from which this work is presented.

What we discover may be useful to affirm the untold experience of Native women like Marie. While it is worthwhile that our general Canadian population learn that such women existed, the learning should also extend to myself. Education shouldn’t always be limited to learning about others and their experiences, it should sometimes teach you more about yourself because, “if research doesn’t change you as a person, then you aren’t doing it right” (Wilson 2008, p. 83). I remember first reading this quote a few years back when I began this road of a Master’s studies and I remember then that it hit me profoundly and still does. My paradigm, then, was on shifting quicksand as I acquired new learning. What is the purpose of any learning, if we remain the same, unchanged, unchallenged? This thesis was approached the same way and so I am changing all the time, evolving because what I thought I knew was sometimes on shaky ground and maybe it will be the same for you.

My first attempt at a thesis topic was quickly abandoned. I was prepared to research Kipawa because I felt there was something to learn about this traditional area and that perhaps Marie could broker some connections to help get the ball rolling. Several attempts in this direction were not met with success and I began to see that Marie’s relationship with her traditional home was fractured. When I spoke with Marie, I was given different stories which were taking me in a totally different direction. At first I was taken aback and no matter how I tried to steer the direction of our early work together, we inevitably drifted back towards Marie’s off reserve experiences. It became clear that I would have to change my direction or
pick a new topic. For a while I let the whole affair tangle without making any decision. I finally accepted that Marie would tell her story and that her story was of such importance that how it fit within the parameters of academia would have to come second. We would figure that out later. I began to ask myself why Native voices need to fit within such narrow structure and happily found I stood on the shoulders of many before me who had already fought the good fight and won. That battle was over and so I began in earnest to frame Marie’s experience in a format that accepted her experience as worthy knowledge to document for the purposes of wider learning.

It was perfectly fine to question mainstream thinking and ask that reflection happen both ways. What was known about Native people could prove to be faulty, since understanding gained by early anthropologists was approached from an outsider’s frame of reference. What was learned became fact and the Native person occupied familiar territory where they were defined as being less than. Such beliefs trickle down to communities and even classrooms. These ideas are being challenged as Native people demand that the western lens be turned around for deeper reflection. Now the pendulum has swung the other way and we can ask them to reconsider their approach, maybe even choose to use “a magnifying glass, when they ought to be using a mirror” (Marker, 2003, p. 386). This metaphor is perfect in my view. When holding up the mirror, mainstream thinkers must look first learn to look at themselves and less at others. The mirror replaces the lens and perhaps their challenges them to see another perspective.

Vine Deloria (1997) tells it this way: “It is now time to reverse this perspective and use the values, beliefs, behaviours, and institutions of tribal or primitive peoples to critique and investigate the industrial societies and their obvious shortcomings” (as cited by Marker, 2003, p. 369). Perhaps if we framed questions differently, we might generate a different answer and not the same tired responses dredged up in studies collecting dusts on shelves. Why not ask
why the rich are rich, and not focus so narrowly on why the poor are poor? We might be discussing the psychology of something different: what it takes to make a person wealthy and if this serves the needs of everyone else in a healthy community.

During the summer of 2016, I met with Marie several times and commenced our research. Since I had discovered that our conversations invariably veered towards specific themes, I chose to set those as topics for discussions and designed sets of questions as prompts to get the discussion rolling. Rather than interviews, I prefer to call them conversations since the interview format connotes stilted questions which form the backbone of the interviewee and interviewer relationship. Ours did not work that way. Though the questions had a function, they did not overtake the importance of Marie’s participation because when some questions were put to the test, they fell flat. For whatever reason they failed to elicit the response intended and sometimes no response at all. I, therefore, paid attention to Marie’s conversation and asked questions which connected with her sharing of the Moment and did not force my prepared questions to override the experience. I highlighted sets of questions not answered to see if they were answered elsewhere, and if they weren’t, I would ask myself if they were important at all. The tangents Marie embarked on were valuable since they are akin to what teachers call “teachable moments.” I looked forward to those Moments because she was offering more than what I asked. Those exchanges were organic, less stilted, defined and primarily less limited.

We agreed to meet for seven, one-hour sessions, most of which were conducted at our cottage which provided a comfortable, distraction free environment. Each session was videotaped and about one hour in length, about the taping ability of my SD Camcorder memory card. With humour, I watched as Marie prepared for the first session and readied herself for the camera by applying makeup and getting her hair “camera ready.” When I explained the purpose of the recording, that it was just for the purposes of jogging my memory with certain details, and that no one else would need to view them, Marie’s preparation took on a different tone. She
became more comfortable, sometimes in a housecoat, sometimes with curlers in her hair, but always we began the session with a coffee in hand. That was my job, too, to make a fresh pot. In the beginning, I got the firm impression that she was answering questions the way she thought I wanted them answered and how they might help me best with this project. I explained, too, that there was no right or wrong answers and that she didn’t need worry about helping me with this since we were just having a conversation about her experiences. Eventually after a few sessions, we both settled into a comfortable rhythm.

Over the course of the interview stage, we had many laughs and some serious moments, too. She knew from the beginning that should there something too painful or uncomfortable in topic or questions, then it was fine to avoid them altogether because some stories were clearly not for sharing. We both agreed on that and when monitoring those tricky areas, we depended on the presence of emotions, trust and our relationship—and it did happen. More than once. They were experiences or stories that Marie wanted me to know about, but would preface her recounting with, “now I don’t want you writing about that one, but this is what happened and you should know about that.” She was always worried about her relationships with extended family members and did not want to hurt them in anyway with the telling of a provocative, painful account which might be too difficult to bear. She could see my limitations in the process and wanted to save us both from the fallout of potentially difficult stories which are fully the property of others to carry.

Sometimes, she would leave the story with just enough inference and not add detailed accoutrements: she instinctively knew the limits herself. It is how she is as a person; she has no patience for gratuitous bits which over sensationalize a story, or move one away from the main idea. Naturally during this stage, the tapes were summarized where main ideas were extracted. When I have used her narratives within the body of this thesis, I have provided different font to show these are Marie’s experiences. They are summarized and not to be assumed to be
transcribed word for word; rather, I have tried to remain authentically true to Marie’s voice, her cadence, her choice of vocabulary, and how she selects certain motifs in her storytelling. The rest of the thesis is written in essay script and analyzed by myself using what could be referred to as an Indigenous paradigm. Some of them are reflections and memories which are my own and perhaps could have warranted another font change, but I think that would have disrupted the flow.

Once finished with the interview process, and as the writing began, Marie was always accessible by telephone for follow up conversations and verification of details. She even provided much needed prodding when my energies fell low and I was feeling the weight of the task. She would ask, “How is that thing going?” and both knew the thing to be this thing. A good many times, I dreaded the question because I felt her disappointment. I started this, she gave her time willingly and now I wasn’t holding up to my end of the bargain. Once started, she wanted to see it to its rightful conclusion. Many times I was reminded that time was ticking as she entering her later years. “How long before I start to forget things?” she cautioned. Marie has made it clear that she wants her story told and she wants it mainly for the benefit of coming generations she may never meet. She’s also mentioned that she wants people like you to understand people like her better. Beyond that, she is proud to see her offspring like me involved in education. It’s always been her mantra. Where some families value the importance of religious training or being a part of whatever the family business might have been, Marie had always preached to the value of a good education. The idea was that a good stoic education came with purpose and a means of escaping an unhappy existence. She has respected education and the insights it offers for better thinking and because it has the power to make us better the effort.

My orientation, as is my subject in this study, is from the Indigenous paradigm. I will not assume that what is discovered in the process will be a homogenous rendering applicable to
all. First Nation people may be divided along several lines: family, clan, community, religion, culture, language, politics and history. Sometimes veins and combinations appear simultaneously and complicate definitions further. Truthfully, this curious notion worries me. Living on a First Nation, I have already been confronted with the reality that homogeneity is a falsehood. The outside world is often deductive in this way, seeing all Native people by narrow definitions. This is how stereotypes are formed.

It was vital, however, that Marie’s voice ring true and though you haven’t met her, you’d have a feeling that you had. It is as Archibald stated, “the mystery, magic and truth/respect/trust relationship between the speaker/storyteller and listener/reader may be brought to life on the printed page if the principles of the oral tradition are used” (Archibald, 2008, p. 20). Listening or reading may demand that you join in the relationship and become an empathetic ear simply because you were able to connect with Marie’s stories. I had to accept my role in this process and I was one in a line of storytellers. “We come from a tradition of storytelling, and as storytellers we have a responsibility to be honest, to transmit our emotional wellbeing as well as education” (Archibald, 2008, p. 84). I was committed to write it in first person because Wilson (2008) claims, “we cannot be separated from our work, nor should our writing be separated from ourselves, i.e., we must write in first person rather than third” (as cited by McIvor, 2010. P.140). There it is, simply put, this thesis would be a storytelling about the storyteller. It is a blending of narrative inquiry with autoethnographic veins running throughout; it is intuitively perched within the Indigenous paradigm. Since I will be unapologetically exposing myself in the process, McIvor likens this to “consequential nudity” and for an intensely private person, I am strangely at peace with it (p. 142). Marie’s sharing is mine too; her bravery prompts mine. You, the reader, are therefore forewarned, this writing prefaces with a disclaimer of sorts within this stylistic license. The author, me, feels the need to warn you, the reader, that Native female nudity is certain within the content of this thesis and
may be unsuitable for those couched in colonial values. Thought provoking discretion is advised. It is both a warning and invitation to continue.

It was with great interest that I looked to other works of previous Indigenous researchers such as Mary Isabelle Young’s *Pimatisiwin: Walking in a Good Way a Narrative Inquiry into Language as Identity* (2005) and Shawn Wilson’s *Research is Ceremony* (2008). Both authors make no apologies for their entirely personalized perspective from which they have prepared their academic work. They are personalized accounts that contribute to their understanding of language loss in the first and then Indigenous ways of knowing in the latter. To my way of thinking, it is natural for me to accept my personal role in this inquiry. Through Marie’s experience, my attitudes and opinions were shaped in a certain generational trickle-down effect. Authors like Wilson and Young, as it is with me, learned to dip their paddles in both western and Indigenous waters. They were nourished and altered by both worlds. My work follows a parallel path. The framework from which I embark on this journey is altered from my dislocated Indigenous background and informs my thinking. It has always been that way. It is curious to note how many of my urbanized cousins, children of my mother’s brothers and sisters, have drifted into other First Nation communities or who have devoted their working lives to Native causes and First Nations. All of us struggle with our perceived disconnect and must “work hard at developing” that which was lost to us. Though traditions and language weren’t passed on naturally, we feel a complicated connection denied even though we are marked by varying degrees of Native status issues. At times, we’ve had to defend our relationship with our Native heritage: the position being, that we are counterfeits because we have missed out on what is to be an authentic Native. Still, many of us would say we felt a calling, a mystical pull towards our understanding of our identity. I’ve heard it called blood memory and some elders refer to as being “called home.” Whatever it is, who we are is irremovably stamped on us and is not meant to be rubbed out by others, no matter the
machinations used to that end. Though we didn’t live on my mother’s reserve, we knew we never truly belonged in the urban landscape either.

Since my agenda includes moving Marie’s experience into the centre for a moment as we reflect on her voice, I am making a case for transformative thinking. Smith provides Indigenous researchers such as myself with a paradigm in Decolonizing Methodologies about how this could work. The diagram looks much like the Anishnaabe Medicine Wheel and I’m feeling immediately at ease. I can imagine Marie at the centre of this paradigm and consider her life as she moves through the four stages: baby, child, adult and now elder. Her story, this thesis is there with her in the centre. As her narratives unfold, her stories provide much healing and we may come to accept her experience differently. When we are moved beyond what we think we know, we approach some measure of transformation. Knowing something different might spark something new. According to Smith getting the story right, telling the story well is the job of the Indigenous researcher because we are taking back, talking back to the system of power. She asserts, “there are few people on the ground and one person must perform many roles; activist, researcher, family member, community leader-plus their day job... the researcher must get the story right as well as tell the story well” (2013, p. 226).

Including oral histories such as these set us up to acknowledge the incredible veracity and fortitude of First Nation women like Marie. Her ability to survive and thrive is a testament to the resiliency of such women. She reminds us that remembering may bring a host of emotions and Smith cautions that “this form of remembering is painful because it involves remembering not just what colonization was about but what being dehumanized meant for our cultural practices” (2012, p. 147).

It has been a real honour to spend time with my mother as she has shared these stories in trust. Where she could not pass on her Indigenous knowledge because they were lost to her, she gave what she had and that was her experience. It was a valuable foundation for what I have
needed on my journey. Of late, she expresses an interest in how this work might be used and benefit others. She was in full possession of her critical faculties because she was savvy enough to know that once something is written down, you lose control of it, even if the experience belonged to you. Not that long ago, she asked what the university does with this kind of thing (meaning the completed thesis), where the work is stored, who reads it, if anyone uses it for other things, in other words, who really owns it? She is agreeable to signing contracts which are intended to keep me from exploiting her, but she finds it all unnecessary; she says she would like to see these stories written down and shared with educators.

As a result of the work Marie and I are doing, our relationship to one another developed, yet it was always from the perspective of respect. Her stories are important and central to anything we were trying to do. There was no need to force anything: no need to venture beyond areas of mutual comfort. Just let the stories speak for themselves and see where they would take us. I was on the path of a storyteller writing about the storyteller. Often times Thomas King drops by to see how we’re doing, really how I’m doing. He is keeping a watchful eye that a certain modicum of fidelity is present and not being overrun by prescriptions. He knows the road I’m trying to take and he also senses the detours ahead. Can this thesis find its place among others in academic libraries? I hope so. I know these stories are relevant. His advice is a curious mix of ambivalence as he advises me to remember that the stories I’m writing are like the ones he has been telling for a long time. His stories, he asserts: “draw more on storytelling techniques than historiography. A good historian would have tried to keep biases under control. A good historian would have tried to keep personal anecdotes in check. A good historian would have provided footnotes. I have not” (2012, p. xii). It is more than a little liberating to know that the story should take centre stage and allow ancillary details to fit, rather than bow to convention and make the story fit.
I am reminded by the observations of a Facebook friend I have made and never met, though I have admired from afar. I feel that he speaks his learned truth to me, a truth that he learned from bravely carving out his success with less than essential education, he says: “There is only one way to write. Your way. There is only one writing voice. Your voice. There is only one writing truth. Your truth. To spin the wheels of magic you need to be free. Give yourself these and you will be” (Wagamese Facebook Post, 2012, March 11). Thank you Richard, thanks for the advice to have faith in the story and write is for the story’s sake. A good story is the one that touches and when it is done well, we can as Richard further shares on his Facebook pages “change the world one story at a time” (2014, September 19) and “if you don’t want to disappear and be forgotten as soon as you are gone, you can either write something worth reading or do something worth writing about. Either way or both ways if you are fortunate, you can touch people, you can change people, you can change things and minds, you urge others to examine the world, plumb it for its joys and treasures” (Wagamese Facebook Post, 2012, December 11). So true. Stories, personal ones are where the heart lies. Where the heart lies, emotion mingles and takes up residence. Learning about others, especially when we are moved emotively about what we thought we knew, something curious happens. We learn to care. We learn to ‘plumb the world for its joys, treasures’ and maybe its weaknesses, too. Perhaps, in the process, easing the burdens for others when we learn their particular story. As we come to know Marie in the next few chapters, we begin where all good stories begin: at the beginning.
Chapter 3

Trains, Gospels and Busy Priests

Figure 3: Kipawa, Quebec as it is Today (2016)

I was born in Kipawa. That is my home, still is. Even though I really don’t go there often. It will always be my home. It’s where it all started for us. We always knew we were Indian people born in Quebec. We learned that we needed to rely on one other in order to survive. We were a big family with a lot of typical struggles. Both my parents were Indian and identified themselves as Algonquin people. They were hard working people that demonstrated that they loved each other deeply and passed that kind of love onto us.

My mother was called Beatrice and her early life was filled with struggle. We knew what she told us and believed it to be the gospel truth. She told us that her mother had died when she was five and that she was passed around family members until she met our father. She didn’t talk much about her early life, but every once in a while, she’d say a few things and we would learn a new piece of the puzzle and it was up to us to put the pieces together. She said that her dad was not a good father and that is why she lived with family members instead of with him. They came from a line of families from
Brennan Lake with the family name of Meness. Her mother’s name was Theresa from a family called Wabi.

Anyway, she told us that when she was 16-years-old, her father arranged for her to get married. A 20-year-old young man was picked out for Beatrice. That seemed young, but back in those days, people did get married early. His name was Joe and his father was Paugene. Paugene was known widely throughout the area as an excellent farmer and skilled barterer. He had all kinds of metal tools and imported foods from lumbermen. Paugene taught his son, Joe, how to supplement their wild diet with vegetables and how to store foods properly. And he shared his knowledge easily with others. As a result Joe had many talents and I’m sure he must have been considered an ideal partner for our mother. He knew how to trap, fish, farm, build things and he was even a good cook. He learned many things in the lumber camps. He was not a lazy man.

The first time Beatrice met Joe, she was dressed poorly in whatever hand me downs were available to her. She had no shoes and had no choice but to wear her father’s shoes. Poverty was a way of life and though, Beatrice was embarrassed to meet her future husband this way, none of it was particularly shocking for circumstances of the day. Our mother was a pretty woman and Joe obviously overlooked her shabby condition and saw something else that kept him interested.

Shortly after meeting Beatrice, Joe returned with a pair of ladies shoes and that began their short courtship. He would always appear with things that Beatrice might need: boots, material to make clothes, food, any of the basics that she didn’t have, but could use. He would bring what he could for her. He was already starting to take care of her. It was easy for Beatrice to fall in love with him because he was so kind. They married quickly and soon began their own family.
They moved deep into the bush and lived a very isolated life. They would come into town every once in a while to get provisions they might need, things like flour, sugar, lard, and stuff like that. Ma was a skilled homemaker. She didn’t waste anything. I mean nothing. She made clothes from the sacks of flour. Nothing was wasted. She was so careful with supplies that we were never allowed near them where mistakes could be made. We could help, but we couldn’t put the ingredients together, nor were we left in charge when something was cooking. She couldn’t account for anything getting burned, or ruined. Nothing was wasted. Dad kept up his trap line, so he had a team of dogs. Whatever was inedible for us was given to the dogs, but that was no reason to waste.

Dad was even kind to his dogs and always made sure they were taken care of. When it got too cold in the winter, he would bring them into the mudroom. He wouldn’t stand to see anything mistreated. Everyday dad got up first to check on everyone and that included his dogs. Then he would go outside and give thanks to the day in his language and make a fire so that the house was warm when we got up. At meal time, Dad would never sit down to eat right away; he would always tell Ma, “Make sure the kids eat
Ma would try to get him to eat with us because she knew how hard he worked, but he wouldn’t have any of it. He would wait until we were all fed first. He was generous to others and would share with other families when the need was there.

My parents had an enduring friendship and love that lasted until his death. Ma was still young enough to remarry, but she was adamantly opposed. There was no one else for her: she would casually say, “They just don’t make them like your father anymore.” She was right about that. And that was that, she died a widow, loyal to our dad until the end, even though a few men came calling. (Dolbeck, 2016)

I feel that anchoring Marie within her community and her early reserve experience, as it was, is important. It demonstrates the divide she crossed from Kipawa into the urban landscape. My mother, Marie, was born on the Kipawa Reserve, slightly north of the Tembec Logging Company. Both her parents were born on that reserve as were all her eleven siblings. It goes without saying that they relied on one another. With Grandpa Joe being away months at a time either as a paid logging guide or traditional hunter and trapper, Granny Beatrice had to make do with rations and whatever could be provided by the older boys. What my mother learned was how a family relied on one another. During this time, my grandparents were still very much a part of the reserve.

From what I have been told, they both still spoke the Algonquin language. It was the one they spoke to each other and it was viewed, by my mother, as their private space for one another. A house cluttered with children gave little way to personal alone time and it was there, in their language, where they practiced intimacy and some form of renewed connection. Of course, with so many children, alone time was seldom found. Marie shared that her parents passed knowing glances towards each other and wicked banter marked by their mischievous revelry, all communicated in their traditional language, far from the access of their children. It was in this place where they rekindled their romance since there was no place to wonder off for private dinners and other such activities of present modern day couples. Marie, with her
siblings and parents, lived in close cramped quarters away from neighbours. There was another reason why my grandparents did not pass on their traditional language. As the children arrived, Grandma Beatrice and Grandpa Joe made a conscious decision to practice only English or French and morphed the two into a unique creole practiced within their family unit. It was their belief that this would better prepare their children for the outside world; they did not, however, envision how this decision would play out in generations to come. As Marie tells it, life on the reserve was rather routine, though having some predictable pits and valleys along the way. Yet some experiences were devastating, such as the story about one of her elder brothers. Alcohol always found its way into the community and left an indelible mark on the Depotier family. It was the thing that could set a family packing and running when risk for the unknown seemed a better gamble than the one they knew for a certainty. Kipawa was their home where they enjoyed their established family trap line, a modest home and a growing brood of children, often appearing one after the other in rapid succession. Still it was less than idyllic; living on the reserve no longer held any promise or future. They were beyond poor and alcohol addiction was becoming a serious threat to the wellbeing of their family. Marie tells the story this way:

_The headlines read, ‘Kipawa Indian Killed’. Well what the North Bay headline didn’t say was that Kipawa Indian was my 24-year-old brother and his name was Emile. Even though I was only eight years old, I knew that there was something wrong here. I hadn’t learned the harshness of racism yet, but I knew that there was something here that set us apart from everyone else. Something that we needed to be ashamed of, something that touched us differently. I remember thinking that I probably wouldn’t ever read that same thing about other people. Not likely that I’d read “Temiscaming Frenchman killed”. The story in the newspaper marked him, us differently. Emile was always railing against what we expected and I somehow don’t think he planned to live to be an old man. He was all about living in the moment and to hell with planning on any future because he didn’t see himself there. I think this is the way with a lot of Native people. We all learn early that there are places we are not welcome and we have to expect our limitations and learn to live with them. Some people can do this_
better than others. Emile loudly protested that in everything thing he did. He lived big and made a lot of noise, I guess you could say. He was a hard working boy who sure could play the guitar and sing just like Johnny Cash. He was the life of any party and no party was going on without him.

Emile was always getting into some kind of mess and had seen the insides of many jails. In fact one of his many jailhouse visits actually saved my life. One day me and Annette were down by the water and we were told to stay off the log that was far out in the water because it would drag us down. Ma was swollen up heavily with my youngest sister, Georgie, and was shuffling about uncomfortably. Pa was off in the camps for long periods of time, coming out briefly to leave his mark with a budding new family member in Ma’s belly. My sister Annette was another one who fought off notions of proper behavior and doing what she should.

On this particular day, it was her idea to venture out to the log and she invited me to be a part of this misbehavior. I was an agreeable kid, chubby, even what some called fat. That’s how I got my nick name, Dolly. You know everyone that is family calls me Dolly because I was round and chubby like a little chubby doll. Back in the day that was considered “healthy” and I was always encouraged to eat more because I was supposedly the healthy one. Annette was fit from all the mischief that she was getting into all the time. I followed her out on the log and I slipped off easily being the clumsy fat one and I took Annette in with me. She fought off my grasp and splashed frantically, getting Ma’s attention. I sank like a stone to the bottom of the lake. I remember panicking, eventually I settled at the bottom of the lake and actually became less scared, even peaceful. A tired feeling settled over me and as that happened my body felt like it was rushing quickly, not sure where I was going and a curtain was parting. I wasn’t scared anymore. I believe I died that day and it was a kind of odd comfort when you are making that transition. I believe there is nothing to be afraid of when you die, it’s always a part of living. Any time, any day, we could find ourselves on that path and we will have to be ready for it, like it or not.

So on that day while I lay at the bottom of the lake, my frantic heavily pregnant Mom was set to jump in after both of us. She was losing her mind. My brother Emile heard all the commotion and came from the other side of the house. He made the decision
right there and then, that he’d come back with both us and told Ma to stay put. Annette was pulled out right off. She was a fighter and made it known where she was. Emile pulled her out and laid her skinny little body on the shore, but for me, it wasn’t so easy. I don’t know how many times he dived down, but he wasn’t giving up as Ma wailed on the shore. Well you know the rest. Of course he found me and dragged me up to the surface, fat little old me. I wasn’t breathing and Ma saw him do something that she hadn’t ever seen anyone else do. It’s called mouth to mouth resuscitation in cases of drowning and that was what saved me that day, that and my big, brave brother. Emile somehow learned First Aid in prison, so I guess it’s possible to learn a thing or two there, if you are paying attention.

You know that big waters have scared me ever since and I am just learning to swim and feel okay in a pool since I have been taking lessons for the last few years. I am happy my granddaughter, your daughter, Joy is such a good swimmer and even a lifeguard. She has offered to give me private lessons and I plan to take her up on the offer someday.

Well anyway, that is a real story of my brother Emile and I loved him deeply. He was my hero; I didn’t care what other people said or thought about him. He would never give up his ways and was always carrying on and Ma wouldn’t miss a chance to let him know that she disapproved. Once the Mounties surrounded our house because he and some other Kipawa trouble makers robbed a bank. No matter what my parents did like working hard for their family, the boys were always getting in trouble and not just little stuff. It was the kind of stuff you wanted to run away from. It crushed Ma, but Emile just couldn’t and wouldn’t change and I remember hearing him say to Ma, “Ma only the good die young and when I die, you’ll know I was good.”

He just couldn’t conform to what was expected of him. He was handsome, funny and just didn’t believe he ought to live like most other people. That was his way and that is what he was doing the night he was hit by the train. He was celebrating and spending his weekly earnings as he often did, then and after a night of carousing, he passed out on the train tracks. That was how life was on the Kipawa reserve. I don’t think my mother ever got over it. I was just a kid, but remember it like it was yesterday. I
remember her soulful wailing the night she found out that her handsome, carefree boy would never come home again.

The funny thing was his singing style changed shortly before he died. His preference for party style country tunes had switched up to gospel type of hymns and the song I remember best him practicing during this time was “Shall We Gather at the River.” It is still my favourite gospel song and it still makes me cry when I hear it. Emile was buried on his 24th birthday and that broke Ma’s heart. Everything about it was sad. Emile was buried on his birthday because that was the only day that the priest was available. Indian people had no say on those things in those days. He was buried down by the river with another young neighbor, a young sickly teenage girl who died at 16 years of age. It was common for the priest to bury all members who had passed during the priest’s absence on the same day because funerals and marriages, anything that required the service of priest always happened according to the availability of the priest. I remember things like that.

After that, Ma just decided she couldn’t live in Kipawa anymore and I think that she worried the drink would take more of us if they stayed. The move away from Kipawa was supposed to be for greater opportunities. It is the same reason that both of our Kipawa Native parents decided against passing down the language and to stop practicing many traditions. They did it out of love and the belief that giving up our Algonquin past would help us adapt better to life off the reserve. Then we would get a better education and better jobs. We would have happy healthier lives. Sad to say that it just didn’t work out that way for any of us. (Dolbeck, 2016)

It saddens me to hear this story. It’s the reason many generations have lost their inheritance, due to a mistaken belief that a better life was just around the corner once you traded in who you were. Life has a way of going on, being even mundane, until it isn’t. The headlines in the North Bay paper read, “Kipawa Indian Killed”. When my mother’s older brother Emile was hit by a train, it changed everything for her family. Marie has lots of stories about Emile, her beloved brother. He was, without a doubt, the troubled one, the rebel, often hanging with other malcontents, boozing their way into comfortable oblivion. Marie says that
his music of choice changed about a month before he died and this story is part of our family folklore. It is how she remembers every note and every lyric of “Shall We Gather at the River” and the room fills with a heavy note of sorrow when she recollects this reason for their exodus from Kipawa. Native people were not valued enough to be included in the significant details of their own lives or the lives of their loved ones. It didn’t matter that Granny Beatrice was opposed to burying her son on his birthday. That didn’t matter. What mattered was when the priest and the church were available for Kipawa Indians. In fact a few other Kipawa Indians were buried on that same day, next to my uncle Emile. As the family said their final goodbyes, they huddled close together on the bank of a river behind the church as Emile’s coffin was lowered into the ground. Granny took his death hard and vowed that she would lose no more of her children to the drunken excesses now becoming common place on the reserve. The family packed up and moved to the nearest commercial area, on the outskirts of North Bay.

After leaving Kipawa, we settled in Callendar and I tried going to school there. Like I said I didn’t feel the full extent of racism until we moved to Callendar where everything was English. That was something. There were no other Native families in that school and the kids had a real time with us. The teachers would jump on us all the time and never could see that we were the ones being picked on.

My brothers and sisters stood together and to tell you the truth, there were some nasty fights. My brother Chiboy and sister Annette took no shit from these kids. Pretty soon, there was no point in going to that school either and no one cared if we went. One by one we dropped out and no one ever checked to see what happened to us. It was like we didn’t exist. The teachers and the other kids didn’t care about us and were probably happy when we gave up on the whole thing. Where were my parents in all of this? Dad was off working out of town and mom pretty well hid out in the house. She was experiencing her own brand of racism in the community.

I was always a chubby kid and look at me, I can’t hide from being Indian now, can I? How many times can you be called an ugly fat Indian before you do something like
fight back, believe it or turn it inward? Me, I was never a fighter, not like Chiboy and Annette, so you know what I’d do. I’d just cry and hide, hoping they’d leave me alone.

I have always admired my scrappy brother and sister, but their lives weren’t made any easier for the constant wars they raged everyday just because they would stand up for themselves. No, I’d say their lives were harder because they learned to see all relationships as battles and it affected the good relationships they would have had with people they loved. None of us walked away untouched by the terrible experiences that we had every day.

Imagine what that feels like to walk out your front door every day and wonder what sort of problem you were going to have that day. Who would say something? Do something? What you might have to do to protect yourself? What was the best way to walk home? How to best avoid bad encounters? I don’t know how to describe it, but just to say that every day was a challenge. You just didn’t walk out the door and imagine what good things might be coming your way that day. (Dolbeck, 2016)

Westernized education reinforces that which had been left behind was inevitable since the urbanized Native was following a “progressive” continuum. Classrooms that the Depotier clan frequented were not always safe places for debate or challenge. Framing one’s worldview is discussed in the text Engaging Minds: Learning and Teaching in a Complex World revealing the purpose of education (Davis, Sumara, Luce-Kapler, 2008). Its mandate is to clearly reconcile learners to an accepted worldview. Knowledge never occupies neutral territory isolated from the rest of the world. It is important to ask the difficult question: “what is the purpose of education?” We live in a capitalist society, which is preparing the next generation for their place. It is important urgent work so that this society can continue to dominate. Revolt is never good and would not serve its capitalist needs. Educational practices support their society and ensure its continued hegemony. Along with instilling values and dominant word views, education is also given the task of telling the story of its history, from a certain
acceptable perspective. But whose history do we tell: the one about the conqueror or the conquered?

Donald cautioned in his article, *Edmonton Pentimento*, that dominant cultures get to tell the stories, have them written and recorded thereby, ensuring their place in history. He provides the legacy of Frank Oliver, an early Canadian businessman, newspaper baron and later prominent politician from Edmonton. From his perspective, Oliver felt that Native people were an unrelenting burden to the settlers of early Canada and lobbied aggressively in his newspaper, to influence politics and public opinion against them. Through media and later politics, Oliver successfully campaigned to have treaties ignored and Native lands expropriated so that “Indian reserves would no longer be able to impede the economic development of the nation” (2004, p. 39). How did history treat him for this racism and thievery? Oliver is fondly memorialized in Edmonton where many parts of the city are named after him, a monument to the hard working spirit of early Canada. This is now a part of our collective Canadian history because few have any memory of the Native groups who predated Oliver. A rereading would include the Native narrative and question early perceptions of the iconic Frank Oliver.

What this band of displaced Kipawa Indians found in surrounding urban areas was an unforgiving landscape of “whiteness” where entry was granted only conditionally. Without exception, all the children of Joseph and Beatrice experienced quantifiable levels of racism in every neighborhood, every job, every school and even within the non-Native families they eventually all married into. Their migration to urban life was not a success: the Depotier clan suffered cultural disconnection. They were isolated in small pockets of urban communities were they didn’t belong. As a result, they grew less confident in their ability to live fulfilled lives. Though impervious to the average non-Native person, my mother’s family were very much aware of the insidious nature of the colonization project. Though there was no name to it, they understood their role was one of inferiority and it eroded their confidence in ways Native
people understand. It was customary to be surrounded by, as previously discussed by articles of Adams and Coulthard, “racial stereotypes that portray the Aboriginal as inferior shape their consciousness and undermine their self-worth” (as cited in MacNeil, 2008, p. 7). An erosion of one’s self worth is a consequence of living in a society which places you beneath all others: you begin to question your abilities, your intelligence and your self-efficacy. When this belief settles deeply within a person, one can expect to see that they became unwell in a variety of ways. As noted by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation of 2004, “this belief creates feelings of insecurity, depression, and unresolved grief in Aboriginal youth which, in turn, result in self-destructive behaviours being expressed in an alarming rate” (MacNeil, p. +7). The alcoholic excesses which were finding their way into the reserve they left behind were not avoided because Marie’s siblings actively sought them out.

Sadly the vision our grandparents had for their children was not realized. I can extract, though, some understanding from two pivotal decisions my grandparents made: the decision to leave their culture and language behind and migrate into urban centres. This decision to abandon their culture led to a state of confusion that is still with us today, several generations later. Intergenerational trauma, a new term, means our ancestors’ traumas were a part of us too. It is that way with the Depotier clan. We know that one generation connects to the next. Being urbanized a few generations removed from our grandparents, meant that we had further lost connection with our Native roots. If we did return to Kipawa, it was always from the stance of visitors. We simply didn’t know what we didn’t know, but we walked around knowing that a piece of us was missing. I was an adult before I knew we were descendants of Algonquin people. In our home there was no reference to Native culture and traditions; it was like these things never existed for my mother. I was surprised to find many years later that my grandmother and grandfather were fluent Algonquin speakers. When my mother’s generation
left Kipawa, they left with what they could carry and they felt their language and traditions were things too heavy to take.

Without an anchor, it was difficult to manage the ravaging winds of unchartered waters which set many of us adrift. The Depotier clan had no idea how to become urbanized and the urbanized had no interest in showing them how. In fact, non-Native people seemed to take delight in pushing them down further. My family of ancestors could only look to poorest neighborhoods for relocating and within those neighborhoods, habitants already established didn’t take kindly to the new brown faces in competition for the handful of available jobs. From everything Marie has told me, urbanization had the distinct flavour of isolation and rejection. There was plenty of tension and eventually family members took their feelings inward, accepting all kinds of abuses as normal behaviour.

Education has had a history of exercising its colonizing will and never was that more evident than when it was applied to the presumed edification of Native children. Foucault has theorized that education operated on a ‘formula of domination’ and complete acquiesce was central to its success and especially for the uncolonized (as cited by Smith, 2012, p. 71). Full participation was never a goal and success within the system was not expected, but obedience was. At best, educational efforts were thought to bring the Native child into preferred civilized ways of being and at their worst, they were traumatizing experiences which dismantled families and communities. Discipline was meted out and Native people found themselves both excluded and marginalized. Smith writes,

These forms of discipline were supported by white communities as necessary conditions which had to be met if Indigenous people wanted to become citizens (of their own lands). These forms of discipline affected people physically, emotionally, linguistically and culturally. They were designed to destroy every last remnant of alternative ways of knowing and living, to obliterate collective identities and memories and to impose a new order. (Smith, 2012, p. 72)
In the example of Marie and her siblings, urban education offered no respite. They were effectively outsiders and they chose to reject its efforts. Colonized people do not make for the best, cooperative citizens in society. They learn that they are locked out and that society simply serves the needs of others. They are, as Ogbu (1992) asserts in his article “Understanding Cultural Diversity and Learning,” involuntarily colonized, or members of the “involuntary minority,” the conquered (p. 5). As such, they are resistant to dominant society and its goals. Ogbu further asserts that colonized people have a different, more troubled relationship with the wider collective, a relationship defined by opposition and they may have even become out rightly hostile to further colonizing efforts. They have a deep understanding of oppression and believe that discrimination is institutionalized. Collective action may be necessary to change the rules and even the playing field for everyone. This view is not shared by the larger group which sees their system fairly innocuous in nature and neutral in stance. Education and how it relates to the First Nation student is caught in this tangled mess. It is with incredible lack of insight that educators dismiss this reality. Educators, well-educated, often well intentioned and ultimately well served by mainstream values, are well trained in a system which has summarily devalued and dismissed Native people. Teachers need to acknowledge this if they hope to have an understanding of how to reach the Native student in their classrooms.

Colonized people make for poor students and not for the reasons you would think. Being on the outside of colonized privilege, the colonized recognize the deeper purpose of formal education and actively resist complete assimilation. They intuitively learn that full participation is coming at a price and that their culture is under attack. In order to be with one, you must be at odds with the other and this doesn’t sit well with many. They are subversively resistant to becoming fully integrated at the cost of understanding who they are as Native people. Ogbu (1978) has written extensively on the nature of involuntary minorities (referring
to their “caste status”) and how their experience differs from voluntary minorities who want to integrate into mainstream societies (as cited in Cummins, 1986, p. 18). A perception of cultural inferiority exists, especially among Native children coming from poorer backgrounds. Colonized groups who have their culture disparaged and forbidden and for whom equality is not achievable, become resistant to the goals of the colonizer and its systems such as education (Ogbu, 1992). They begin to see these structures as irrelevant and work toward resisting them. Educators may view them as behaviorally disordered and “who, unintentionally or otherwise, draw lines in the sand that force, troubling students out the door” (McCluskey, 2005, p. 331). They are simply not the teacher pleasers and often for the western teacher, they are the students who are difficult to like. Normalized behaviour is the goal and “learning the rules” is part of a hidden curriculum. Students are groomed, as Whitty is quoted in Gale & Densmore article, to “having to preform according to prescribed criteria for a market environment over which they appear to have less and less control” (Gale & Desmore, 2002, p. 19).

Being given the label which distinguishes them as difficult, sets the vulnerable youth on a bleak path. There is a coercive dynamic at play in institutional education. In order for the Native child to be able to participate within the system, they must first acquiesce, then accept that the system not offer equal status, and does not respect them or their culture. The youth’s family and community have become resistant to power structures which demand that they continue to accept an inferior role. The student begins to recognize a language “register” where language functions differently in the academic halls of education from the conversational milieu of their home. They come to see that language can differ in content and use, but also recognize the value placed on academic language. The Native child begins to experience a profound disconnect between their homes and school life (Cummins, 2000). Given the higher status of academic language, the child is left with few options if they value their culture. They must accept their inferior role or reject what is being presented as superior.
The disconnection between the professional teacher and the impoverished student is felt in every sense: education, economics and race. It is interesting to note, though not surprising, that the Renzulli study (2000) assessed that 48% percent of high school dropout students occupy the bottom quarter of socio economic levels (as cited in McCluskey, 2005, p. 331). There is a strong correlation between poverty levels and school failure. Why this needs demonstration or validation is unclear; it’s rather obvious. It’s like worrying about what colour to paint your house when it’s burning to the ground. Education, in this sense, becomes a frill and downgraded in importance, especially when home life is cluttered with critical realities like homelessness, and lack of resources to meet basic needs. Achieving standard scores at school will not fill empty stomachs or house them safely. Such students have steep hills to scale; their access less certain, their disengagement more likely. Westernized teachers’ lack understanding of the dynamics of poverty and First Nation people places them further away from being able to assist the Native child in their classrooms. The engine of education is centered around students achieving requisite performance at timely levels. When provincial or state run tests become routine, it is the disadvantaged student who suffers first. As the minority children struggle, then fail, assessments are put into place to legitimate the problem and the locus is found in the child and their community.

Though supported through studies, the very origin of my work with First Nation students was predicated on this reality at a local level. In 1996, I was hired to review the Special Education Identification of Alderville First Nation students which was determined to be at suspiciously high at twenty-five percent of the total student population of Alderville. Children from this community attended the local provincial school where tensions have mounted over the years between the neighbouring non-Native community. It has led to fractured relations and student disengagement. The old epitaph of “follow the money” comes to mind. On casual inspection, it was evident to see the impetus for over an identification of
students. The school board of the day invoiced identified Alderville students three times the tuition rate, which made it a lucrative practice indeed. Our chief called it the proverbial cash cow. Part of the pilot project was to determine what supports were available to struggling identified students, supports that would warrant such charges. It turns out that too was a contentious issue. In a nutshell, costs severely outweighed services. Alderville families never felt welcomed in the school. Alderville education workers, myself included, were not invited to interact with the school and our visits were met with suspicion. Alderville students were struggling and there was little we could do, except sign the cheques. No invitation. No partnership. It was concluded that we had little to offer. Over the years, better partnerships have led to better supports which ultimately led to improved student performance. Once given a voice, many things changed. Teaching staff and teaching practices do make a difference and can be agents of change for the Native student. We are, however, still working on the curriculum.

Anne Hickling Hudson discusses, in *Contesting Curriculum in the Schooling of Indigenous Children in Australia and the United States*, pedagogy and practices are visibly out of sync with respect to Aboriginal students. She argues against an accepted position shared among the dominant group which she refers to as “white blindness” (Hudson, 2003, p. 67) and its origin reaches back in history. In fact, she calls it “historical patterns of injustice” where racism become institutionalized (p. 67). Fancy passes for fact. The absence of Aboriginal experience within curriculum not only keeps Native students from learning about themselves, but also keeps white people from learning about their privilege and acknowledging their position of power. Ignorance on both sides of the divide set the stage for a lack of understanding between the two, thereby perpetuating the status quo and offering no impetus for change. Hickling Hudson’s study examined curriculum and practices in both state-run and Aboriginal-run schools. State-run schools, she noted, had an overpowering presence of
“whiteness” and were often insensitive to their history as conquerors. They told history entirely from the point of view of the settlers, as though history began when they arrived. Books and course materials reflected white culture. It is the same in Canada. Students learn very little about First Nation experience or First Nation history in Canada. It is still new territory for provincial education.

To Hickling Hudson, bias was obvious everywhere in classrooms, yet few teachers could see it and continued to teach the way they always did. “White blindness” was an acceptable norm that teachers experienced both as students themselves and then again in their training to become teachers. Eurocentrism was entrenched deeply, from its selection of colonized literature to its preference of telling history from the perspective of the conqueror. It is curious to note that ‘white blindness’ carried over into the teachers’ inability to acknowledge their privilege or power. Few had a firm grasp on their own history and certainly very little concerning Aboriginal people. Though there were better practice tools available, few teachers were using them, instead preferring to remain comfortable with what they thought they knew. Their teaching style was “teacher as expert”, with little room for collaborative learning. Methods were autocratic and driven to produce high state scores. The state school had started implementing routine testing and Aboriginal students were not performing up to standard. Interestingly when these objectives failed, teachers and administrators decried the lack of parental involvement and the rate of high absenteeism among Aboriginal students. Critically appraising the education they provided their Aboriginal students was not part of the equation. What is interesting in Hickling Hudson’s study is how this reality differed in Aboriginal schools which developed their own curriculum through an Aboriginal lens. Aboriginal communities were validated and curriculum reflected this. Collaboration replaced test driven objectives. These schools were highly connected with their communities. By all indication, the
schools were successes, but their funding levels were threatened by reduced levels which did not come close to matching state run schools.

There are similarities to be gleaned from Hickling Hudson’s observations in Australia to ours in Canada. Our Ontario preponderance for high provincial scores significantly crowds the curriculum and leaves room for little else. Curriculum is value laden around issues of competition, excellence and performance on demand for preferred tasks. Additionally First Nation inclusion is weak, if present at all. It is the common lament among First Nations. There has never really been the demand for this material and so there is less published. Of late, there seems to be a rush to develop First Nation experience in provincial curriculum. Over the years, I have watched First Nation content begin to creep into the curriculum; it is refreshing to see novel selections from First Nation authors, resources which include rich Native history and culture, as well as materials which address issues which affect Native communities. We are still in early days though.

In order to be more progressive, curriculum would have to be, less white centred, less emphasis on the settler experience and less about the great white men of early Canada. Additionally on the issues of funding levels, all Nation schools are chronically underfunded and do not meet the levels which are routinely given to provincial schools. Teacher education should include helping the teacher navigate this area. Since elements of Native experience are absent in the curriculum, it is careless to expect that teachers do this on their own, to sort through and develop materials on their own. A coordinated effort needs to be evident from both the Ministry of Education and teacher education bodies. First Nation communities are very familiar with how responsibilities are continually bounced from federal and provincial bodies and how this lack of accountability is left dangling for individual communities to solve. The individual classroom teacher might be left feeling the same. Prior to their assignments, teachers should be retaught about First Nation Canadian history and how their classrooms could be more
reflective. Currently Lakehead University has moved ahead with their two year teaching program and included a mandatory Indigenous course for student teachers and have established that they are on the cutting edge. Kidder, a well-known education advocate, claims, “Many teachers say that they don’t know enough about Indigenous issues because they won’t be teaching in areas where there are many First Nation students, but the TRC has called for a change to everyone’s education, that’s how we get true reconciliation” (as cited by Brown, The Star. Com, May 2, 2016).

It’s a common mistaken belief that including First Nation experience solely benefits the First Nation student and not others. As if the non-Native community had nothing to learn. Another stroke of arrogance. Are we to be surprised when Beyak, a Canadian senator who was the chairwoman of the Senate committee on Aboriginal people declared that, “she didn’t need any more education on residential schools because she too has “suffered” alongside survivors” (CTV News staff, 2017)? Hello? Such comments are beyond ridiculous to entertain seriously; yet here is a well-paid Senate member, presumably on this committee to provide sage advice, sounding off in such a way that should embarrass. Beyak remained surprisingly contrite, arrogant even, and closed her remarks by turning her attention to band expenditure accountability. This, following her claim that the Truth and Reconciliation Committee unfairly misrepresented the work of residential schools, which had made good Christians out of many Native children. Though Beyak displayed a temerity that prevented her from seeing the err in her judgment, others were not so inclined, and the opposing party swiftly set to isolating her remarks and removing her from the committee. A colossal national embarrassment and an example of lack of education of the average Canadian. First Nation communities are firm on the issue of education and assert that teaching the truth of Canadian history may actually benefit non-Naïve communities more. It is how Canadian communities will become more enlightened. As it is, education in this area is woefully inadequate. It’s how we end up with senators
spouting off inane comments because they feel they have nothing new to learn about First Nation people. It seems education is a good thing, so long as it isn’t about Native people.

Education as a practice has been problematic for First Nation people. It was thought to be an effective agent, as was religion, in assimilating Aboriginal societies to dominant ones throughout the world. From this stance, First Nation people learn that their culture and language are devalued. Since education is an effective tentacle of a society’s value system, it is not surprising, therefore, that some educational pedagogy is incompatible with First Nation worldview. In order to gain entry into the world of the learned, Native people understand that they must be prepared to trade in their language and culture. Educational practices have adopted a colonized approach that is well understood by Native people and non-Native alike.

It is revealing how little the average Canadian knows about its colonizing history and Godlewska (2010) notes that “ignorance is a powerful social force, especially when combined with mythology and unexamined ideology” (p. 445). In fact, it is a concurrent theme evident and one that is felt across grades and provinces. First Nation experience is simply not present or variously optional. Inclusion of First Nation presence is shockingly low within typical provincial curriculum and results in adults who are completely ignorant of this topic. Less than one percent (0.02) of Ontario high students have taken a First Nation course (Godlewska, 2010, p. 436). It is deliberate, a whitewashing of sorts. While marginalizing First Nations people within the curriculum, the Ministry of Education (2005) turns its attention to celebrating notions of heroism since Canada was a “partner in war efforts, a peacekeeper and middle power, a leader in humanitarian causes” (as cited in Godlewska, 2010, p. 431). Canadian curriculum is short on its First Nation content, yet generous in its stance as an honourable ally, humanitarian to its core. There is little, if anything, about Canada’s colonial history within mainstream curriculum as it “still excludes and marginalizes Aboriginal peoples in a variety of ways, including omissions, and significant silences, nationalist self-congratulation, apology,
problematic placement, the continuance of colonialist narratives and relation of Aboriginal Peoples to primitive place/time” (Godlewska, 2010, p. 445). It celebrates its connection to the Union Nations, but stops short of mentioning how that very body intervened and sided with Canadian Native women because of Canada’s racist and misogynistic policies. Such injustices could not be managed effectively from within. This kind of history doesn’t get told within Canada’s education curriculum. No, Canadian students receive a sanitized version of history which continues to place the colonizer in the position of virtuous hero. It is willfully and deliberately silent on its First Nation peoples because both versions, First Nation experience and Canadian self-aggrandizing mythology are fundamentally at odds and irreconcilable. Our educational system has produced adults who are embarrassingly ignorant of their Canadian First Nations and its history since Godlewska’s (2010) study found that “72 percent (study respondents) could not name a single Aboriginal group and its traditional territory… and over 98 percent (respondants) were unaware of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples” (p. 435). As a result of Canada’s omission of its colonizing history, it stands a good chance of being perpetuated. What can’t be acknowledged, can’t be challenged, or ultimately changed.

Our acceptance of education as a colonizing vehicle is succinctly illustrated by the findings of an education research activity conducted at Lakehead by Iseke Barnes for preservice teachers. She makes a convincing claim in her article *Pedagogies for Decolonizing* (2008) that even though Canadians in general have very limited knowledge of First Nations’ issues, they do, however, possess a uniquely innate understanding of how colonization works especially how it works under the guise of education. Make no mistake, she argues, Canadians have a deep understanding about the mechanics of colonization. Without attaching a name to the societies, the author divided the class into two distinct groups and assigned activities which would eventually require the “progressive” group to expand and overtake the cooperative group. It didn’t take long for the “progressive” society to exercise their colonizing will and
design educational systems with the task of wiping out dissent. After the exercise, strategies were discussed and Iseke Barnes’ queried the group about how they came to know so much about colonization and its stratagems. Not surprisingly, it was their experience as Canadian citizens that taught them how education was used as a forceful agent in assimilation. Colonization was not accidental they conceded; rather it was systematic, determined oppression.

Within the provincial classrooms as late as Orlowski’s 2011 study, curriculum is rolled out as innocuous. Since the value of hard work and individual merit are prized and are fundamental within the system, it’s difficult to view the dynamics both have on the struggling child. Poor performance would equate to lack of effort and individual ability; for a child, this would be an assault on their character. What is not always considered is the set of cultural practices at play in the typical classroom. Orlowski was able to work with a small group of classroom teachers in British Columbia. He found most were unaware that the environments they were developing for students were power blind to their association with dominant culture. He also concluded that teachers had not progressed as fast as the curriculum had developed. Teachers confused multiculturalism with Aboriginal peoples and had grown wary of the infringement of differing cultures in the curriculum, citing that they were now the opposed, as the new victims in multiculturalism. When queried on the long struggle of Aboriginal people in Canada and how they might made curriculum more relevant, most were very much unaware of its history, issues and culture.

Though teachers were weak in their knowledge of these areas, they were without the requisite time or motivation to learn more and develop units. They did not see any problem with the current curriculum, preferring to see it as neutral and were not convinced that colonizing history was relevant to contemporary education. Evident in their beliefs was the value of individual student merit and hard work. They believed that if all students possessed
adequate work ethic and an improved attention to academics, then all students would be successful. Native students who struggled, teachers believed, struggled because their communities and families were negative in their attitudes towards education. Though there were issues of poverty and other social problems, the teachers, it is interesting to note, made no connection with this and their relationship to dominant white culture. All the problems were perceived to have been generated from within Native communities and there was nothing that the average classroom teachers could do to solve that.

How is it that Native people, those suffering trauma and having no discernable connection to their identity, actively seek it out in areas where they settle? In my case, it was always about not quite fitting in and knowing that I was broken off from a connection that was waiting around the corner. Let me paraphrase it this way: something lay deep within in me that needed exploring, something akin to that word that we are searching for that is just sitting on the edge of our tongue. And I knew its definition could be found in claiming my history and knowing more about our family’s evolution. As I looked around the chaos of our family, I wondered what brought us here: this long before I read the scholarly work of contemporary thinkers in the Master’s program. Some grandchildren, myself included, have drifted into other First Nations and have enthusiastically embraced revitalization efforts within those communities. I am in my fifties just learning to speak Ojibway in my adopted community. First Nation people who migrate to urban centres are effectively in their own canoes paddling upstream, sometimes without a paddle. Without the support and identity of their First Nation, many have fallen into despair; yet, strength emerges in the most unlike places. The stories of the disaffected are the stories of survival and resiliency.

What I noticed were family members, sisters, cousins, aunties and uncles, all searching too. Some drifted in various institutions in search of the answers; my particular preference was education. As I learned, I thought and as I thought, I remembered. I remembered my history
and perhaps the memories that I was beginning to carry were not the memories of my particular experience. Taking apart the word “remember” is a study of contrasts as we consider the juxtaposition of the idea “re/member”? We, my mother’s family, were truly an adhoc band of dislocated people, fractured from our roots: dismembered in essence and trying to grow our limbs back on. The act of re/membering alludes to the process of putting ourselves back together. But what if we do it incorrectly, like put our arm where our leg should go? We lost the road map, our culture, which would offer some vision of how we could look, how we should look. Being urbanized meant that we were doing this in a strange place while using the tools not of our own possession. Maybe we were using a hammer when a hand brush would do nicely.

Gregory Cajete’s *Reclaiming Biophilia* is a study in remembering. The act of remembering is vital through interaction with nature. He suggests that adding elements of dance, ceremony and art heighten memory. I have found learning Ojibway songs on the hand drum a very effective tool for beginning to learn the language. The patterns of language are better remembered by tempo and rhythm, more so than by studying isolated phonemes and morphemes. Cajete further cautions, “Once people break those cycles of remembering, they begin to forget and start doing the kinds of things that have led to the crisis we see today ecologically” (1999, p. 197) for me, displaced peoples were uniquely at risk for this problem. They were adrift, often bereft of their culture and without adequate supports in place as they assumed their place among the marginalized. They became extremely vulnerable to the colonizing influences of education and had nothing to fight it off. To survive it, they adapted to it: some faring better than others, but always struggling to find their place. The story of my family is a story about forgetting, about losing one’s way and about having lost access to those things which can heal and provide comfort to restless, broken hearts. It is about what happens when one’s way of being in the world is replaced for something that is thought to be better. Marginalized and forgotten people begin to forget many things. For me, colonized urbanized
peoples such as my mother, so completely detached from their roots, were uniquely at risk for this problem. Knowing this, offers an opportunity for me to review educational practices: what works for Native students and what doesn’t? It is of great value to consider its effect on this one family as we hear its influence from the account of one woman.

Along the lines of Cajete’s interest in the importance of place as it relates to the Native person is Eviatar Zerubavel’s reference to the landscape holding memories. He likens them to a mnemonic device of sorts which immediately functions as a reference for shared social memories. The Native person is physically positioned in their traditional landscape and knowledge passes from one person to another, from generation to generation in order “to allow future generations mnemonic access to their collective past” (1996, p. 292). The Native person who becomes disconnected from their traditional place, has much of their knowledge amputated and passing down knowledge, as oral societies do, is severely encumbered.

Deloria states in his article entitled Philosophy and the Tribal Peoples, “if Indians themselves give their own heritage the respect it deserves, an amazing number of issues can be brought forth…all knowledge must begin with experience, and further that all conclusions must be verified easily in the empirical physical world ” (2004, p. 11). Knowledge, for him, begins with experience and he states that the physical world is part of how knowledge is verified and transferred. Knowledge is highly relational, localized and experiential. I am struck by Basso’s understanding of the interwoven nature of place and spirit, as he writes in Wisdom Fits in Places, “when places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anyone’s guess” (1996, p. 107). This seems to be a place where Marie’s stories can enter the discussion. Urbanization moved her further away from her traditional roots and what replaced it was something she didn’t connect with and that made no connection with her. It is valuable to explore these issues and see where they might lead.
I drifted in and out of education for years, finally finding myself in a tiny hospitable reserve which I have come to think as home. With no real plan, I fulfilled my teaching credentials and began working for my First Nation. It seems, I too, fell into the comfortable rhythm of chasing down the next dollar and busily attending to regulations, policies and reporting restrictions. Without really seeing it happen, I was a willing participant in what has become named the “politics of distraction” (Smith, 2003). To get our share of the pie (those limited Native dollars), our day is filled with requisite reporting tasks which keep our minds busy, our hearts empty and our actions fueling the cogs of colonialism. I feel that I owe more to the community which has taught me so much. It seems we have a lot to learn in our communities too, but our hearts are turned to helping Native children succeed and we have plenty offer, if given the chance.

There are many theories about Native Education in Canada and how it could become more effective. The Canadian Teacher’s Federation commissioned a study asking direct questions to Aboriginal educators about their views on the nature of teaching for Indigenous students based on their professional experience. On March 10, 2010 the study was released and Aboriginal teachers across Canada were invited to offer their views as they witnessed by their experience. Four critical themes education were highlighted among 59 Aboriginal teachers across Canada and they were:

1. Philosophy of teaching
2. Integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives into curriculum
3. Addressing racism in education
4. Identifying allies of Aboriginal education

First Nation teachers of the study felt that the presence of racism and its unrelenting arm of oppression undermined student learning and that its presence was continually discounted by non-Native people. Non-Native teachers are so well absorbed into colonizing efforts that
they are ill-equipped to recognize it: they simply can’t see the forest for the trees. If they did, they might change everything; their philosophy, their selection of materials, and most of all their attitudes.

School failure leads to other undesirable social issues. Once out of school, with few prospects, disengaged First Nation drop-outs are vulnerable to all other social activities which are detrimental to their futures. Notwithstanding is the reality of lost children who become underachieving adults and our nation’s lost potential. Educational spheres have looked deeply at the First Nation child to find the answer to the question: what happened? It didn’t move anyone closer to finding the answer or correcting the result. We need to look at the issue differently.

Thomas King just walked in, pulled up a chair and invited himself into the discussion. He reminds us that people are given to saying meaningless epitaphs like: “Those who do not understand the lesson of history are doomed to repeat them” when in fact they’d rather believe and actively practice that, “those who understand the lessons of history are only too happy to repeat them” (2012, p. 90). He’s being cynical of course, but the colonial engine he is talking about is still here. It never left. And some people riding it, have no intention of getting off on their own. We may have to force them off and leave them at the station with their baggage in hand. Perhaps we need new engineers, a new train and a departure from different tracks.
I was born in Timiskaming, a small logging village which hugs the banks of two provinces, Quebec and Ontario. It is a place of dichotomies: French versus English, Native versus Non-Native and old versus new. After working in the logging kitchen, my seventeen-year-old mother met my father, a thirty-year-old man, also working in the camp and they married quickly. Sylvester’s life experience prior to meeting Marie is a bit of a blur and not much is known about it. Being young and inexperienced, Marie decided to overlook the painful experiences my father and his family were escaping. Having left Poland with nothing, this collection of hard working individuals settled into relative obscurity in a Central Ontario town and proceeded to quell their painful memories with alcoholic excess. In his blind drunken rages, Sylvester dealt with his trauma in ways that were customary to his family. The day after such rages, he got up and went to work while we got up and covered our bruises. This situation lasted ten years until Marie finally
retreated from life for she was emotionally, physically, mentally and spiritually broken. In those days such tipping points were called nervous breakdowns, a curious misnomer, since it was not her nervous system which was fractured. Marie acknowledges that this period in her life was difficult and readily admits that it was her life that made her sick. When she changed it, her health improved.

I am brought back to the Moment on the dirt road, the brief detour Marie and I took whilst we were on a “herstory” fishing expedition for her life’s story details. That was the trip we took together shortly after she agreed to become my research subject. Marie shared the story that this chance meeting with my father resulted in a complete change in the direction of her life. It is important to have the correct details here because that trajectory moved her further away from her identity as a First Nation woman and ultimately estranged her from herself. She explains it this way:

_School didn’t work for me at all and so it was time to think of what I should do with myself. There wasn’t much employment prospects for someone like me, so I took what I could get. I landed working in camp. Some were tourist camps and I would be in the kitchen or making beds and doing that kind of work. I was quite young, starting around 14 years old at the time. I was trained on kitchen type work or cabin cleaning. I would have to start work before it was light outside and I wasn’t finished until it was dark. This gives you an idea of how long the hours were. The bosses were real pushy; it didn’t matter how fast you went, you were always being pushed to go faster. Around the time I met your father, I was 16 years old, and working for a Mill at Tee Lake. This was a working camp for men in the lumber industry. All the men working there were real pushy too and were easily aggravated if you didn’t have all the things on the table when they sat down, or if you didn’t keep things filled up. Your dad was one of the men, but he was a little different. He was a little bit kinder and I noticed that. We were able to watch films at the camp once a week for entertainment and I saw him there too. I was always a mess, in my old work clothes with my hair pulled back in a ponytail. He seemed to be noticing me too which is kind of funny because I’d say he was looking at someone pretty unattractive, if he liked the looks of me. I never had time to get fixed up nicely. When that_
job was done, he followed me. We got married when I was 17 years old. I really didn’t
know much about him, only that he was 30 years old and he was Polish from Barry’s
Bay.

My parents didn’t approve of me marrying him, but I gave them no choice and went off
with him anyway. In those days parents would sign for underage marriages because they
knew babies would follow and the future was bleak for unmarried girls with babies. So
that was always the worry. Back in those days, mothers watched their daughters closely
to make sure their monthlies came and went regularly. It was less of a private thing when
undergarments had to be washed so that meant checking on them was an easier thing to
do for a mother.

Like I said, I didn’t know much about him, but I soon learned more when I met his family.
They were a family of heavy drinkers, all of them: the brothers, the sisters and both
parents. Alcohol was on the table for each meal, even breakfast. It was worse than
anything I had ever seen at home on the reserve which is funny since everybody back then
thought it was the Indians who were the big boozers.

I remember a time when the old lady wanted to give you some alcohol at the table and I
refused. You were maybe five or six years old. The old lady claimed it was the best way to
have kids not become drunks. I had to bite my tongue on that one, since, because from
what I had seen, that’s exactly what they all were. I had to show respect, even though I
didn’t feel it. One sister, the oldest, would take to pounding on the old lady late in the
evening after a night of heavy drinking. The next morning, bruised and battered, they
would show up at the table, like nothing happened and start all over again. The younger
sister, considered the beauty in the family, had a child out of wedlock, whom I raised as
my own son, for five years, until it became clear my marriage to your father was a
complete failure.

Even with all their problems and struggles, they looked upon me differently. I was an
outsider and I knew they would have preferred someone else for your father. And it
wasn’t because I wasn’t Polish, since all the brothers married girls who weren’t Polish
either, but somehow they fit in better with what they expected. I was a strange Indian girl
with Indian ways and even though you looked more like them, you were considered
different too. I would send pictures of you to the grandparents, but when we came to visit,
all the other grandchildren were proudly on display, never you. It became clear that we weren’t a part of that family and truth be told, I wanted an excuse not to go back. I didn’t want to be a part of this family either. I stopped visiting, even at Christmas, but continued to push your father to go visit them. You and me would pack up and go to my family where it was more about Christmas; where I belonged; where people cared about me and you. The marriage was clearly unraveling. Little by little, more by more, and as time went on, we grew further apart.

Your father drank more. Even though he worked steady, the bills went unpaid, groceries were short and we were sent packing from one crappy apartment to the next. There was always enough money for booze and cigarettes though.

One time you were so sick that I called on the doctor to come and check on you. That was in the day when doctors would do house visits. He came and gave me a prescription which I was not able to fill. There wasn’t money for necessities, but always enough for your father’s selfish addictions. I just hoped you would get better on your own and thankfully you did. I resented him for that, lost complete respect for him and you could say it showed in everything I did after that. I made no effort to make him happy in any way. I did not do any of things a wife should do. My form of birth control was, “get the hell away from me.” He began to blame me for his alcoholism, saying if I was a better wife, he wouldn’t have to go out and drink so much or even look at other women. All of that was ok with me; at the least that kept him busy and away the hell from me. There was lots of abuse and I felt so trapped. I didn’t want my parents to know how bad things had gotten. I remembered my dad telling me, because he was angry that I had run off with this older man and he was as angry as I’d seldom seen him, he said “now you’re on your own. You made your own bed, now you go live in it! Don’t come back here when things don’t work out!” It was my mother who intervened to save me in the end. Dad’s pride was always in the way.

I couldn’t go back to the reserve if I wanted to and staying with my husband was unbearable. There were no transition houses for battered women back then, or Mother’s Allowance to help with raising the children. We just had to put up with it, our bad marriages: to live in the beds we made for ourselves and try to cope with an unhappy life.
I was in a deep depression and I really didn’t care about living. I was able to get all kinds of pills from doctors. I got nerve pills to calm me down, I got pills to make me sleep, and I got pills to wake me up. I got any old kind of pills I wanted. The doctors seemed happy to push you out of their offices with a prescription in your hand that was thought to be a good solution. I don’t know if I was suicidal, but I was severely depressed, so depressed that I didn’t have enough energy to complete the job, I’d say. I still had you in the middle of all this and that was my thin lifeline. I had trouble getting out of bed and I have to admit that I loaded up on the sleeping pills more because that was when I could really escape. Sometimes I wished I could fall asleep forever and be done with it all, but I would wait it out, just one more day. Just hang in to the end of that day and say that I made it through, but I always knew that I was dangling in the wind and that that delicate string could snap at any time.

I don’t really have much memory how the next part happened, but Mom and Dad came and took me out of our apartment on Kehoe Street. At first I thought I was going to a regular hospital, but I soon found myself at the North Bay Psychiatric Hospital. I’m sure the sight of my condition was alarming for them. They still knew nothing about how we were living. They convinced me that this was the best place for me and so I signed my name on the papers. I would soon find that I signed myself up for more than I bargained for and there was no way out. It was a scary place. All kinds of people winded up there. Back in the day, that’s where all people went who were not considered ‘normal’ and who were not in jail.

You had the crazies and the violent ones mixed in with innocent mentally challenged people who were really like children. They were often institutionalized like us too. Almost immediately I was introduced to a new therapy that took off from where my drug therapy had left me. It was called electro shock-therapy. On shock days, some patients would fight off the inevitable, but me I’d just say, ‘I’ll go first’ and get it over with. That’s how I felt. I just didn’t care about anything. The pain didn’t bother me either and that part was real unpleasant. If you ever have that feeling that you can’t breathe and you are suffocating, that’s what it was like. It’s the best way I can best describe it.

Every time I felt that I was dying all over again. After they strapped me to the table, I would look into the eyes of that doctor and wonder why he was doing this to me. And his
eyes stared back: black and blank as anything. Why did I have to endure this torture? I wondered what the point of all this was. I didn’t believe then or even now that this was useful to my wellbeing. I couldn’t understand how this was supposed to convince a person that living was worthwhile. I got it every week, two to three times a week and I was in that hospital for over a year. So I got a lot of it. Enough to knock out a lot of my memories and emotions, but not enough to kill me. That was one good thing. I am guessing that this was the purpose of it: to make me forget the things that were making me sad. It did something else, as you know, a funny kind of side effect. Along with my memories, it seemed to take my pain receptors. That’s a curious one. Since then, I’ve had tumors, broken bones and all kinds of incidents that should put me into feeling some major pain, but I don’t. To this day, when doctors look at my arthritis and x-rays, they look closer again at me and ask what medication I’m on. None, I tell them. They are all in disbelief that I am not on anything and wonder how I manage my pain. I tell them what pain? I don’t feel any. So I’m thinking that is something else the shocks left behind and that one that I don’t mind at all.

I made some good friends there, though, that are still friends with to this day. My friend that I told you about already, the one in the residential school, I met her there. Another friend had been just widowed and left to raise five small children on her own. I would say we were a class of women who didn’t know how to cope with our sad lot in life. There was no supports there for any of us and we had to make a go of things on our own. That is how it was for women like us back then and the Indian woman had it pretty bad.

Little by little, I started to realize that I wasn’t sick. I’m not sure what brought the change in me, but I know it wasn’t the therapy. I made some lasting strong friendships there and we helped each other through our troubles because there was no one there for any of us and I mean no one. We could understand each like no one else could. We could talk openly about all the terrible things that we were trying to live with. Some of those women had it worse than me and I began to see that I had people who loved and needed me; some of them didn’t even have that. There was good things for me to go back to and I had a life waiting for me that I didn’t have to recreate. I just had to make some changes and I was more than ready for that. I began to miss my life, but made a decision that the part that included my marriage was over. I started to see that I wasn’t mentally ill like some of
the people there. Maybe I was drying out from the drugs, but things started to get clearer for me.

I began to understand that my life was what made me unwell: the conditions that I was living under, I mean. And I decided that I was going to change those conditions. While in the hospital, I also realized that I didn’t miss your father. I didn’t want to see him again. There was no love there at all; that was gone and it wasn’t ever coming back. I knew what I had to do and only felt dread. I felt such peace when he wasn’t around. I didn’t hate him like I thought I did. He was a product of his upbringing, but I was done with living like that. So when I made plans to leave, I decided that I was moving back in with my parents as a bit of a transition. At the same time, it turned out that your father was out of job options in North Bay and decided that he would move to Toronto to be closer to employment. I don’t think he realized where this hospital experience had taken me because he still thought we both had plans to take up where we left off. He was still planning for us to be together as a family. I played along that I would join him there in Toronto with you when he got settled, but I had no intention of doing any of that. It was the easiest way to make a break with him. You know the rest: he was there and we stayed put. That was fine with me. I didn’t ask for child support and as we moved around North Bay, I purposely didn’t keep in contact with him. He started whatever life he had there and his visits to us became less frequent until they stopped altogether.

Ma had talked it over with dad, about us moving in with them, and warned him that he had to be okay with that. She said to him and I heard it, ‘what good is your damn pride when your daughter is dead? You think those kinds of things only happen to other people? She needs our help and I am going to be there for her. So are you!’ And that it was it; just like that, dad was there too and willing to accept me back, no matter the mistakes that I made. I was discharged and had no interest in returning to my old life. I was happy to be back with my parents.

Soon after, though, another bigger tragedy happened. My Mom had sent dad off to work one day with a packed lunch, not knowing this would be the last time that she would ever see him again. He was an older man now, still climbing roofs, performing tough physical work: work only fit for young men, when he slipped off a roof and broke his neck.
After that you and me lived with your granny. I became the breadwinner, working every day, often performing the kind of work men did because I didn’t have the right kind of education for office work. We helped each other, Ma and me. That’s why we remained so close over the years, even after when I finally remarried and set up a home with my second husband. She was more than my Mom; she was my best friend and my partner for so many years. I could never bear to be far away from her and she relied on me too. She never had friends of her own and only went out when someone took her and that was usually me. Always from her, you’d hear her comments about ‘people looking at me. I can’t go in there. There’s too many people there and they will look at me.’ It was an irrational kind of fear that didn’t make sense, but it was a powerful and it always happened the minute she stepped out of her house. Sometimes we would laugh about her fears and try to make light of them, but that didn’t stop them or slow them down.

(Dolbeck, 2016)

It is interesting to hear this story. Her last comment about my Granny rang true. Granny was curiously paralyzed by feelings of being watched and overly scrutinized. I believe this was a result of the racism and overwhelming alienation she felt when leaving the safety of the reserve. I recall one episode that has remained with me. I was maybe seven years old and we were in downtown North Bay. We were having lunch at a small diner, just off the main street. As was the custom of the day, diners were often attached to drinking lounges. I remember three small entrance signs on the same side of street reading; “gents”, “ladies and gents” and “restaurant.” My Mom and grandmother enjoyed the restaurant part because it was a short distance from downtown and most importantly the owner was a friendly Chinese man. He knew our granny well and would always serve up her trademark hot hamburger sandwich accompanied with peas, mashed potatoes and gravy. On this particular day, Granny was not feeling quite herself and had fallen ill. We were in the midst of trying to get her home, when the inevitable happened. We made it out into the street and she began to vomit by one of the entrances. She was completely humiliated and it was made worse by a passersby’s comment, “you see that drunken squaw?” An assumption made because she was standing near one of the tavern entrances and that she was a
visible First Nation woman. My Grandmother never took a drink in her life. She just didn’t believe in it. Here she was this quiet dignified First Nation woman already rattled about being out about town, suffering from some kind of anxiety attached to being in urban places. She always took such effort to be well groomed and elegant, always looking her best. She never stepped out of the house without looking presentable. On this day, though she went home, vowing to never go out again.

“Home” is meant to be a protective oasis, a place where we can unwind and rejuvenate, regroup in order to face the demands of the outside world, but what if that place doesn’t exist for you? What is there is no safe place for you at all? From Marie’s account, we view a deepening divide of her own urban alienation from within. Racism and lack of acceptance drifted in from the community and found its way into the non-Native family she had married into. Native women, like Marie, were extremely vulnerable. Marie and her sisters noticed that Native men were rarely interested in Native girls of similar experience and went about actively pursuing fair non-Native women. Native men, it seems, were dealing with their alienation their own way. With their confidence battered and sense of self in confusion, Native men Marie notes, moved further away from their culture by selecting non-Native women as life partners. She recounts her displacement when looking for a romantic partner and realized that finding a Native man with similar values was completely off the table. Marie, and other Native women, had to look for partners beyond the boundaries of their First Nation. In my father’s case, what may have initially piqued his interest, her uniquely Native background, dissolved quickly when their differences could not be blended. There was little to unite these two, not even me. Sylvester’s family were likely battling demons of their own acquired through traumatic events in their country of origin. There was some hint of postwar trauma, but I know little of that story.

Certainly interracial dynamics were shared among the Depotier siblings and happy marriages were not the trend. Threads of racism found their way into the fabric of these unions
and permeated their relationships in ways which eventually brought them down too. The urban landscape proved to be tricky terrain and none of the Depotier clan were particularly well packed for the journey. Neighborhoods and communities they drifted into were also troubling. Employment was difficult, giving way to impoverished living conditions ripe for a host of other unwanted social dynamics. Sickness seemed to plague them and while they turned their grief inward, a toxic existence began creeping into their lives. Their experience was not unique and was shared by many other First Nation peoples attempting urbanization. They were, as Wesley-Esquimaux (2009) states in *Trauma to Resilience*, “First Nation people [who] began to walk backwards into the future, unarmed with the social and psychological strengths that would have been passed to their children if their societies remained intact” (p. 19). Their history behind them and their future inaccessible and incomprehensibly out of reach.

Studies have begun to exam the prevalence of First Nation trauma; Kiramayer (1994) uncovers a strong correlation between suicide risk and poor socioeconomic conditions finding that “frequent interpersonal conflict, prolonged and unsolved grief, chronic family instability, depression, alcohol dependence/misuse, and a family history of psychiatric disorder” were shared characteristics of many First Nation people (as cited in Cutcliffe, 2005, p. 142). Poor living conditions do little to reconcile people to happiness. Lives full of struggle drain the individual of optimism and they may begin to pursue avenues for escape in order to cope with their bleak future. McNeil has written on this social dynamic among First Nation people and their disconnection and how a “lack of cultural continuity creates a loss of confidence at the individual level in understanding how to live life and make decisions” (2008, p. 6). It was the first time in all my readings that I had read about what loss of confidence can do to people on an individual level. We see this often in the trickle-down effect of intergenerational trauma.

Currently on reserves, we have many struggling families and bear witness to the reality that some parents are lost and experience an erosion of their confidence to lead their families
effectively. We have a fairly recent envelope of government funding entitled Parental Engagement Strategy aimed at better connecting parents with their children. A casual view into the family lines of the dispossessed exposes fracture and a few generations of parents who had poor parenting themselves. The origin of this generational family disconnect was always a colonizing program away. Marie has watched many such families under the auspices of The Indian Friendship Centre in North Bay. She volunteers there and participates in many functions which aim to bring Native families together. It is commonplace to see events descend into chaos as raucous children whirl around in destructive play with little regard to others, breaking toys and crashing into tables with prepared food. I know what she is talking about because I’ve seen this in my home community. It’s a handful of families and usually struggling ones with parents who seem helpless to know what to do. Sometimes they excise themselves physically, so they can pretend that they don’t know what’s going on and leave it to others to handle. I believe it’s about a diminished notion that they have accepted about themselves and they lack the confidence to lead their families. Discipline is confused with abuse.

Communities were strung together with a common thread of ingrained attitudes of inferiority both from the outside world and more devastatingly from within. From this perspective, insecurity, depression and unresolved grief was experienced with regularity among First Nation people, leaving them with a bleak view of the world. It was certainly the case among Marie and her urbanized siblings. Chronic alcoholism, drug abuse, lack of education, unemployment, violence and family dysfunction plagued the Depotier clan. Many coping behaviours were self-destructive as their sadness, frustration and anger turned inward. It is significant to note 95% of all Native people are disproportionately affected by a family member’s alcoholism (MacNeil, 2008). A Native person’s response to such stresses are significantly prevalent and supported by a higher rate of suicide. Cutcliffe discovered that suicide within this cultural group was both a multidimensional complex phenomenon as well as a viable trajectory to
end their suffering because their state of misery had no perceivable end. It was a response than was born out of mental exhaustion (Cutchliffe, 2005). In other words, different strategies for intervention needed exploring since typical ones used were found to be ineffective.

Traditional and cultural practices may hold more promise. The cause for a person wanting to end their lives, Cutchliffe discovered, was simply a desire to end their ‘psych-ache’. He found that continued focus on the study of the brain offered nothing new and the path would better forged to explore a serious investigation to human emotion. What makes a person profoundly sad, disillusioned and unable to cope? Nadeau noted that colonized peoples more often experienced “social suffering” and that a medicalized conventionally westernized approach failed to consider the stresses and consequences of people living in dehumanizing situations. The spiritual disconnect among such people was, in her view, entirely predictable (Nadeau, 2006). The medical approach is to treat the symptoms, while the Indigenous view is to realign the spirit with the body and its relations, bringing the person back into proper balance. Since a colonized person is coping within an unwell system, the old environment is there to greet them once they return.

It follows that a colonized community needs repairing too in order for the recovering person to continue to be well. The goals and dreams that Marie might have had eluded her because of her lack of education, and over time in a failed marriage, the abyss further widened seemingly beyond reach. It was on her shoulders to figure out, to carve a place where she could participate. She could adapt better perhaps, but the outside world remained the same. It continued to be unwilling to bend and threw all kinds of obstacles her way. Getting better didn’t automatically open new doors. It would be a while before she would find her way in systems like education which could open new doors and allow her the luxury of dreaming up new potential.

Several studies discuss how First Nation people were at particular risk since their population had established risk factors. Such people were in the throes of “…community
alienation, substance abuse, psychiatric problems, physical abuse, disconnection with cultural history, child separation and loss, lack of interpersonal support, lack of social capital, cultural stress and weakening of belief systems and spirituality” (Isaak 2010, p. 259) and were distinctive in that they were suffering so many of these troubling indicators. First Nation people were disconnected from their home communities and had no available supports to ease their transition into urban areas. Racism permeated the neighbourhoods, classrooms, work sites and all areas of commerce. There was no place to hide from it. Available research clearly outlines the consequence of such prolonged living conditions. Eventually, little by little, the individual under this kind of attack becomes at risk for being unwell: unwell in body, mind and spirit. Having no access to their culture and traditions, the urbanized Native person loses what supports could have assisted and learns instead that they are not successes in the urban landscape. There is no place in this world for the disinherited First Nation woman and there is no going back either. Significantly unique were these experiences felt by Canadian First Nation women like Marie that there was little understanding among mental health practitioners of the day of how to help. The prevailing wisdom of the day seemed to have a preference for external remedies such as shock therapy and medication, neither of which, seemed to help Marie.

Edwin Schneidman tends to entertain a different, more expanded notion of this dilemma as he states, “it means that our best route to understanding suicide is not through the study of the brain, or the study of social statistics, or the study of mental diseases, but directly through the study of emotions described in plain English, in the words of the suicidal person” (as cited in Cutcliff, p. 144). From this stand point, it makes sense that recovery from life’s traumatic events are best understood when the person finds a sympathetic ear and when they feel that they have been fully understood. Our need to connect runs deep and fractured connections, so it seems, are the very ilk of human suffering. Could it be that these women, my mother’s friends in the psychiatric hospital, formed their own family and ultimately built a foundation of trust, enough
that some measure of optimism was taking root? I have known these women all my life as my mother’s friends and they were really like aunties to me. Being a child, I floated along oblivious to their common thread of disconnect and how they truly helped each other to cope. I didn’t know many of their stories until I began this journey with Marie and then I began to see many parallels. Their children became my friends like extended cousins. Mom has many such friends and each shares an abiding connection that has endured throughout the years, their connection marked by individual struggle and shared support. When there seemed to be a world absent of available supports, they created them. Theirs was an “ad hoc sharing circle of sorts” where there was frank discussions and open sharing in an atmosphere of complete trust. Certainly the value of the “shared story” in safe environments cannot be taken lightly. It is a place where recovery is born.

Marie continues to enjoy the company of other women tremendously, even to this day. In fact, a trip to the local Walmart, will find her vying for the post of unofficial store greeter. She knows many people, all women, and frequently meets up there with them, catching up with all their recent happenings and misadventures. They are all quick to share personal stories about themselves and their families. Some are sad stories; often they are funny and mainly they are stories meant for women with the purpose of sharing and supporting one another. It’s often interesting the depth of what you may become privy to and later find difficult to dismiss in casual social situations. It’s not unusual to hear about broken relationships, unfaithful husbands, ungrateful children, loss of jobs, abuses of every variety, stubborn injustices and yet many, of the stories have a deep vein of humour coursing throughout. Marie’s relationships with women reach beyond her sisters, though their depth was likely cultivated in the small, overcrowded bedrooms she shared with her many sisters on the Kipawa reserve.

Marie’s adult experience was connected to social issues of poverty and abuse. The cycle of abuse is well woven through the fabric of a Native woman’s experience as a respondent to the Native Women’s Association suggests during research by the Canada Council on Social
Development and Native Women’s Association: “it is an exception rather than the rule to know of an Aboriginal woman who has not experienced some form of family violence throughout her life” (Zahradnik, 2009, p. 409). Violence against Native women is well institutionalized. What is of interest in the Zahradnik article is that resiliency can be learned at the community level when members have been victimized by violence. In fact within a community, fractured people can find healing through strong supportive relationships cultivated with each other.

Urbanized First Nation people may have been exposed to more stressful indicators which might very well add to their maladaptive condition since they, according to LaFromboise & Dizon (2006), “may well experience greater stress in daily living than their relatives on the reservation because it is difficult for them to access social support networks, such as extended family networks that are more readily available on the reservations” (p. 194). It was certainly true for Marie and it is her perception that her experiences cut deeper because of her disconnect with her First Nation; and deeper yet again when her disconnect was met with flat out rejection from her reserve. She had always viewed Kipawa as home, but it became a home that was as far away and inaccessible as Mars. There was no going back when she learned that, according to the band list registry, her name had been completely removed and her connection severed. Gone and forgotten.

Resilience, owing to adapting to life’s challenges, has a connotation of being capable of recovering, springing back into shape like some sort of untethered elastic. In Marie’s case, being stretched taut to the demands of a difficult life did not return her to her original state. Rather, it was something else, harder to define. Along the way, she learned many new survival skills that were more in keeping with what constitutes coping. She learned to take whatever job she could get to put food on the table and a roof over our heads. Living in cramped, less than acceptable conditions, we learned how to pack and run in the night when rent was due and how to “shop for groceries” eating our fill as we grazed shelves before checking out with few paid ones. Sherman
Alexie’s memorable quote from his novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* as he discusses the mythological virtue of suffering brought on by growling bellies and condemning looks from those steeped in creature comforts. He suggests there is nothing noble in poverty because “poverty doesn’t give you strength, or teach you lessons about perseverance. No, poverty only teaches you how to be poor” (2007, p. 13). As I went through school and we moved around different neighbourhoods, our poverty was noticeable. It is easy to spot and all manner of judgement followed. Some teachers from affluent neighbourhoods find it difficult to connect with families in crisis. They wonder why families are poor and who is to blame. There is an implied belief that hard work and individual talent levels the playing field and that everybody has a chance. I rather like how Laura Nader turns the inquiry around and suggests that we ask the question in reverse; “Instead of asking why some people are poor, we should ask why some people are so affluent” (Marker, 2003, p. 369).

Laframboise indicates that there are some critical factors which influence one’s ability to demonstrate resiliency, identification and pride in one’s culture, and the appearance of a protective maternal warmth. Though we intuitively understand that strong, loving mothers have a cumulative effect on the self-efficacy of their children, it is quite a surprise to note that this factor rates above all others and that it may assuage the effects of other key factors such as an absent father and the presence of delinquent co peers and friends (Laframboise, 2006). Like walking textbook examples, both Marie and my grandmother epitomized this and it helped us to find our way. The following story about my grandmother has been told to me several times and I doubt that Marie remembers how often she has told it. The absolute affection she feels for her mother is obvious and she always prefaces it with the following: this was the kind of mother I had, the kind of grandmother you had:
4.1 Cinderella of Sorts

I had been working at Gamble Robinson at the time and was a labour worker at the back loading area with the men. Every day I was up to my elbows in rotting tomatoes and busted up vegetables. It was my job to sort through farmer produce and repackage them to send out to the local grocery stores. That was back in the day when grocery stores were not all big chains with the food coming from God knows where. Our local grocery stores were not chains and were very much a part of the community. I was uneducated and had to be happy with any job that I could get, but truth being told, I liked this job. I knew what I had to do and when I walked out the door, at the end of my shift, the work was done. Sometimes when I went shopping, I was sure I saw my packaged vegetables and fruits on the shelves. I had a certain amount of pride in that. I also learned the full extent of my physical strength because I worked as hard as any man there. Every day I began with my long walk into work, another thing that I have always liked to do and still do it as much as I am able.

Time rolled around and now it was winter. Believe it or not, there was always work to do, even in the winter, but the warehouse just got colder. There was a buzz throughout the company about a staff New Year’s Party. I seldom went out, but was interested in going to it. Mom heard me talk about it and encouraged me to think about going. She said that I was still a young person, even though I was starting to feel a little worn out, and that I should go. Upon further thought, I knew it was not appropriate to go and the reason was I didn’t own a proper dress. Granny was not one to take this as an answer and set to telling me that we needed to go shopping and find me a suitable dress.

I said okay and off we went. After shopping around Woolworths and even Kresge’s, remember (I actually remember these stores in North Bay) there was no Walmart, I became pretty discouraged. I told Ma ‘see there is nothing here for me. I can’t afford any of these and buy groceries next week’. This did not discourage her in the least. Our next stop was the fabric store and the fabric was expensive. Ma spotted a remnant tossed in the corner which was sparkly and very appropriate for holiday wear. The party was coming up in a few days and I was feeling that this would be too much for her to do on such short notice. That didn’t matter either. She was so confident and I was not. Anyway, we left the store with only the fabric and no pattern, but Ma said she didn’t need any.
That night she rooted through my closet and found an old house dress that fit me. She pulled it apart and refitted it to my body as it was her guide before she cut into the fabric because she didn’t have any extra to spare for mistakes. That machine went humming through the night and I fell asleep thinking that she would give up at some point and go to bed herself. The next morning she was still sitting in front of the machine working away like one of Santa’s elves. The dress was pretty well done and she asked for my opinion. I almost cried. To me, it was the most beautiful dress ever and it fit me to a tee. I was able to borrow shoes and few accessories from friends and I was all set to go to the party.

The night rolled around and I got all dolled up, teased up my hair and all and I gotta say I looked great. I was dressed to kill! I looked fabulous even and my dress was a real hit since no one had seen anything like it on the hangers in Woolworths or Kresge’s. Compliments were flying in my direction all night. I felt like a princess walking around in a dream and I have my mother to thank for that.

Shortly after that night, one of the women who had admired that dress asked if she could borrow it for a graduation dinner she was attending. I was so proud that I said yes. Well the woman disappeared out of town and so did my dress and I never saw her or the dress again. I was so mad at that woman, I could have pounded her out myself. Ma was the other way. She told me, “Don’t feel bad about the dress. It’s only a dress. You know I can make another one if you need it. If that made her happy, that’s good. Feel good about that. Don’t talk bad about her.” (Dolbeck, 2016)

That was my granny and she could tolerate no negative talk about people even when they deserved it. She was kind to a fault and the following story stretches beyond kindness and tolerance into the realm of denial. This story is mine and I almost didn’t tell it, but it is relevant to the discussion here. It took place over a time when many of our family members were gathering in North Bay. Granny was always the catalyst that brought extended members together and this took place during a time when we lived with her. I can guess my age according to where we living at the time and my rough estimate would be around the age of 8 or 9 years old. Four of us lived in a one bedroom apartment and we were positioned strategically throughout the apartment.
to best utilize the space. I had my own bed outside of the bathroom in a small hallway alcove, not pretty, but it was enclosed and I had privacy as long as no one was using the bathroom. On this day, my mother was at work and I’m not sure where everyone else was, but I was alone. It was customary for people to be dropping in. I wasn’t immediately aware that I wasn’t alone at first, but soon became aware. My great uncle, my granny’s brother, who was in from Kipawa, was suddenly in my tiny bed with me. I pretended to continue to sleep, my eyes firmly slammed shut and would roll away avoiding his persistent touching. None of it felt right and I was immediately confused and troubled. I have little memory of how it ended, but I don’t think it advanced beyond this. Perhaps he was interrupted, I’m not sure. The house soon began to fill up and my mother returned from work. As she was changing, I went in and talked to her and told her what happened. I will never forget what happened next. She never once doubted me, never caused me to feel at fault, but she was as angry as I had ever seen her. She hugged me and immediately made it better. As for the uncle sitting comfortably on the couch chatting with everyone out in the living area, well it wasn’t so good for him. My mother confronted him, called him a dirty pig and told him to get the fuck out of her place. There was a loud commotion, I was called a liar and troublemaker by him, of course, and a few of Mom’s brothers had to jump in and wrestle in some order.

It was all very stressful and I went outside sobbing that I was the cause of such a ruckus. The worst thing in all of this was my grandmother’s reaction. She came and sat beside me on the steps and earnestly asked how I could say such terrible things and asked why I could cause such trouble. I immediately wanted to take it all back, every bit of it, to say it never happened, so that we could all get along. It broke my heart that my grandmother would prefer to believe that I could engineer lies like this over believing the horrible tendencies that ran through some of the men in our family. My mother, if she wasn’t yet my hero, she certainly became one in my eyes that day. We have talked about this many times since. She believed me instantly because I was her daughter, she was my protector and she also knew intimately of the experiences that women of
our family dare not speak of. Being believed had the effect of helping me cope with this experience. There was no such thing as counselling in those days because remember: *these things didn’t happen*. Having someone in my corner who believed me and went to bat for me, helped me to work through the experience and it didn’t have much of long term effect, that I can tell. I never saw this great uncle again nor did we attend his funeral when he died and that was fine with me. Granny did: this was her brother after all, but his name was never mentioned again in our house, even though we continued to live with her for years.

While my grandmother was hard working, resilient and kind, there were places where her mind would not allow her to go. When she passed, we learned more about what we didn’t know about her, and it has left many of us wondering how well we knew her at all. What traumas lay buried deep within her? Still she led her family with poise and was always there for those who needed her as long as their need didn’t venture into areas she couldn’t face. It is not surprising to me that she closed her mind off some things, preferring to have life resemble something else. Marie came from another tradition and experience. Hers supplanted the old and she was more willing to discuss things previously unmentionable. And now there is me: writing about them. What is clear is this: we come from a long line of determined women; determined to succeed when the reserve held no promise for family members; determined to succeed when the urban landscape offered no respite; and determined to succeed when conventional education failed to include. We are a band of connected and conversely disconnected people linked and fragmented by the experiences of our mothers.
Chapter 5

Bill C-31ers and Squawlibbers

We’ve had a long, hard struggle. I think what kept us going was our heritage and our sticking together. Maybe we didn’t have all the same ideas, but we had one goal in mind: equality for the women. We’re just as good as the men. That was our one strive. I think what really kept us going is our determination to seek what is rightly ours. And that is our heritage. We all knew that no government agency, be it white or be it Indian, was going to tell us we were no longer Indian, when we know we are Indian. Here is the Canadian government making instant Indians out of white women. You might as well say they were trying to make instant white women out of us Indians. And it cannot be, because being Indian: it’s in our blood. I think that is our determination right there, it’s because we are Indian. We are fighting for our birthright. Mavis, Gores (as cited in Silman, 1991, p. 9)

In the book Enough is Enough (1991), Janet Silman interviewed and documented the accounts of several key Tobique women who had become politicized enough to challenge the Canadian Government because of clear sexual discrimination against First Nation women. These women, Mavis Gores among them, were reacting to many of the unfair realities experienced by Native women across Canada. Of particular issue was the 1951 amendment to the Indian Act of Canada, section 12(1) (b). While the Act was a historically discriminatory document levelled against First Nation women, it now included this new addendum which went further and effectively disinherited First Nation women when they married non status men. Conversely, in the case of their brothers, Indian status was passed on to their non-Native wives. It was wildly discriminatory and it remained that way until 1981 when the United Nations, an international body, deemed it sexually discriminatory. Though it was challenged by Native women within Canada, there was little effort from the courts, band councils and even some Native advocacy
groups to correct this injustice who were often more interested in challenging the efforts of this small group of women with open criticism.

Sadly, many Native women across Canada, with children in tow, were unaware that this had happened as they attempted to return to their First Nation communities from broken marriages. They were simply told, as in the case of Mavis Gores, that they were no longer members because of new government policies which erased them from band lists while supplanting their brothers’ non-Native wives. Mavis adds after being informed that she is no longer an Indian, “I’m not? I find out that white women are Indians now, but I’m not. Honest to God, I was shocked. I couldn’t believe it. I got to talking to some of the women and find out its true” (Silman, 1991, p. 99). Native women were given no courtesy, unbidden, they were summarily turned away from their communities. Marie and her sisters also experienced this rejection as a complete shock and after all these years that rejection is still there: it is raw and evokes powerful feelings. It has been casually underestimated how these ruptures have damaged relationships in Native communities. Silman powerfully presents these womens’ stories about how these they were rejected. They noticed that there was no support anywhere for them, that “the most painful part…aside from the federal government, they had to challenge opponents within their own First Nation, often men and women in their own families, who had no sympathy for their position” (p. xxxv1). Colonial policies translated into practice and actively divided communities by fracturing the family from within.

As it is, many Indigenous writers have of late have responded to this colonial mishandling of First Native people. I am joined by Thomas King and what emerges is a lively conversation. King, in his customary sardonic manner, quips “North America popular culture is littered with savage, noble, and dying Indians, while in real life we have Dead Indians, Live Indian, and Legal Indians…Legal Indians are considerably more straightforward. Legal Indians are Live Indians, because only Live Indians can be Legal Indians, but not all Live Indians are
Legal Indians. Is that clear?” (King, 2012, p. 68). He’s doing it again, a little cynical, but I get it; legal First Nation people are a trying presence. They are tied to history, treaties, the Indian Act. They are a reminder of what has gone wrong in Canada and efforts need to be taken to minimize their impact because King reminds us, “the only Indian that the governments of Canada and the United States have any interest in are the Legal ones…North America loves the Dead Indian, ignores the Live Indian and hates the Legal Indian” (p.69). Why? Simply because “Legal Indians” are tied to treaty rights and they are an expensive nuisance. In this sense, Native women became the Live Indians, seen but not heard; they don’t count. No voice, but certainly visible in all their vulnerability. The Canadian government, with its patriarchal disposition, had a solution for dealing with “Legal Indians” and started with women. That was easy to do because women across society already had an inferior role and were an easy targets for any kind of abuse. Women, gaining Native status through marriage, were “selected” and more importantly, non-Native. Makes sense?

A microcosm of this Canadian policy played out in the Depotier family and so did its repercussions. Interestingly, all Marie’s siblings, both male and female married non-Native partners, the Native sisters all losing their Native status and the brothers not only maintaining their status, but conferring status to their non-Native wives. The Native men were able, therefore, to pass on this birthright to their children. During the course of the interviews, I was able to learn that Marie was not aware that this was happening early on, nor were her sisters, since there was no effort to explain this to the community. Imagine if they did: what words would they use to name it? Marie and her sisters only found out when they were in touch with their First Nation and were told explicitly that they were no longer on the “band list.” The female Depotier siblings no longer had access to any supports while they watched their brothers register their wives and assume ownership of what was once theirs. I asked Marie many questions about this: “When you married my father did you know what had happened with your status? Why did you marry
someone out of race? What do you feel you lost with having your status as a First Nation person taken away? What bothered you most about this? Your access to supports, or your loss of inherit Native Rights?”

We Indian women knew that our Native men didn’t want us. They, like my brothers, went to looking for the fairest possible wives, all the better if she was blond and blue eyed. I guess this made them feel better about themselves. Racism runs pretty deep and sometimes you even start to believe that you are not as good as the white person. That left us to look elsewhere, or become nuns. We wanted families too. The men who wanted to take up with us were often troubled themselves. What do you think that does to a person’s confidence? Our Native men didn’t want us and the ones willing to take us are men that nobody wanted either. So many of us had really bad, abusive marriages, like me. Men who drank their weekly earnings and then would cuff you one if you dared challenge them on where the money had gone while you were at home with the kids. We had no
choice but to take it. I stayed in a ten-year bad marriage like that and it was ten years too long.

When I found out what they did to us, I was really resentful. None of us girls fully understood the extent of how it would affect us. We were all so uneducated about non-Native ways. I'll tell you something else, sometimes it takes white people to understand non-Native ways better. When I married your father, the Indian Agent found his way to our tiny apartment which was off reserve. He brought a stack of papers for me to sign. His hand covered much of what I was supposed to sign. He just commanded me to sign wherever he pointed, saying sign here, and wouldn’t allow me to look at what was on the paper. I was about to sign, but it was your father who stepped in. He told me ‘don’t sign anything you can’t read. This guy is not even letting you read any of those papers. Don’t sign them. I wouldn’t’. That made this Indian agent pretty angry and he just defended himself by saying that I HAD to sign them. Well your father didn’t back down, stared hard at this guy who was in our place and said, ‘You think so, eh? Take her to court and then we’ll see if you can force anyone to sign anything. We live in Canada.’ The Indian agent was some kind of angry when he left without getting my signature. We never saw him again.

Me and my younger sister never signed any of those papers which, we found out later from the older sisters, were all about signing away our Native status. Some girls were even given money in exchange for their signatures. Turns out it didn’t matter if we signed them or not, they just took away our Native status anyway. They took what was our birthright and gave it to our brother’s wives! When our brothers brought those white girls home, we treated them like sisters and some of them didn’t even deserve the kindness we showed them.

I found out about what the purpose of those papers were when I went back to the reserve after my marriage ended. I was looking to try to get health benefits for you because my brother was getting them for his kids. You needed help with dental care and I had none of those benefits through Gamble Robinson where I was working and your father was now long gone. There was no getting him to help with any of this and I really wanted no reason to invite him back into our lives. He couldn’t help with the basics when he was with us, the chance of that improving was pretty dim.
I was already making payments on dental work the dentist had done for you and I was having a tough time managing. You had gone on a school trip and had smashed up all your front teeth and needed emergency care. The band wouldn’t help me: wouldn’t even talk to me; but, there was your non-Native aunt, going up there, talking to whoever she pleased and getting all the kind of things for your cousins that I couldn’t get for you. She kind of bragged about the help she was getting and so I thought, why not me? Or you? I loved your aunt, still do, but boy did this ever make me mad.

Her marriage didn’t work out with my brother, but to this day she still carries a status card as though it’s her right and she’d defend that to her last breath. It’s hard not to resent women like her now. They have no problem standing up for what they think is theirs: going to meetings and demanding that the band consider their needs. They knowingly took what was ours. They went out and got their band cards and have a claim to what should have always been ours. And the community supports it and slams the door in our faces. Even today their children are treated preferentially over ours.

And, yes, that makes me resentful. How did sleeping with my brother make her an Indian? And I guess how did sleeping with my husband unmake me one? I couldn’t rub off my brown skin and call myself white and similarly she couldn’t put on Native regalia and suddenly become Indian, but she does. Wears all the regalia, goes to all the functions and ceremonies. It’s not her fault, the rules were slanted in her favour. And I guess it’s not my community’s fault since they didn’t make the rules either, but goddammit, it makes me mad. Native women are completely disrespected and so easy to put down.

What happened to us wasn’t right and our non-Native sisters don’t seem to care about that or understand how it deeply hurts us. We were the ones who belonged, not them! Why couldn’t they stand with us and voice their disapproval? What did they do? They moved in and replaced us and closed their minds off to what they had to know was wrong. And the kicker is, none of those marriages lasted any better than mine. But the difference is, they are still a welcomed part of Kipawa band membership and we were “allowed back in” as Bill C31ers and not all band members approved. And some of them that are most resentful are the damn white women who shouldn’t be there at all. Our community has come to be okay with seeing us as outsiders and feel justified to calling us a drain, like freeloaders, on what has got to be shared among all members. We are told
that now that they have to include us, everyone gets less, like somehow they are being punished: like we created this shitty system.

Some of those white women are still in Kipawa, on Native land, even when their marriages to the Native men collapsed. Some have now moved in their non-Native partners and continue to live on Native land like it is their right and fail to see that there is any problem with this. They’re working the system is what they’re doing. Now that they are classed as a status Indians, it affects all the other generations because according to the government rules, kids who have two parents with status are treated differently. They can pass their status further down to coming generations. These women turn up at community meetings and have no problem making demands and being vocal on all matters concerning the reserve that they married into. They are given more rights than the Native women our communities threw out. We Native women were treated like throw out garbage and that our opinions and feelings didn’t matter.

I did eventually get my status back, but that was because other Native women, like me, were banding together and forcing others to listen. It’s still didn’t correct everything because those non-Native women should have lost their status when we regained ours. It would have made everything equal for the next generations. The kids would have all been treated equally. I love my grandkids and great grandkids as much as my brothers, so theirs shouldn’t be treated any better than mine just because they happened to be men.

In fact, truthfully, if they were going to make anyone lose their status, when marrying non-Native partners, it should have been the men. We carry those babies in our Native bellies and nurse them with Native ways. It’s the women who bring the children into their traditions by teaching their culture and encouraging it every day, by helping them stitch their outfits together, by preparing traditional foods and attending ceremonies. When did the man’s role become more important? I say it is often us, the women, making sure that children learn the ways of their culture. And maybe the lawmakers of the day knew that too and might have thought on how to break Native families up, or maybe the lawmakers can’t think any differently because that is how they’d treat their women. I think carrying that baby and being the mother is a real important part of defining how a Native person comes into being.
When they took away my Native status, they didn’t just take away my claim to services, they took away my identity. My own band turned their backs on me and I left those offices humiliated in ways that will stay with me forever. How can you have any pride in being Native when these kinds of things are allowed to happen? A community that can do this doesn’t deserve our respect because how were we supposed to fight this attack from within? You know that it takes money to get things done and then you got to get the right people together. Some of us Native women were hanging by a thread, as if we had the energy and time. I can tell you, though, that I am happy about what those courageous women did in those books. They are the ones who deserve my respect; they are heroes.

Native men, as a result, have not felt the same extent of racism as Native women. We faced the sting of racism everywhere, even within our communities and families. Let’s not forget that the leadership within the Native communities was always men and even though that is improving, they still by and large are running the communities. Men were siding with men: Native and non-Native. It worked like this on First Nation communities: White men, non-Native men, white women and then us Native women at the bottom, with everybody stepping on top of us. Native men who are in the leadership role are some of the biggest hypocrites. They’re all done up in the regalia at events playing Native when it suits their purpose. They parade in their non-Native wives, also in Native regalia, and don’t see that this was done while stepping on us. We were the easy target. This was just fine with them. Do I respect them? No I don’t!

And another thing, let’s not pretend that this attitude has anything to do with how desperate Native women could get. We know that we were cast aside and that plays with your head. It produces a cycle of women who are not respected anywhere and who are very vulnerable. I could see how Native women could drift into unhealthy lifestyles. I know because I did it. When you don’t care about yourself and believe that you are nothing, then anything can happen to you; alcoholism, drug addiction, abuse and all kinds of other bad things that nobody wants for the women they love. Look at that pig farmer in BC. How long did it take to catch him? And that was because we were talking about broken down Native women with no options living risky lives. But I bet if you dig deep enough into the lives of those murdered women, you’ll find a lot of sad stories and broken lives; mothers, sisters and daughters who were suffering all kinds of abuses, maybe going back generations.
Recently Marie came to visit and I decide to introduce her to a few more women, via Goyette’s book entitled *Disinherited Generations* (2013) that she hadn’t met before, but to my surprise, Marie had been meeting them in private already. I said to Marie, “There is someone here you might like to meet. Someone that shares many of the same stories you have been talking about. Her name is Linda Goyette and she’s written about many of other Native women’s experiences.”

“Oh, we’ve met already,” Marie laughs. “I get up at 3 or 4 am every morning and I’ve pretty well read the whole book, even ahead of you. I spotted that book over there in the corner with many of the others you have piled up that you don’t seem to be reading. I read more than the National Enquirer and newspapers you know. There is one thing that shocks me, though, and I really can’t get over it.”

“What did you find out that you didn’t know before? “

“Well,” she started: “for one, I didn’t really realize that the part about me losing my status when I got married to your father, was only passed by the government in 1951. I thought that they had done that to us much earlier. I couldn’t believe how often the Indian Act was changed just to deal with us Native women and make it so that we were always the ones feeling the worst kind of punishment from the government. Here is the government and all kinds of people making us believe that changing anything in the Indian Act is like something so big, so huge, that it just can’t be done without all the legal experts getting involved and how it might even threaten existing agreements with the reserves. But with a simple stroke of a pen, no questions asked, they can do that to us Native women. We lost our birthright. And for another thing, just because the government was made up of white, rich men, they could force their rotten beliefs on Native communities. I’m sure that our communities would never have invented such a poor system that would divide their community this way. What community would purposely do such a thing that would be so terrible for them and have half their members treated so badly. All the systems they imposed on us were designed to break us down.”
It makes me really angry at the white women our brothers married, all blond and blue-eyed, taking what was rightfully ours, but I know they didn’t create that bad system. Still, I can’t understand the white women who knew that they were replacing us in our communities, when we Native women were sent packing. The law never made me white and it sure didn’t make them white women brown skinned either. How could they walk around with any pride? Worse our communities, our own brothers and cousins, never wanted to understand what happened to us when they kicked us out and moved in their wives. No one gave a shit about us and they have the nerve to call us Bill C31ers, even squawlibbers as if that should make me feel ashamed. Well it doesn’t. I’ve come to expect that they will throw roadblocks our way because we live off reserve and they, the band administration, feel entitled to do it because the government told them that they should. It’s like they have lost not only their minds, but also their hearts. They don’t see that we are trying to make things better for our children too. We feel that it is the right thing to do, since what happened to us after all was completely unfair. How does this not make any sense to them, or do they hate us that much? (Dolbeck, 2016)

Marie is referring to the 1876 Indian Act of Canada which defines those being Indian as male and how the understanding of heritage would flow through the male line. It also included the understanding that Native men could pass on their treaty status to their legal non-Native partners and their children. The definition was clear, but it wasn’t until much later that definition was coupled with action. By 1951, prevailing practice would include having these women stroked completely off the list, in perpetuity, regardless of whether or not the marriage lasted and would prevent them from returning to reserve, even to be buried. The label given, at the time, was “red ticket holder.” Indian men could maintain their “blue ticket” holder status as long as they maintained a myriad of conditions. Red ticket holders were defined as the Native women who married out; and they and their children became non-status and it became known as the discriminatory clause Section 12(1) (b) of 1951 (Goyette, 2013, p. xxx11). Such women could not live on the reserve, could not inherit their parent’s homes, or indeed any property, could not vote or speak up on issues, could not access any support services, health or education, and finally,
could not be buried on their reserves. They became the invisible and it “forced exile from a home community and a harsher, more difficult life” (p. xxx111). These women were simply not valued. Since they were gone, they were out of sight, out of mind.

This discrimination has been defended vigorously by the government, Native advocacy agencies and reserves across the nation. It took a successful challenge to the United Nations Human Rights Committee from a Native woman to have the government cave under the pressure. What is not well known, beside Sandra Lovelace’s name as it is attached to the hallmark historic United Nation successful challenge, is the litany of Native women across Canada who were standing up and fighting back. Women, like Marie, simply wanted to make things right and have their children claim their heritage and be proud of who they were. These brave women learned to stand on their own two feet, rally and support one another because they had developed plenty of survival skills from injustices they faced daily. They learned to push aside opinions which devalued them and reminded themselves that defined places carved out for them were to be dismantled. They learned to reject what was meted out and demand to be treated with respect. We, their offspring, guard what they have fought for closely and honour their life commitment to this work. During this tumultuous time, such brave women were demeaned and tagged Bill C31ers squawlibbers and many other derogatory terms.

As a result of their intense dedication, Bill C31 of 1982 was implemented and did address the discrimination against women as it appeared in the Indian Act of Canada. After that, it took the government three years to catch up and begin to reinstate women who had unfairly lost their status; 162,000 members were reinstated, interesting since the previous estimate was thought to be 15,000 women and 45,000 children (Goyette, 2013, p. 81). A sad footnote to this victory is the apparent rejection such women felt when they returned to their communities. They were perceived as a threatening entity, those who challenged the services and rights of existing members, and that fear was especially felt from the members who acquired status through
marriage. When the Bill was passed in 1985, The Canadian government allocated 100 million for housing these Native women upon returning to their reserves. Few reserves applied for the additional funds and the women were often regarded as a drain on existing resources (Goyette, p. 111). When regulations fell away, many First Nations continued to reject these women, pointing to the limited funds which would be stretched further. Any First Nation person living on First Nations’ territory will tell you that colonialism was taught so effectively that Native people have learned to practice it on each other. They no longer need governments to demonstrate what to do when they freely are doing it themselves.

While the Bill C31 judgement was welcomed and long overdue, it housed many limitations. It clearly stipulated that successful applicants would be only be reinstated with their children. This meant that status would only be granted to these women and their children. No further generations. It was called the second generation cutoff and women began to see that sexual discrimination was still at play and had crept through the back door. Her descendants were disinherited one generation earlier than her brothers. The government’s handiwork was all over eligibility criteria and remained unyielding to the problem they created by controlling eligibility criteria and access. It wasn’t long before this was challenged. Sharon McIvor, an activist and scholar from Lower Nicola Indian Band launched a challenge in 1989 which customarily slogged through the courts for another 30 years. Within the past four years, it has added another 45,000 grandchildren to the First Nation band lists of Canada (Goyette, p. 98). Predictably, there are limitations with the McIvor ruling too, the main one being that only births occurring after 1951 would be eligible, and this continues to lock out members. Since the introduction of Bill C31, the number of registered Indians has doubled in Canada (Goyette, p. 99). A sidebar corollary to these judgments is the intensively bureaucratic registration process that has been created resulting in a backlog of applicants. Everything moves at a snail’s pace in the Department of Indian Affairs except requisite reporting assigned to the First Nation. That is always due yesterday.
Renewed status repatriation is dogged by requisite wait time and a complicated process which requires the Native person to acquiesce to the system with patience. In my case, for my children, I was struck with how disingenuous the process seemed to be in helping a Native person navigate the system. My children had the benefit of two persons who had some experience; their mother with the educational matters and their dad who was a government employee himself. For our children the process took over two years with the application being sent back three times as the application moved around Ontario finally finding its way to Winnipeg. During the process my daughter turned 16 and the process had to be restarted from the beginning as she was now deemed an adult. There are families and parents that I know first-hand who would not have hung into the end. Within First Nation communities, we have many social issues which plague families and getting through government tape does not register as a priority. I recall a day when my
husband had a meltdown with an employee from the government department because not only was the process inaccessible, the employees themselves were quite unavailable. Tracking any claim, we discovered, proved onerous; however, in the end we prevailed. It is not the case with all families. I know this since I work with all families on the reserve and am somewhat familiar with their circumstances. Not having Native status, gives the Native person absolutely no access to their home reserve. Why would the government do this? I think it’s safe to say more status individuals equates to more money and there is also the reality that the government is steeped in excessive red tape. It’s how it functions. New applicants have not resulted in improved funding levels on the reserves. In the case of Alderville, existing funds are simply stretched further.

One of our local elders, Wayne Beaver, has an opinion on this and he is eager to share it with the community so that our representatives take notice and look beyond a voting term, to really look a few generations down the road. He sees the status issue as a thinly veiled goal of the government which is a disguised arm of The White Paper calling to an end to Indian Reserves of Canada. He is emphatic that the younger generation pay attention to the issue of status which was created by the government. So concerned was he that while holding office, he commissioned a study to review what he feared for coming generations. “Marrying Out” among First Nation people is quite common: Alderville has a 94% rate and larger First Nations like Six Nations are lower at 80.5% (Beaver, 2017). The numbers are high and no one has to be a mathematician to do the math. Marrying non status partners is disproportionately high and will result in declining numbers of status members on a First Nations like Alderville. Resident numbers are small and opportunities for marriage minded members to find suitable Native partners slim. Marrying out numbers far outweigh the partnering of two status individuals. A result of this trend would find Alderville with its last status member by the year 2037 (Beaver, 2017).

Another independent study using a different methodology confirmed the first study. At the same time Alderville was commissioning its studies, so too were other neighboring First
Nation communities. Their findings supported the same aggressive trend. Status individuals are disappearing quickly and the future of First Nation communities is uncertain. Wayne has been a negotiator for the Williams Treaty for more than 20 years and the document will soon be ready for signature. He cautions that there is one stubborn clause which bears consideration and that causes him to lose sleep. Essentially the clause reads that should the First Nation reserve become extinct, the land will become crown land, in essence government land. He fears that status issue is unequivocally tied to land claims and tied in such a way that time favours the government.

Simply put, the government is dragging its feet on land claims and waiting out First Nation status trends. The status blood quantum debate is disingenuous and distracts from other important business. Keeping the community consumed with questions about eligibility or being able qualify before entering any discussions regarding their community significantly distracts and keeps the government in the driver’s seat. It also keeps communities busy with requisite tasks further dividing them and ultimately removing tools which would foster greater autonomy. Slam dunk for the federal government of Canada. Other countries recognize this colonialist strategy easily and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Indigenous activist educator and author from New Zealand, argues that “these debates are designed to fragment and marginalize those who speak for, or in support of, Indigenous issues. They frequently have the effect also of silencing and making invisible the presence of other groups within the Indigenous society like women, the urban non-status tribal person and those whose ancestry or ‘blood quantum’ is [too white]” (Smith, 2012, p. 76). Race is always central to the debate, especially when we are talking about women. The status issue continues to divide First Nation communities since it does what Smith alleges: silences portions of the communities. Participation and access are tied to membership lists and non-status people are in essence defacto non-members and are reminded often of this reality.

Other divisive features of mixed blood First Nation people is their visual appearance, especially if they look too white and not Native enough. Blood quantum levels are tied to
authenticity and harkens to colonized presumptions of what constitutes a “real Indian.” I’m reminded of a typically Trumptonian view. In 1993, while Trump was offering his congressional testimony, he declared triumphantly with a scattershot of ridicule and performance: “They don’t look like Indians to me and they don’t look like Indians to Indians” (as cited in Huffington Post, 2016, June 27). He was not too far off with his disaffections and how they could reach others: he was striking a chord of common dissent, a shared view that Native nations were getting more than their fair share. And now he, and other like him, are the new form of estranged class permeating the US. Trump was particularly resentful of tribal gaming casinos cutting into profits he felt more properly coming to him. Now he is the President of the most powerful nation in the world. As we have come to witness, Trump’s name is synonymous with derision and division. He does both with unprecedented skill and his tentacles are reaching deep within the fibers and walls of his country.

Debates of blood quantum are designed to both simultaneously divide and conquer and it’s a type of practiced colonization that we widely use on one another. Bubbling up from a morass of gelid turbulence, it finds its way to be temperate enough to many, even our most vulnerable: our children. Working with teenagers in Alderville, I have been privy to how they have experienced discrimination both ways: too Native to belong to the outside world and too white to belong within their Native community. It’s an experience that I can sadly relate to. As late as March of this year, I was engaged in a conversation with two high school students. It started over something they had viewed on YouTube and how one student, a female, was offended by the portrayal of Native people. The male, on the other hand, was amused. They both casually observed that racist remarks about Native people were shared about Native people and how they felt personally affronted and hurt by such comments from non-Native friends. They observed that friends were continually insensitive to this and unwilling to alter their language when called upon it. These two students were often reminded that they didn’t look Native and so
the full extent of this logic would ask: “how could you claim that you are Indian?” It made them question the depth of friendships they might enjoy outside their community. Similarly within their community, they were met with members who discounted them because of their fair features. I sense in both a confusing melody of corked fury. Their sense of identity was threatened and casually dismissed. It was certainly relatable to me.

Indian Affairs, or now Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, spouts the line that they are devolving much of Indian Affairs activities to the First Nation. There is one area, however, that they are firmly maintaining control over, and that is the status issue. They continue to evaluate and decide membership using their criteria. Is this a calculated strategy to wait out a few generations for the inevitable disappearance of First Nations altogether? Some, like Wayne, say yes and he has grown wary of the process and feels that there is dishonest, calculated strategy at play. Wayne Beaver is passionate about the C-31 issue since it directly affected his family and absolutely refuses to separate membership codes from all other important negotiations because none of the discussions are meaningful if they result in disappearing nations. It was a lesson he learned when First Nation people were not paying enough attention to the status issue the government created.

This has been a recurrent theme in Marie’s sharing of her personal history and it’s a feeling of injustice and violence against her and her sisters that runs deep. Marie demonstrates something that she has underlined and wants to share. She begins to read, “If we are ever to stop the violence perpetrated against Aboriginal women and their families in this country, it is imperative that we look critically and also from a cultural lens at the policies and legislation that have been passed by the Canadian governments. Policies and legislation that are, at their core, misogynistic, and have long term effects. Land claims are important, as are better housing, health and education, but it is when we end the violence that we create real change” (Goyette, 2013, p. xv). After we had a discussion of the meaning of the word “misogynistic”, she had plenty to say.
Here Marie is adamant, that the government and band reserves, alike, acknowledge the abuses levelled specifically against Native women like her.

We were put down lower than the Native man and lower again than any other Canadian woman. We could be kicked around and nobody noticed, nobody cared. Even today, the average Canadian still acts surprised to hear how we Native women were treated differently than our brothers by the government, then again by our communities and worse sometimes within our own families. I realized, when I was reading that book, how hard we Native woman had to fight for our own equality. Nobody kindly gave it to us when it was brought to their attention about how unfair it was. No, Canada had to be humiliated by the United Nations before they would take notice. Nobody gave us a damn thing. We had to fight for it, so I don’t care if this pisses some of them off on the reserve. I don’t give a shit about their attitude. (Dolbeck, 2016)

She perceives that treatment of First Nation women received as a national disgrace. Colonizing practices were in place which enforced not only racist values, but tacked on sexist ones which invariably placed the Native woman at the bottom. Further illustrated is the awareness that this was happening, as acknowledged by a federal study in 1979 which concluded, “Indian women likely rank among the most severely disadvantaged in Canadian society. They are worse off than both Indian men and Canadian women and although they live longer than Indian men, their life expectancy does not approach that of Canadian women generally” (Silman, 1991, p. 10).

Marie had not read this passage before our interviews at the cottage, yet she had a firm idea of how the social structure worked. The findings of the study echoed her experience and her words rang true: “It works like this: White men, Native men, White women and then us Native women at the bottom, with everybody stepping on top of us.”

When Marie is fired up, it is a difficult thing to steer away until the Moment passes and this was certainly an example. To Marie, it is not a stretch to see how the devaluation of Native women across Canada played out in them becoming murdered and missing. They were never truly valued members of society, so who cares about a bunch of them anyway and they brought it
on themselves if they wanted to scramble up into truck rigs or jump in with passing motorists for the sake of cheap transportation. It is the prevailing wisdom that they are the sole authors of this misfortune. Like Marie’s father told her when she married her husband, “you’ve made your bed, now live in it,” a statement that she would never forget and one that haunted her. Years later, after my arrival and after numerous tiny apartments that we were thrown out of after her husband’s chronic alcohol abuse which devolved into frequent strings of marital strife, after vitriolic rages and chronic poverty, Marie looked to supports around her. And found few. When home life became particularly frightening and unmanageable, there were some friends and aunts who were willing to help. They were truly the lifelines.

One of the Tobique women, Caroline Ennis, observed the continued struggle of her Native mother and felt helpless, but it may have fired up something else since she says, “we kids were too young to do anything at the time, but it must have shaped my character because when I got older I decided that I wouldn’t let anybody push me around” (Silman, 1991, p. 94). In some ways we are always learning the understory of our parents: learning from watching them, their struggles, their defeats and their successes. It’s not so much what they say, but more in what they do. I didn’t see how Marie’s experiences had affected me and intersected with my life until I was much older and could unpack them clearly from some distance. It did, without a doubt, shape an internal barometer within me when I witnessed flashes of injustice and entitlement. It still does. As I drifted around Ontario, trying to eke out a life for me and my family, I finally settled in a First Nation and became a member. I set to work gathering the requisite credentials I needed in the educational system and kept a watchful eye to issues involving First Nation education. That is no accident: it is a product of my early experience, a result of my mother’s lived story that now appears here as a thesis.

I was struck with a comment that an elder made to me while at a writing retreat. We were having a deep conversation and the topic drifted into my internal belief that I feel that I am
an perpetual outsider, that no matter where I am or what I am doing, my views are formed from that perspective. I believed that the community sees me this way too. This elder invited me to think that perhaps this view is more within me and less from the community. It might be true, but not entirely. Though I have lived in the community for years, I still consider myself a newcomer, an outsider, not a complete member. I possessed many of the isolating serial descriptors which would move me further away from myself. I was too urbanized and too white, too much of the other, or as Donald Trump would have it, just not Indian enough. I had accepted that this was how the community saw me, but this challenge from the elder forced me to consider that the locus of this perspective resided in me. What is true is this: I was all too prepared to easily accept this view for myself. It is a kind of existential violence we do to ourselves. And it is more the case when we seek to belong. The more I consider this, the more I can accept that this may be the case with me. Still there are those from our community who rigidly stand by their convictions at all cost, even to themselves and their families. I hear it in their comments, “they’re not members, they don’t have status,” or “you’re Native? You don’t look it!”, and “You have status? How?” It creeps innocently enough into casual conversation, but leaves an indelible mark that somehow you were studied and found wanting, a counterfeit of sorts. I hear it from the confusing comments of students which ultimately leaves them rejecting their culture. I wish members could see the havoc they wreak on one another and see the damage they do. Would they really prefer us to wander off and become “white?” Would they want this for their community, for the grandchildren and children to come? To see large numbers of youth dismiss themselves and join the outside world and not look back? Would that serve their community? Them? No, we should applaud our children’s fragile attempts to remain and not turn them away.

I’m beginning to understand some members’ lack of inclusivity is framed by their colonized experience and leave it there. They accepted their training well, they were good students in that area. I look to see where I can improve my thinking on the subject and curiously
find my allies in our youth who are struggling with the same issues. My urbanized upbringing formed a foundation to recognize detachment as something natural. In the world I knew there was little use for the Indigenous experience and truth be told, I often discounted it. Still I drifted towards it naturally, like some sleeping bear buried deep awaiting their inevitable awakening after a long undetermined slumber. Invasive government policy on status issues has made a mess of Native communities and continues to hang onto notion of who qualifies. It serves their interests after all. Thomas King is onto something as he writes cynically about “The Legal Indian” and how native communities have sown dissension in its name:

I’m even willing to admit that Native people have made some grievous errors, have had some serious lapses in judgement. We have done a reasonably good job of injuring ourselves without the help of non-Natives. For instance, for decades we have beaten each other up over who is the better Indian. Full bloods versus mixed-bloods. Indian on reservations and reserves versus Indians in the city. Status versus non-Status. Those who are enrolled as members of a tribe versus those who are not. Those who look Indian versus those of us who don’t. We have been and continue to be brutal about these distinctions, a muted strain of ethnocentrism. (King, 2012, p.162)

It is a sad reality of our colonized state as First Nation people that we have become so adept to colonization, so well trained to its processes, that we freely practice it on each other. Our colonizers have less work to do. We took our training well, adapting under its influence, to the point that we have invented and practiced new methods to exclude and wreak havoc on another. Divide and conquer. Divide the conquered. The conquered divides. On their own. It’s almost formulaic: the conquered could not have planned it better. And how were they able to do this so well? Through safe, relatively innocuous entities which were aimed at improving the state of Indians, education.
Chapter 6

Generational Education, Intergenerational Trauma

Education lives in a box that has a small window so that you can look in and see what you can’t have. It’s like window shopping for the poor and I understand the view from there. I am on the outside looking in. My pockets are empty, but it doesn’t matter, I need what is in there and I can’t have it. It makes me want to throw a rock through the window and run away. (Dolbeck, 2016)

When I began this journey, I wasn’t sure where it would take me. When we talk about intergenerational trauma, First Nation people like myself understand this term easily. Raised by a woman who occupied the edges of the dominant culture, I had firsthand ‘lived’ experience about how education missed the mark with Native people. It was a critical filter, which prevented Marie from fully participating in a society that valued education. Without it, it determined what employment was available to her, resulting in what neighborhoods we lived in as a family, and ultimately what people we routinely spent time with. My mother understood well the value of a good Eurocentric education, but could not see herself represented there. Battiste states that “no force has been more effective in oppressing Indigenous knowledge and heritage than the educational system” (2000, p. 86). Colonizing efforts of education were ever present, yet transparent. They quietly crept into every facet of education and with great shame the Native person found that their place was among the ruins of their culture. A debate about representation never fully took place, until Indigenous scholars began critically thinking about pedagogy and its value as it delivered to the Native student. It is from this standpoint that I discuss the braiding of colonizing educational practices and how they were woven through the experiences of three women and three generations of the Depotier clan: my mother Marie, my grandmother Beatrice and myself.
Dominant views held that formal education would prepare Native students for the modern world, but the opposite has happened. They were not prepared by education as it existed for the dominant world, and they were additionally unprepared to function naturally in the Indigenous world that they left behind. Because it was presented as an agent of progress, education rose above any objection and occupied an exalted place of altruism since its goal was to herald in the new generation. Who would question the good work it was doing? Educational reform is needed as a national strategy to deal with the preponderance of First Nation people living off reserve. Education, with its values entrenched in ideals of progress, needs to re-examine its colonial context and acknowledge its dominance.

6.1 Marie’s Experience

Figure 8: Beatrice Holding One of her Children

Education is thought to be the great equalizer, a place where differences are celebrated; where potential is realized; where the best of what society has to offer is given and where our collective futures are cultivated. While reviewing the purpose of this research, I shared with
Marie the potential viewership might include teachers, and I invited her thoughts on this. Given that this work would fulfil the requirements of a Masters of Education Degree, I thought it prudent to discuss this area as a theme. It predictably launched a raw rancorous chord that distressed her immediately. Her early recollection surrounds the nature of the “reserve” school. Kipawa was not formally a reserve during the time of her early education; it was more of a disingenuous outback municipality where the school housed both the Native children and non-Native families who were considered neighbours. There seemed to be an overlap of continuous contact which involved a range of enduring friendships and long standing feuds, yet there was a general acceptance of the other’s co-existence:

*Our early education in Kipawa was a big laugh. It was no secret that the teachers were there for other reasons. Some had no options. There was only one nice teacher in the bunch that gave a shit for any of us and she didn’t last. It was common for the teachers that were sent our way to be drunks themselves, or completely uninterested in the high calling of teaching. There was no way to put it, but they were unreliable.*

*After trudging along to the school, we would find it locked up and no teacher would turn up. I always thought that being a teacher was a high thing to strive for. That if you could call yourself a teacher, well that would be saying something honorable about yourself. Only a few kids ever really learned anything. The only ones who did were the kids that were sent to other schools. A few Indian parents had better resources and connections and they sent their kids to live with other families and their kids went to different schools. There was a tradeoff with that too because those kids were being packed up and shipped off too, even though some of them seem to come out of it okay.*

*It didn’t take long to find out that the teachers we had had no idea what a high calling was. No explanation, no warning. There just would be no one there to meet us and behave like a teacher is expected to. It was about 50/50, I’d say. Half the time we went and half the time we didn’t. Our parents didn’t especially care too much about it either. Girls were expected to get married and have children and boys rarely finished anyway and ended up working. Both situations were expected and considered more valuable than sitting in a desk and learning about things they didn’t need. High school was just unimportant.*
After Emile’s death, our parents thought moving away to urban areas would be a good idea; it would be better for dad for working options and we would be better prepared for work if we went to town schools. It didn’t work out the way because if I thought I knew what racism was before, it was about to get a whole lot worse.

Callendar did not feel like home. In fact, even though Kipawa was only an hour away by car, it felt like it was a whole lifetime away. I could not have imagined a world further away from where I grew up. School was not a welcoming experience and the reality of where we were started to set in. I wasn’t learning anything at school except that we were all unwelcome outsiders. My older brothers and sisters quit going pretty early on and that made the experience tougher for me. Being a big baby, crying and hiding over what the other kids were doing to me was just plain tough. I couldn’t handle it and the teachers were not there to help us. I don’t know what they were thinking, but I felt that we were more than what they wanted to deal with. It was easier not to go school and by grade 7, I was a drop out, but that was as far as anyone got at that time in our family and so I wasn’t considered a failure. It was just how it was.

You know that I never felt good about not having a useful education, but it just didn’t work for me. I carried that around for a long time: always feeling stupid and not wanting to open my mouth. I hoped that I could float along and not be noticed, but in the end, I always got somehow noticed and usually it was for being Indian. Being Indian was not anything to be proud of, not in my day anyway. Even though we tried to look, sound and act like others, we were always going to be different. We didn’t practice our language, not at all and we didn’t try to dress or act differently; but in the end, we just couldn’t help ourselves, some of our Indian ways would creep in.

Dad always liked the outdoors; couldn’t imagine to be cooped up and every morning he went out and greeted the new day, doing a little prayer of his own. When grandchildren came, there were a few original songs he taught them. He also had knowledge of natural plants and used them when we were sick. He didn’t ever do this boastfully, just humble and kind of quiet. And he loved his family and friends. Anyone was welcome and no matter how many mouths he was already feeding, there was always some to share if anyone turned up. We were expected to help anyone who was down on their luck in the community.
I remember this one time in Kipawa when there was recent widow in our community struggling to get work done around her house and dad sent some of us kids down to help her with her chores. There was lots to do and she was very grateful for all the help. She paid us money and we were very grateful too. When we got home, we showed dad what we were paid because we were kind of proud of what we thought we earned. He was some kind of mad and disappointed in us that we would take this woman’s money. He marched us back up there to give the money back and we were left with a clear message that we were doing work for our community and that was not paid work. You never expected anything in return when you are helping your community because you never know when that might be you who might need a kind turn. I never forgot that. Communities are supposed to work together and that was sure not what we saw in Callendar.

People in cities sometimes think only about themselves and it’s got to be hard when bad things happen. Where’s their families? Who helps them? What if they are all alone? They have got to rely on agencies and people they don’t even know to show kindness and sometimes those people are just in it for the money, too. We hear so much about depression and anxiety these days. I can tell you back in my day, people didn’t spend time talking about those things. Sure sad things happened and people were going through difficult times, but there was people around to help, to show kindness and try to understand with you what was happening. You weren’t expected to get through things on your own without help. I think the way people are living today is making them sick. So cut off from one another: it’s not a good way to live. We need each other in so many ways. When you are going it alone in difficult times, it just so hard to cope on your own. I know because it happened to me.

Kipawa was like that. Even though we were poor, we were all poor together, so it didn’t feel that different. We never went back there to live, only to visit. I missed being around my cousins and the people back there. We stayed away because of the jobs dad was getting were more regular. He was home every night to have dinner and Ma liked that a lot. There was no escaping the racism in Callendar though. Your granny took to staying indoors all the time now and I think it was because that was a safe place for her. I’m sure the parents of all those Callendar kids weren’t any better with her than their kids were with us.
Now I feel things are different. There is still racism, but people are proud to say they are Indian. Back in my day, you said you were anything but an Indian. Some of us Indians got by claiming we were Italian or French, anything but Indian. I wasn’t so lucky; I look pretty Indian, like nothing else. It affected us all in our family, both the boys and the girls. The Indian men, like my brothers included, took up with white women. I think it made them feel better about themselves. A white woman on their arm was always better than an Indian one that might look like me. That left us Indian women alone and I think that made it much harder for the Indian woman in places like cities. We didn’t have our community and we soon learned that we weren’t welcome in the city either.

But when I got older, I think education could have saved me. I would not have been trapped so long in a bad marriage. That’s why I was always after you girls to get a good education. When I was young and inexperienced, I was scared of the world. I was too young when I got married. I was so full of unrealistic dreams that were collapsing around me with no way to cope with all the disappointments. All the good things I had hoped for all went the other way. Marriage was like that for me. It almost ruined me. Life is a gamble and marriage to one person for life is one of the biggest ones you can take. You might have better luck at the casino tables, if you are not careful with your choices. Women should be able to take care of themselves; that’s the big lesson that I learned. For me, education has the same importance of land. You can never lose on either one. Marriage… well the odds aren’t so good there. I’ve been to so many weddings and you see the expense being poured into the big show and for what? A few years later to fight over the stuff they bought. I’m all for quieter weddings and why not put your efforts into a nice trip together? At least you’d have that nice memory when it all goes to shit.

(Dolbeck, 2016)

Education as it was on the reserve was an afterthought. Teachers came ill-prepared, some even without other available options, arrived in Kipawa with a lack of interest in their surroundings and their commitment dissolved quickly when they were unable to engage with this predominately Native community. Teachers are well trained and well equipped with a pedagogy that has been learned and accepted as fact, so much so, that they are resistant to learn anything which challenges their beliefs: they often settle into a complacency which can last the duration of
their careers. Classrooms are well populated with teachers who continue to practice what they have been taught as fact and do it with little self-awareness. They are often from a group of the studious, the pupils who were the good students themselves and well acquainted with the curriculum of the day. It worked for them and it will work as well for their students seems to be the thinking: it is all matter of fact and common sense because it served so many so well.

Native people don’t approach learning this way and they may challenge themselves to consider other views since the enlightenment of one may help the rest. In other words, in the sphere of “common sense” it is quite possible for the group to be faulty in their thinking. It is not majority rules. Teachers who work in First Nation schools often find their thinking challenged when their assumptions are not valued. Just because education has always worked that way for them (teachers), it is not always a good enough reason for Native communities to adapt uncritically especially when a cursory reading of history informs that both may be at cross purposes. When Native communities reject conventional educational systems, teachers are mystified and routinely devolve their criticism toward the communities they can’t understand. Teachers attitudes were of troubling concern in Orlanski’s study since frustrations felt by teachers were explained from an all too often cultural “deficit” perspective (2011, p. 135). The deficit worth noting was always located in the Aboriginal community, never the other way around. Such teacher attitudes found their way into researcher discussions in muted tones painted with subjective racial theories. It was stated, for instance, that Native people’s alcohol abuse was due in part to their physical intolerance to it. Teachers gave no thought to the relevance of the postcolonial discourse involving First Nation people and were roundly dismissive of anything approaching this discussion since that would be “the easy answer,” (p. 136) a presumed reference to this discussion being exhaustively trying and extraneous to their needs. Others teachers clung to narratives which suggested that the community that they failed to reach neither respected
Additionally, the teachers reasoned, the Native community had “an absence of positive role models,” and could not see the benefits of the education (p. 136). One teacher, within the study, felt that altering his teaching practices was unnecessary and that overly focusing on the needs of his Native students would be akin to “spoiling them a lot,” (p. 130) certainly not anything they would need. Teachers, by and large, routinely emphasized many negative attitudes they claimed to witness from the Native community, though surprisingly lacked any insight into how their own negative attitudes had framed their teaching practices. Essentially they had given up on the students and were without motivation to seek out changes, preferring to accept that student failure was a consequence of a community which was completely at odds with them. Troubling since the Native student is found to be lacking early on by teaching professionals who understand so little about Native communities.

It comes to the heart of just what the purpose of education is. In the provincial sense, there is a belief that education can be standardized and is capable of being measured at requisite intervals as though all students are at the same place at the same time. It’s a myth that any seasoned teacher knows, yet difference in performance is marked by ranging ability. The idea of individual ability is especially beguiling in modern capitalistic societies, since as Goldthorpe alleges “the idea that individuals are rewarded on the basis of their innate talent and effort has wide appeal in modern societies and often has been used to explain or justify social inequalities…origins of inequality are thus located at the early stages in one’s life” (Gale, 2002, p.12). Ability ranking doesn’t consider social inequity; rather, it attempts to rationalize its system of ranking. Power dynamics are at play, a part of the colonization project. Education had the duty of assimilating Native students and assimilation strives to have the child measure up. Armed with
this agenda, teachers in Native communities delivered education through a lens of improving the wild nature of the Indian child.

It was from this position of knowing what was best that so much harm was done. From their position of power, a teacher or school was given complete control to do as they saw fit because it was believed that they simply knew more. Governance of the day had a preference for religious institutions to deliver education since the Native person was bankrupt of spirit. Religious instruction coupled with educational practices, could assimilate the Native child and prepare them to function in the wider society. Residential schools and schools aimed at serving First Nation communities did not have scholarship values at the core of their agenda; rather, such schools designed for Native children simply prepared them for servitude and often did so brutally. Discrimination was legislated early on and it should be of no surprise that its roots are buried deep. It is a stubborn arrogance born of power and one that infects any atmosphere for learning. Though not a residential school, the Kipawa School my mother attended was not designed to meet the needs of the students. It seemed, from the community’s perception, a useless disconnected process which employed, for the most part, the most disengaged disinterested teachers. Little premium or expectation was placed on the student or similarly the teacher. Few students emerged with adequate literacy skills.

Out of love, my grandparents made the decision to provide better opportunities for their children so that they might fully participate in society. The prevailing belief was that it was best not to practice anything cultural since it would not be needed. The small community of Callendar was intolerant of the new, sole Native family living in their midst. The hope the Depotier family had with their sojourn in urban areas began to evaporate quickly. School fights were common and the teachers, according to Marie, sided unconditionally with the non-Native families and their children. Marie and her siblings simply stopped going to school altogether. The Depotier clan
could not tolerate the school environment and their early exit made it easy for teachers who didn’t know how to deal with them either. To this day, Marie remembers that as she and her brothers and sisters dropped out of school one by one, no one ever called or visited on their behalf to see what happened. It was as if, she later recalls, they didn’t even exist. It’s a curious dichotomy to be a Native person: to be simultaneously discounted, dismissed as though you are so completely inadequate, invisible for consideration. By equal measure and by contrast, being Native is also about being visible and singled out, being obvious to all for your perceived deficiencies as they are paraded around for judgment. Either way, you are both invisibly dismissed and overtly scrutinized for being less than others because of who you are.

The urbanized experience of Marie laid a foundation which was couched in disconnection. Moving away from their traditional home estranged Marie and the family from traditional ways of being in the world. What replaced traditionally learned knowledge was imposed mainstream ideals found everywhere in provincial education. Educational practices did not invite Indigenous learning and more accurately didn’t acknowledge its existence in any meaningful way. Generations behind Marie question many things about education, and it is now opened up to debate. High numbers of First Nation people live off reserve and have become essentially unknown to the reserves they have left behind. First Nations receive no funding for them and when families move away, little contact is maintained because the primary focus of bands shifts to their on-reserve membership. Without supports, urbanized Native people find themselves in urban provincial classrooms being fed a steady diet of colonial education. They have no access to Native culture and language and are left to identify themselves as fringe players in the larger collective. Education reinforced that what was left behind was a natural part of the process and that they were moving along the “progress” continuum. Classrooms are not viewed as places where debate or challenge is natural. They are, after all, repositories of knowledge.
Many other fringe groups have challenged the notion of neutral education as it applies to a one size fits all application.

It soon became clear that it didn’t matter where Marie and her siblings received their education, the result would always be the same. Education was simply not for them; however, it continued to occupy a landscape of inaccessible privilege. It was a landscape where she and her siblings were pushed out and places they ultimately rejected. It’s been argued of late that disproportionately high dropout rates of Aboriginal students could be more properly viewed from the Indigenous perspective as something else. According to the Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Rights in Education, the high dropout rates of Aboriginal students could be viewed as high rejection rates (Wallace, 1996). Since there is an overwhelming lack of Aboriginal inclusion, Wallace argues that Native students and their communities have simply given up on the system. High rejection rates of mainstream education are evident because he states, “over the last 30 years Indigenous people throughout the world have argued that they have been denied equity in non-Indigenous education systems, and that non-Indigenous education systems have failed to provide education services which are both scholarly and culturally nurturing” (p. 5).
6.2 Beatrice’s Experience

Figure 9: Beatrice at age 5

It’s too bad that education was used against Indian people. In fact it was used as another tool to put the Indian person down. I know this because I see what happened to Native people when they had rotten education shoved down their throats. I see the effects it has in Native communities. It has left many people without the necessary parenting skills to pass down to their kids. Several of my friends had to live with the effects of residential school.

One close friend that I met from the Psychiatric spent her whole childhood in a residential school, only to be handed her bag on her sixteenth birthday. She learned nothing but how to beg. The nuns would take her by the hand at night to the priests to do what he liked. A childhood of abuse, every kind you can think of and there she was with nowhere to go when she had been used up as a child. No skills, no education, nowhere to go. Even with the recent settlements, and she got one in the six figures, it hasn’t been a blessing since the settlement, the money has been a reason for her kids to fight. They can’t wait to get their hands on her money. I love this friend dearly, but if we want to go out for coffee, I have to pay because she is always broke and I’m on a pension myself. Her kids took all her money and she’s happy to give it away to them to make up for the lack of parenting they all received when they were kids.
I thought our little Depotier family had escaped the nasty effects of the residential school, but now I’m not so sure. Many years after Ma had died, I was going through her belongings. I was sorting through pictures and trying to get them to certain family members. I found papers with Ma’s name on them from a residential school in Quebec and she was referred to as a pupil. Everything was in French, but it clearly was a residential school. This is difficult part of our history, I think. I was closest to Ma. I took her everywhere with me, you know that. There wasn’t a day that didn’t go by that I didn’t see my mother. Every single day. I took her grocery shopping, to the bank, out for lunch, you name it. It was always me. I even went to Ma’s to do my laundry and visit having tea while the clothes dried on the line.

I thought I knew everything about her but it seems that some secrets can be buried deep. She always told me that she was self-taught. She had wanted to learn how to read and write and set to teaching herself and I thought that was something. She never had any interest in watching television and would fall asleep whenever she was pointed in front of one. Right up until she died, she read the daily North Bay paper and held views on the goings on around North Bay. For a little old lady she was very informed. According to her, she had never been to school, but here among all her belongings was something that contradicted this. She had gone to a residential school several miles from her home, so now I wonder.

And another thing we learned about her: she told a few other lies. I think Ma knew that some things were just not right and shouldn’t be shared. She always told us that she was 16 when she married our dad, but when we did the math, it was more like 13. It’s hard to picture a 13-year-old with a 20-year-old man, but that’s we have here. Our oldest brother was born two years later when she was 15 years old, not 17, as we were always told. It doesn’t matter now, of course. Their marriage was a success, but damnit it makes you wonder. Life was difficult then and people were making difficult decisions in order to get by. So now it’s got me thinking: was there another reason why they moved deep into the bush where they couldn’t be found, cut off from the outside world? If Ma was in the Residential School system, how did she get out when she was around 12 or 13 years of age when that age that would have kept her there longer? Was she visiting and then quickly married off, so that more of the Residential School effect was avoided? We will never know for sure.
I knew one thing about my Mom, though: painful taboo things just didn’t exist for her. That’s just how it was for her. So here’s what I do know for sure: my mother’s Mom, my grandmother, died when Ma was five years old and we really don’t know what happened to her during that time up until she married dad at fifteen.

Your sister tried to look into that, but was unable to find out much. All I know is my mother never told me a word about this. Nothing. As far as we all knew, she had been passed around to extended family members after her mother died... According to her, it was like this until she married my father at fifteen.

She did not tell us that she was in any French school several miles away from Kipawa. So it makes me wonder what secrets were we kept from. Ma certainly never liked to face things that were bad. She would pretend they didn’t exist. And I’ll tell you something else and I do want you to write about it. It’s high time that we stop hiding from the truth, no matter how unpleasant it is. We get to relive these secrets all over again when we don’t acknowledge the power they have over us. It can make us sick and weak in ways that people can’t understand. People look at the drug addict or alcoholic and wonder all kinds of things about them; they judge them for being such a burden and even find them disgusting. I have learned to look at these people and ask myself what happened to them. What traumas are they dealing with that make them punish themselves so much? What hatred was inflicted on them to learn to care so little for themselves? I don’t believe little babies come into this world and want to choose a life of misery. No, I believe someone taught them that. They want to be loved. The price for not loving them is the person who can’t cope with the world. Sometimes these same people don’t learn to be a human and instead take it out on the world and become dangerous. All of it goes back to how well or how little we love each other.

My grandfather, your granny’s dad, was a very bad man. He’s been put into Kermot’s book in an affectionate way because he was an old man by the time Kermot knew him and we must always respect our elders. He did have some traditional knowledge and he had a way of influencing others. Whenever we saw him, he assumed that he was in control and running the show. Us kids, especially the girls, never liked him. Nobody really liked him. I remember that he had very Native features with lighter skin and blue eyes. I’ve been told that his mother, a Native woman with drinking problems, was passed around non-
Native men and he was the result. He was never really loved and who knows what his childhood was like. Anyway, one of my older sisters taught me how to hide under the house when he was alone with us. I was afraid under that porch because there was snakes under there, but she would drag me under there with her and would order me to stay quiet. We would lay there for hours. She warned me to stay away from him and I later learned that more than one of my sisters knew about his terrible ways. I have a clear memory of my dad throwing him out of house when one of my sisters was found in his room crying. It was a huge commotion in our house. My dad never threw anyone out, nobody, no matter how down on their luck they were. He’d always say, ” what’s one more mouth to feed?” I loved my dad because he was such a kind man and so this incident stood out for me. He threw his wife’s father out of our house and told him to never come back again. And we really didn’t see much of him after that.

When we were adults, me and my sisters would talk about him, our grandfather, and wonder if it was possible that he could skip his daughter, living right under his nose without protection, and just wait to move onto to his granddaughters. We don’t think that’s how it works for men with these tendencies. Anyway Ma could never acknowledge these things. In her mind, they just didn’t exist. She remembered none of these things about her father and would get quite angry if anyone would try to talk about them. In those days, people rarely mentioned these things as if they didn’t exist, but I can tell you they did and I don’t care to be quiet about them just because some people can’t deal with the truth. So it makes me wonder what terrible secrets lay buried in my Mom’s heart. Why not tell us about being in a school? It might have been where she learned to read and write, so why lie about it? Maybe there were more terrible things there that she didn’t want to face or remember. She took her secrets to her grave and we’ll never know for sure. (Dolbeck, 2016)

Trauma was very much a part of the educational experience of our ancestors and affects us in ways we fully don’t understand. My granny never fully lived in the outside world with confidence and we learned much later that she was tied to the residential experience in some way. Education was never viewed from this position as particularly auspicious in orientation and it should come as no surprise when generations later, it is rejected, or in my case, deeply questioned. It was a sphere to be feared; where one false move could have you extradited and
have your family lose complete control. It is interesting to note that there wasn’t a formal residential school in Kipawa, but there were ties with ones in Sault St. Marie and Quebec. I was often perplexed by this; all the talk about residential schools and somehow our family, all the generations, had escaped its arm. My grandfather worked hard, yet they were poor in the conventional sense and this, on closer scrutiny, would not have escaped notice of any Indian agent. I’ve asked her if there was an Indian agent in Kipawa that she was aware of and she is very definite in the affirmative. There was and nobody liked him and she indicated that they did their best to avoid him. They did live far in the bush and she claims that was difficult to access. She attributes this to the possibility of them escaping notice. Also from the standpoint of the community, the family was largely intact; both parents very much involved in the upbringing of the children. Granny was always at home, never drank a drop of alcohol and grandpa was a persistent working man, desperately trying to eke out a living and feed his ever growing family. Still, children were taken and sent huge distances away, often in the event of a death of a parent. Such was the case of Beatrice, at five years old when her mother, my great-grandmother, died.

On my grandmother’s story, our family was completely confounded by Beatrice’s connection to a French residential school. In Marie’s recollections, her mother’s version of her early history were rather opaque, somewhat contradictory snippets without detail. There may be more than what we know. It is a curious footnote to the resilient nature of our grandmother. We will never know the full extent of her traumas; she never shared them with anyone. We just accepted that she was an ever present example of feminine strength. She nurtured all her family members with compassion and without judgment. As marriages collapsed and teenagers took to stormy exchanges with parents, she took them all in and always without expectation of payment. It was a safe place to go and let things settle down. I know this because I was one of the teenagers that landed on her doorstep and I was not the only one. You never really knew who would be in some sort of transition or difficult situation, but if they were, they were at her place. Whenever
family members arrived in North Bay, it didn’t matter from where they were coming from or who they were with, hers was their first stop. It was the place to check in, get caught up, and have tea and probably more. No prior phone call was needed or expected. In fact, if you did call, conversations were stilted, practical and purposeful. The caller had to bear all the effort of communication on the phone because Granny never really warmed up to its intrusion in her space. She would always preface it with an invitation to visit in person and skip the telephone call altogether.

6.3 Catherine’s Experience

My early experiences taught me to become disengaged and the Indian presence in the curriculum was entirely confusing. I felt it better to disconnect rather than initiate any relationship with it. I remember an incident quite clearly. I was in Grade 4 and had brought home homework. Our Social Studies textbook had characterized the Iroquois peoples as being “blood thirsty savages”, to which Marie was loudly opposed. Seizing my work, she forbade me to complete it. This became commonplace behaviour from Marie. She had been a frequent letter writer to the North Bay Nugget, a local non-descript paper for local readers interested in community goings on. She had and continues to be on the lookout for pernicious views located innocuously as fact. Such were her ways to fire off the latest diatribe to set the record straight. She then, to my horror, prepared a rancorous letter to my classroom teacher about this damaging view of Iroquoian people for which I was profoundly embarrassed. I wondered, why the fuss? I couldn’t understand why she bristled so fiercely on something so distant from our experience.

I thought: we were not Iroquois, we weren’t really even Indian people at all, since we were living like everybody else. Weren’t Iroquois Indians like this anyway? That is how it was portrayed. It wasn’t the first time I had heard about the handiwork of the Iroquois. There was poor Father Jean Brebeuf who was unmercifully tortured by barbarian Indians, maybe they were
Huron or Iroquois, doesn’t really matter: they were all the same, so I thought. These Indians were impediments roaming the lands of Canada undoing the proper good work of good European settlers and something had to be done about it. These Native groups, let’s called them savages, were such an enduring nuisance that selfless vicars were sent in to tame these wild people from the wild frontier. The presence of the church was a good thing, right? We had just gone on a class trip to the Midland settlement. We learned about all this and saw countless abandoned pairs of crutches lining the inside walls of the church. Miracles were performed here: we saw the evidence. There were no violations or provocations from the church and its messengers; just this, seemingly unprovoked madness from devils and heathens who would interfere with righteous saints. That’s what I remember; that’s what was taught. How can you not be shamed by your relationship to this and not shrink away in disgust, ultimately burying whatever connection you have to this imagery?

Curriculum is carefully selected to reflect mainstream thought and values. In Leslie Owen Wilson’s “Curriculum Index,” she explores the curious nature of curriculum. She calls curriculum, which is ordered around specific ideas and which serves the purpose of a specific group’s interest, to be examples of Hidden/Covert curriculum (Wilson, 2005). Traditional telling of history from Eurocentric frame of reference serves to maintain its hegemony. From adopting a particular view, material is selected which supports these ideas. Delivered curriculum is understood to be “Overt”; that is, a written format which supports mainstream thinking. What is absent in curriculum has presumed inferior rank. In order words, it didn’t make the cut, not worth mentioning, not within the rank of knowledge needed to pass onto the next generation. Established values and retelling of history from a preferred perspective are examples of Hidden Curriculum. The Native experience, as far as mainstream curriculum was concerned, had been largely left out, and if presented at all, was presented cursorily. On one hand Native people are represented as wild unbidden savages, but simultaneously a construct of a noble savage emerged.
He was always dressed the same and doing the same things. It is a romantic recreation that poses no challenge since that romantic Indian died, long gone. Nothing left to fear. No need to discuss the insatiable march for land that possessed early settlers; rather, the death of the Indian made it acceptable to tell history from only one perspective, the settler’s view.

Another important feature to curriculum is the relative value of what we teach. An extension from what is NOT taught to what IS frames the learner to assign importance, a hidden curriculum where value is expressed openly. There is a danger of juxtaposing heritage language programs with western ones since it is clear to the very youngest Indigenous student that their language and culture have reduced status. Wright and Taylor’s study *Identity and the Language of the Classroom* observed how young non-Native kindergarten children divided themselves up early, preferring children from similar backgrounds before they had truly experienced academic curriculum in any great depth. They displayed attitudes which tended to display a strong preference for white/mainstream culture and aligned easily with it. Curiously, the Native children in the study were not so inclined to these behaviours. There may have been other external factors at play but one thing is certain, schools must be vigilant in their efforts to present curriculum involving First Nation students carefully since their teachers represent mainstream culture. As suggested by the study’s title, there exists a language of the classroom and that language is positioned clearly from a mainstream paradigm and is communicated at its earliest introduction to its youngest students (Wright & Taylor, 1995). What is hidden is truly always in view if you are looking. Values. Attitudes from a position of superiority. Native people are driven see its invisible vein reach rove across textbooks and mainstream classrooms.

Fast forward to my high school years when a short clip from the National Film Board was shared with my Grade 11 class. It was very stereotypical in its view of presenting the Native experience. Chanting, dancing and singing were observed as a Native brave, in leather regalia, circled a fire. There was little preparation in the presentation, so the young teenage audience had
no reference, no experience from which to receive it appropriately. There was considerable 
snickering and ridicule. Truthfully, being so urbanized myself, I simply could not relate to the 
images either. It was times like these when I was relieved to have carried more of my father’s 
European genes, than those of my distinctly visible Native mother. There is comfort in looking 
like you fit in, even when your heart is screaming that you don’t. Truth be told, when my mother 
decided to skip parent/teacher nights, I was secretly delighted by the prospect that I would not be 
confronted with these unpleasant realities.

Education has historically been insulated from criticism as it presents itself as a fairly 
innocuous, even an altruistic social activity necessary to usher in the new generation. My early 
educational experience was “the idea of an Imaginary Indian as a social and cultural icon frozen 
in time” (Donald, 2004, p.28). According to Donald (2004), such well known examples of 
stereotypes; the braids, the inclination to sing, drum and dance and the inability to adapt to all 
things modern among others, had a profound impact on the perception of Native peoples’ abilities 
and how they could participate in wider Canadian society. The Imaginary Indian is never 
contemporary. This form of “Indianess” is a fully colonized interpretation and renders the Indian 
dead or locked in time, a relic of bygone times.

This disconnect with First Nation people and education begins with teachers and this is 
not their fault necessarily, but it is a fact. What is another fact is the low success rates of Native 
students. Since an overwhelming majority of a Native student’s teachers will be non-Native, it is 
of value to discuss how the fracture occurs. Kanu (2006) noted that incongruity between the 
Native student’s home life and school life presented a serious obstacle enough that in order to 
belong to one, the other would need to be discounted. Rather than a continual mismatch, a bridge 
would need constructing. Kanu’s study follows the in-depth approach two secondary school 
teachers as they taught their grade nine Native Studies courses using same board textbook. One 
teacher chose to deliver the curriculum in a traditional format, preferring to keeping a more or
less an arm’s length from the content. He readily shared his lack of confidence regarding First Nation issues and felt that too much adaptation was required and not enough resources were available. The other teacher taught from a more uniquely Indigenous perspective and infused Indigenous perspectives as underpinnings of all the learning in his classroom and as a result, his students significantly outperformed the other group. Both teachers were non-Native, but one had a sincere belief he could do it and did so with interest. What is clear from the study is the importance of a teacher’s attitude; they need both a sense of efficacy and capacity (Kanu, 2006, p. 131-132). They need to believe they can do it and must have the ability to carry it out. It is what I have observed with teachers during my 20 years in education. They don’t have to be Native (though that is great news if more Indigenous students have a calling towards the profession) to teach our First Nation students well. They need a willing spirit and strong dedication to the calling of teaching. Having the right attitude will move them towards seeking out resources, changing their format, developing their knowledge and engaging their students. I see these teachers in the educational system, but I see the others too, too often.

Transformative learning relates to learning that is challenged to its very core or as Mezirow challenges in his widely accepted view of “habits of the mind” (1997, p. 5). Education operates from a predominantly Eurocentric point of reference. It is articulated, albeit innocuously, as neutral in its position, but nothing could be farther from the truth. In order for these rather firmly entrenched ideas to be changed, they would have to be first acknowledged. Our curriculum is shaped by European thought; its preference is for telling history from the settlers’ point of view, its pedagogical practice is one of dividing disciplines and reordering their value, and its dynamic is placing worthwhile knowledge in books with teachers as its primary purveyors. We, Mezirow (1997) allows, could call these ‘habits of the mind’ or even ‘ways of doing business’ because we simply accept, without question, that this is the way it is and should be.
Basso recounts learned wisdom from an Apache elder in his article *Wisdom Sits Here*:

“You can’t live long without water and you can’t live long without wisdom. You need to drink both” (1996, p. 122). This elder, Dudley, likened the human quest for knowledge akin to drinking water. It is as basic and necessary to the spirit as water is to the body. Spirit is what gives life meaning. This statement made me think about education, knowledge and experience. I drifted in and out of education for years, finally finding myself in a tiny hospitable reserve which I have come to think as home. With no real plan, I fulfilled my teaching credentials and began working for my First Nation. It seems I too fell into the comfortable rhythm of chasing down the next dollar and busily attended to the regulations, policies and reporting restrictions. Graham Smith summarizes it this way in Indigenous Struggle for the Transformation of Education and Schooling when he says that the politics of distraction is:

The colonizing process of being kept busy by the colonizer, of always being on the ‘back-foot’, ‘responding’, ‘engaging’, ‘accounting’, ‘following’, and ‘explaining.’ These are typical strategies often used over Indigenous people. The ‘logic’ (notwithstanding that many of these practices are not even thought about- they are better described as bad habits) seems to be that if ‘Natives’ are kept busy doing ‘trivial pursuits’ there will be little time left to complain, question or rebel against the ‘status quo’ conditions…It occurs when oppressed groups take on dominant thinking and ideas uncritically and as ‘common-sense’, even though those ideas may in fact contribute to forming their own oppression…It is the ultimate way to colonize people; you have the colonized colonizing themselves! (2003, p. 2)

Brilliant and sadly, true. To get our share of the pie (those limited Native dollars), our day is filled with requisite reporting tasks which keep our minds busy, our hearts empty and our actions fueling the cogs of colonialism. It seems I had a thing or two to learn about “habits of the mind.” Without really seeing it happen, I was a willing cog in the wheel of what has become named the “politics of distraction.” It all makes sense until it doesn’t; the moment when bitter clarity makes obvious a strident purpose. When I first learned about what is called the ‘the
politics of distraction,’ I was incensed. I had spent so much of my professional life serving its purpose critically unaware. Secretly, though, I wondered why frequent, detailed reporting structures were demanded. I knew from experience, few people read the reports, certainly not the government staff who demanded them. Their follow-up questions always gave that away. So why force First Nation communities to acquiesce to such structures? It seemed to me the answer is clear: it is simply because they can. Their indefatigable will can be forced on people they control and remind them often of who is in charge. To learn is to question and we may have a duty to question when we look around and see a lack of useful knowledge.

A critical examination of any definition of Indian needs to include multiple influences and perspectives which have affected Native people. When we can acknowledge this, we might begin to approach a balanced rereading of history. After having several conversations with our Alderville Native Liaison Education Person, I have come to understand her frustration. Classroom teachers of today want to include the Native experience, but their understanding is limited. They simply don’t know what they don’t know. Teachers want the one day workshop about Powwows and regalia and have little room for anything else. This activity in isolation does not define inclusiveness of the First Nation experience and does little to tie it to existing curriculum. In the case of Alderville, our drums and cultural components are invited to ceremonial events, but when the drums are packed up, so are the intents for deeper inclusion.

Last year, our youth drum was invited to the grand opening of their new high school and the boys practiced in eager anticipation. The event was well attended with several dignitaries, one being the Minister of Education, Liz Sanders. It was a highly successful evening with many events strategically planned in tandem and everything was going well, that is until it was learned that one superintendent had casually made disparaging remarks about the Native drummers to the sitting jazz band. He said: “There’s more to music than banging on drums and yelling; We wouldn’t have been in such a hurry to take over this country if we knew this was going to be the
kind of thing we would have to put up with.” Oops, “habits of the mind?” Here we had an elderly man of considerable rank acknowledge his part in colonizing practices of Canada and from a position steeped in superiority. I’m sure he thought he was being flippantly humorous, but his denigration of young proud students washed over the night in shame. He, of course, denied his remarks preferring to absurdly allege that his objection was due in part to the level of noise the drummers produced and he was worried about the damage such activity might do to their ears. The reaction was swift. An independent investigation found the report to be credible and enough pressure was brought to bear until the superintendent resigned.

Education for Native students has little relevance; it may not, as studies indicate, promise secure employment. It all means that teachers need to come into the teaching profession with a different attitude; one that acknowledges the dynamics of power and one that requires them to be more critical of how students acquire knowledge. They don’t need to be an Aboriginal person to do an effective job. Teachers can and have been effective agents of change. Curriculum needs to focus less on the “culture of whiteness,” less on European settlement, fewer great men and less about the pioneer experience. The First Nation experience needs to be present and not a tokenistic way. Ideally, students may be taught a ‘both ways’ education, perhaps learning about two different points of view which may conflict, but may on occasion, converge. First Nation curriculum is infused with components of mainstream education to prepare student for both worlds, as Corbiere, states:

In essence, then, we First Nation people want our languages and culture to flourish, but we also want to participate in the economy, which means speaking English. It would appear that the two goals are at cross purposes, and indeed these goals have been presented as incompatible by the English-only community. However, recent research has indicated that a well-planned bilingual education can enable these two types of competing goals to be more compatible. (2000, p. 113)
It is a bilingual education of sorts and it is not a new idea. Many scholars and researchers support the legitimacy of bilingual education. What is different is the position that Native communities are not looking to have Indigenous experience taught in isolation or as a subset of the curriculum. Rather, Native people are exploring a more comprehensive approach which would ultimately transform educational experiences for Native students. An ability to enjoy both worlds seems to be the goal as illustrated Dr. Scott Tunison’s *Aboriginal Learning: A Review of Current Metrics of Success*, as he quotes an elder; “If you talk to young people who are strong in their culture and ask them about their academics, you will find they have graduated and some are going to college and university” (Tunison, 2007, p. 12). There is a notion that the two worlds may have a method of morphing together after all.

Donald (2004) questions the notion of what an Indian really is and tackles its definition. He adeptly employs the use of the painting technique of “pentimento,” the act of painting over painting. In this metaphor, each layer interacts with the other and getting back to the original painting is almost impossible. He further postulates that a mixing of cultures needs to be examined. A permanent mixing of cultures is explored in the term “metissage.” In fact, he uses the term much like a verb, to “metissage” Indian race, language and culture. What I appreciate about the view of “metissage” is the notion that conflicting worldviews don’t have to necessarily agree and fit neatly together, but rather acknowledge the existence of the other and make room for their existence. The analogy provides a powerful image of how two or more cultures might mix, collide, overlap, with heavier applications here and there, and in some places nothing or very little at all (Donald, 2004).

Just as Donald would see the influence of cultures in the verb to “metissage,” so does Giroux with the larger interpretation of what knowledge is. While Donald is preoccupied with questions of what an Indian is, Giroux’s article *Practitioner’s Insights: Change* sees the dominion of knowledge as equally problematic. Knowledge, she argues, is not some fixed neutral notion in
time to be discovered and harnessed equally for everyone. Knowledge, rather, is an active process constantly evolving. She affirms that “this new thinking creates a tension in the old system that has traditionally seen knowledge as fixed and certain” (1995, p. 3). She cautions us to be critical of ‘thinking you know’ since this is the dangerous territory of common sense and where ignorance and complacencies flourish.

Almost all Indigenous people, in particular those who have suffered the impact and effects of colonization, have struggled to access education that acknowledges, respects and “promotes the right of Indigenous people to be Indigenous” (Wallace, 1996, p. 5). This perspective originates from a view that any perceived deficit is located more properly within the educational system and not necessary the Native child. Perhaps the systems have failed the student and not the other way around. Focusing on the student’s deficits does little to address where the system went wrong. Within the Coolangatta document, there were many recommendations, many of them echoing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples first appearing as a draft document (1993) and later adopted in (2006). This became the tenet of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee to be discussed further in the next chapter.

From this experience, it is curious to note that many years later, after raising a large family, my mother went on to eventually gain a university education. She always had an abiding interest in learning but her early provincial education did not inspire it. Throughout my years growing up, she was adamant that I secure an education denied to her. It was her mantra and one that I railed against in my teens. Trapped in the shortcomings of my youth, I challenged her limits, preferring to dismiss her opinions that I was loath to acknowledge. After all, I reasoned, what did she know about it? She never made it past grade school. What I didn’t understand though was that her lack of education limited her access to many things which eventually trickled
down to us all in ways that I didn’t see. She wanted us to carry the torch and soldier on in a system that had locked her out. Being a young person, I simply wanted to rebel and not be given the task of righting the wrongs of a distant past. I didn’t share her early experience, didn’t connect to them, so I thought. What I did share, though, was an acute feeling of not fitting in. Clearly something separated me from the other students and teachers, but I countered, it was me who was different. I didn’t fit anywhere, not within my family, my urban neighborhoods, or even that distant place in the woods in northern Quebec from where Marie came. I had just enough Indian blood to disqualify me from everywhere and not enough to live on a reserve. Marie, though I hadn’t thought to consider, was far worse off by my own way of thinking. Her brown face with distinctive Native features marked her and followed her everywhere. She had all the Indian blood and no access. There was no escape and she was like many Native women living in urban areas, defined by it.

Generational education and intergenerational trauma were practiced and braided throughout the Depotier line. Thomas King and I have become good friends I like to believe. His sharp wit and uncalculated wisdom has made him my unwitting companion for this thesis journey and I hope he doesn’t mind. Someday I hope to have the honour of meeting him formally, but for now I am satisfied when his words jump out and bring into focus what I am trying to say. He refers to educational goals as engines that “continue to push us up the cattle chute of capitalism” (2012, p. 117). That is their purpose after all. Native people were a trying dilemma since they did not operate within its system. Education in itself is not the problem necessarily, rather it is the goals for which it serves and how those goals are achieved; that is at the heart of the problem. The real problem is the unmitigated belief that education originates in a vacuum free of disingenuous purpose, with a belief that all is fair and good. Thomas King is adamant in his beliefs, too and says “Here’s the irony. Native people have never been resistant to education. We had been educating our children long before Europeans showed up. Nor were we against our children
learning about white culture. Education is generally described in terms of ‘benefit.’ But why, in
the name of education, should we have been required to give up everything we had, to give up
who we were in order to become something we did not choose to be? Where was the benefit in
that?” (2012, p. 119).

Education, it seems, taught the Native child that she was less than the rest. For my
grandmother, educational practices were designed to pound out her ‘Indianess’, while Marie’s
experience seemed to conclude that she was absent and not worth consideration. By the time I
arrived, the ‘Indian’ had become a relic, ancient and thankfully buried with all his wild
proclivities to be of any useful threat. Now for the next generation of Depotier people, we stand at
a different precipice, I hope. Will educational practices invite change and reflect a new dynamic
which does not ask the Native child to trade in who she is and accept her inferior role? Time will
tell.
Chapter 7

Resilience and Richard’s Advice

7.1 Gift of Resilience

Very recently, after powering up my computer, I was stunned to learn that Richard Wagamese had passed away. At first, I thought it to be an internet prank, but soon learned that it was indeed true. Richard embodied the two concurrent themes I was developing for this last chapter. Having been apprehended at a young age, he was a product of the 60s scoop where young Native children were taken from their homes and placed within the foster care system or placed for adoption, usually with non-Native families. Richard’s early experiences fractured his connection with his family and home community. With incredible resilience, he found his place and even carved out a place within our Canadian literary landscape as he went about living his life in the service of others. Resiliency has become an intense topic of interest among those who study disadvantaged peoples because, “people who display resilient adaptation become stronger by learning new skills, developing creative ways of coping, and meeting and overcoming life’s challenges” (Laframboise, 2006, p. 194). Racism, poverty, abuses and other negative social indicators are deleterious precepts which lower an individual’s ability to be resilient. The resilient person who triumphs has developed skills as a result of their ability to cope in situations which serve to bring a person down. Hemmingway famously quoted in his 1957 novel Farewell to Arms as he pondered the struggles of the day, “the world breaks everyone, and afterward, many are strong at the broken places” (1957, p. 249). Turns out the concept of struggle reaches across generations, time and a variety of people.

Building confidence in areas of education are supremely difficult, but not impossible. What may be of interest to any teacher working with culturally disadvantaged groups like First
Nation students is the power they do have. The presence of one supportive teacher, coach, or leader in a student’s life influences resilient competence (Laframboise, 2006, p. 204). It is easy to become discouraged and overwhelmed as a busy classroom teacher, but it is encouraging to know that it is not idealistic fancy that they can be agents of change. It is certainly within a teacher’s purview to provide a supportive school environment for a Native child’s culture and to be that sensitive supportive outside adult source who can make a difference. The locus of change can be found in the classroom.

While I was attending elementary school, Marie registered with Canada Manpower, as it was then called, in order to secure employment out of the home. She learned that she needed serious upgrading in order to meet requisite basic literacy levels, but she kept with it and by the time I was attending high school, she was also at the secondary level. In essence, we attended high school together, but at different schools. To us kids at home, we watched her struggle with spelling, scientific terminology and mathematical equations. With fondness, I recall her efforts to learn spelling as she copied down words on the inside of her cigarette pack. As she sat having her cigarette, though she has given that up decades ago, she would run through tricky spelling of words and math equations, practicing and unpacking words, memorizing factors and math problems. Practice was always a cigarette away. She didn’t stop there and became certified in many trades as she diligently went from one course to the next. Still that wasn’t enough and she went onto to obtain a College Diploma in Native Social Work and is currently one course away for her Native Social Services Degree. Unfortunately she hit a wall with computers and that one course is at a stand-still. For her, though, she has proven what she wanted: that she can belong, that she has the ability to learn and that the sphere of education can include someone like her.

During the interviews, the topic of education came up often and as I discussed in a previous chapter, education was not an inviting environment and was where she felt locked out.
What would possess a woman like her to cross into this territory again when education carried such painful memories? Marie shares that as she began to see her children enter the educational system, she struggled with her own feelings of inadequacy. Knowing that education evaded her, she was desperate to uncover her potential which was largely unexplored territory. She upgraded beyond high school competency and then became eligible for post-secondary school; Marie began her new journey at Canadore College. She tells it this way,

After all the things I experienced, I realized the reason I dragged myself down so low was because I really didn’t like myself that much. I felt stupid because I knew that I struggled to read basic things. I would have to teach myself. What does this word mean? How do you write that? I would try to learn without people catching on how little I knew. I knew that if I wanted something to change, then I would have to change something in me. It made me think of my dad, Joe. He never went to school and couldn’t read or write at all. I was proud to say that I taught him how to write his name and that was kind of funny. After I taught him to write those three letters-JOE- he set to writing them on Mom’s table, the tablecloths, anything. He was childlike in some ways that he was so proud to be able to do that, until Mom put a stop to the scribblings which were causing her extra work in the cleanup department.

I realized later that there was more to education than reading and writing a few things to get by. I was missing a lot and needed to go back and figure out where I was really weak and maybe even discover where I was strong. I didn’t even know where to start. I knew I liked reading about new things and other people’s lives. I still love reading biographies about other people’s lives, famous people because you learn that before they are famous people, they are human beings with struggles too. Manpower was not a great example of education. It was all laid out, boring I’d say, and there was no help with it either. It was all a means to an end just to keep you qualifying for more low paid menial work. I wanted more. I actually wanted to learn, so I made the step to go to college after I upgraded enough to get what was a high school equivalent diploma. I think you and I graduated high school around the same time. And then I was ready for the college experience.
I was really, really scared. I spent so much of my life feeling that I was stupid. That’s what trauma and racism can do to you too. You don’t have much to fight with when the damage is done. It’s something that you carry around with you every day. You can feel better when you are protected with your family and people like yourself, but at some point you have to go back out in the world and face it. Racism is like a piece of clothing, like maybe a sweater, that waits at the door for you to put on before you walk out the door. You have no choice but to wear it every day. Sometimes you can even forget about it, but something always happens and there it is. I remember getting ready for my first day at college and I almost didn’t go. I was playing that same tired conversation in my head and it was all about what the hell I thought I was doing. What was I trying to prove? I was an Indian, I was an older lady and I really wasn’t smart enough for any of this; how could I ever belong in place like that? But you know the rest. I dragged my ass in there expecting more abuse. But it didn’t happen that way. I was so lost in that really big place and felt like crying. I had my schedule in hand. Young people were coming and going with all that youthful busy energy, laughing and happy. And here was me all lost, like a fish out of water. I didn’t even want to ask anyone for help because no one really looked my way and as long as I stayed quiet, I might not get noticed.

I could try to be invisible, but one young man asked if I was lost and asked where I was going. He stopped what he was doing right there and then and looked at my paper. He took it upon himself to take me right to the room with a big smile. I soon found out that many people were curious about me. I was something different and for some of them, my experience and opinions mattered. That started something new for me and I ended spending a lot of time there, taking more courses and making new friends. Some were young people, some older students like me, some were the workers at the front desk, some were staff from the First Nation Room and some were even the professors. I never knew that education could be like this. I was enjoying learning. Not only was it useful for future goals like employment, but it was a place where I could discover who I was as a person. Everybody should have the chance to experience what that feels like. So when they talk about higher learning, I have an idea of what that is. It’s something light to carry and it is something that makes you feel good about yourself. I made my mistakes there too, not because I was trying to take an easy road, but because I didn’t know any better.
One time we had to write about something kind of tough. It had to do with law and believe me, I tried to understand it, but it just wasn’t working for me. I did my best and handed in work that I thought might please the professor because it contained the words of someone obviously cleverer and their words sounded so impressive. I have to admit that I didn’t fully understand everything I handed in, but it sure sounded great, so I thought. I got the paper back with a big fat “F” on it and beside it was the word “plagiarized”. I felt that familiar sting of shame. I looked up the word and figured out what I had done wrong. I went to the teacher and apologized. She could see that my mistake was not from being lazy, but from poor understanding. I was given another chance and did not waste it by trying to impress smart people with the words of other smart people. I learned to have faith in my own way of saying and doing things. It’s still that way for me. I am still friends with that teacher. She is retired now and lives in Sturgeon Falls, but when she comes to North Bay, she will ring me up and we go out for coffee. We still laugh about that incident, but mostly we talk about things, like what is going on with each other. (Dolbeck, 2016)

During the summer of 2013, Marie and I spent several days travelling around North Bay, Callendar and Kipawa. At times it felt awkward and then, incredibly, the memories began to dance off her tongue. We tested those memories and tried to locate them in landscape, but came up empty. Buildings had crumbled and others were as deserted as relics with few remembering their names as though they had never existed at all. Some confused her. Paths were overgrown and roads returned to forest so it seemed that time was playing tricks on her. It was impossible to find the origins of her stories. They no longer occupied any space of importance because as she was wont to discover; her family’s original reserve homestead was gone now reclaimed by nature; her first urbanized school now replaced by subdivisions; her place, the lumber factory mill, where she began the dance which ultimately led to me, now dilapidated abandoned and patrolled by dogs; her place where she gave birth to her first born- me, now fashioned into low rental apartments; her experience with mental health intervention in a mega sized mental sanatorium bulldozed and the several roads leading in, now reclaimed by forests and trees; and
her final goodbye to my step father as he breathed his last breath in a city hospital all gone, all reduced to a pile of rubble.

All of it, all these places gone, repossessed and ultimately forgotten. She looked thoughtfully around at each and every remnant carefully surveying the wreckage. One thing that remained was her memory. It became lucidly clear that these artifacts, which recounted critical Moments in her life, did not have the permanence once thought. When the bustling activity ended, it was clear their longevity was an illusion. The boxes on their own hold no power. It was, perhaps, time to think beyond the box and its presumed power. Our forays into entangled dead ends brought me to think on the structure of schools. First Nation people view the importance of relationships above all else. It is what makes the experience, not bricks and mortar. Concrete had forgotten, but an old woman’s memories survived. I was more convinced than ever that I had a duty to acknowledge her memories.

Marie, like Richard, embodied resiliency and it occurred much later in life, as a mature woman. What exactly is resiliency and how is it achieved and why are some people more resilient than others? It brought me to think about resiliency and relationships and that maybe this is where the magic can happen. Marie did have the presence of supports: she experienced those with her family and friendships she cultivated along the way. Through life’s lessons, she learned the value of having faith in herself, a relationship that began from within. Along the way, she learned that her life had value and meaning. During the course of the interviews, she realized that she had a worthwhile contribution and was able to express what she found in her relationships with others. She has always been involved in the lives of others and in 2005, she was awarded the Courage to Come Back Award, sharing the stage with others, most notably Canadian comedian extraordinaire Mary Walsh. It was a night where struggle was paraded and celebrated. Marie had made it her life’s goal to volunteer and help others. For her, service to others heals the heart, not
theirs, but yours. No life is better lived than one that touches others and makes their living a little better. It’s when you don’t believe that you matter and that you are unloved that everything seems so hopeless. Marie tells it this way:

Figure 10: Marie with Elderly Cousin (2016)

I wanted my life to have a purpose and I like spending time with people, especially lonely people. I would go up to the hospital and sit with some of the elderly. It all started when I would go and visit an old teacher I had back on the Kipawa Reserve. Remember I said that there was one teacher that was good. Well, this one teacher, I loved her. She really cared about us. She was unlike any of the others who were completely unreliable and had given up on us before they even knew us. After she got married, she was dismissed. That’s what they did with young female teachers back then. They had to make a choice, the job or a family. I cried when I said goodbye to that teacher. I had never met one like her and I never would again until I was much older.
Many years later, I ran into her in North Bay. She lived on Cassell Street with her husband until he died. Then she moved into Nipissing Manor and I would go to visit her and just talk and sit with her. She was now a lonely older lady with her kids all far away. We got to know each other all over again, but she was still that kind lady. I visited her right up until she died, but by then I was getting to know some of the other residents too. So I just kept going. The staff signed me up for a feeding course and I was taught how to feed residents and talk to them. It was easy work because I was pretty well doing all that stuff already. I was introduced to this little old lady who liked The Young and the Restless like me. So it was all arranged that she would get her supper tray when that show was on and we’d both sit and watch it together while I fed her. We had fun chatting about all the comings and goings of Jack and Victor in Genoa City. She eventually passed away too. I was a little sad, of course, but happy that we shared so many afternoons together.

Lately I’ve been really missing babies. I am arranging to go in the high schools where the teenage Moms are attending and help them. It’s a good thing that young girls don’t give up after they have unplanned babies, or maybe even planned under immature circumstances. All my young life, there was such focus on that unwanted baby if that “horrible thing” were to happen to a young girl. Then I would see the same girls treated like they had committed some crime; that was terrible. They were treated like they were ruining not only their lives, but those around them. And where were the boys and the men? They got to walk away like the girls had done it to themselves. I’ve seen more girls left holding the bag without much help. And I’ve always said: unless people are willing to pay the bills and help raise and love that child for 20 years, then they have no business sticking their noses in the affairs of women who have the real tough decision to make. Nobody can tell a woman what’s in her heart and she must bear the weight of her decisions, sometimes all by herself. So I’d like to help and then I’d get to bounce a beautiful baby on my knee once again.

Richard shares his thoughts on his ability to be resilient and discusses it this way “I no longer want to be resilient. I don’t want to simply bounce back from thing that hurt me or caused me pain. Bouncing back means returning to where I stood before. I want to go beyond the hurts and the darkness” (Wagamese Facebook post, 2015, May 7). Resiliency is a fundamental
cornerstone of recovery for First Nation people and especially for First Nation women. The relentless attack on First Nation women had effectively moved them out of their communities and into the peripheries where all manner of injustices could flourish, but thankfully it is not the whole story. Marie embodied the very ilk of the people she left behind; her ongoing value of relationships is an enduring feature of First Nation beliefs. Wesley-Esquimaux states in her essay entitled *Trauma to Resilience*, “First Nations people’s traditional morality placed exceptional value on ensuring that relationships between people were maintained and on seeing that the needs of the vulnerable (elders, children and women) were met through communal caring” (2009, p.19). Marie’s journey back was possible because of the relationships she cultivated and a return of her cultural traditions. Wesley-Esquimaux offers “instead of telling only the stories about trauma and victimization and pain, let’s talk about our survival and our undeniable strengths… We need more women’s stories with women placing themselves as powerful agents within the social context” (2009, p.28, 30). So true. Marie’s is one such story.

Marie’s dedication to serving others has been an ongoing feature of her personality, more so than seeking comforts or acquiring material possessions. According to Fox’s interpretation of self-preservation in *Arne Ness and Deep Ecology*, the self has a need to discover meaning and finding oneself is achieved through the service of others. Gandhi proselytizes, “I am here to serve no one else but myself, to find my own self-realization through the service of these village folk” (as cited in Fox, 1995, p. 11). In Marie’s case, I have witnessed how she has grown to identify herself through her relationships with others. Fox (1995) discusses this in terms of a preoccupation with unifying our concept of self. Unifying a fractured sense of self is critical for the person whose understanding of self is under attack. An expansive understanding of ourselves evolves when we accept that we are defined by our relationships to others. In order to understand the world, we need to understand our place in it. Being more self-aware, more eloquently self-realized, is deepened by our connection to others. It is also an internalized understanding of
indigeneity which never entirely abandoned Marie. The quality of relationships is something highly valued among First Nation people. My mother’s hyper sense of alienation left her struggling to find greater purpose in life and that was fulfilled in her personal relationships with others. As she reassembled, re-membered herself, she began to gain more confidence in her all her particular strengths. Her services to others helped heal her and put her on an alternative path to recovery. Fleeing a broken marriage and charting a new course after the many rejections she faced, Marie lacked a clear understanding of who she was as a Native woman.

Richard weighs in. He completely understands Marie’s healing path and recognizing the healing power of ourselves is forged through our connections and service to others. Richard has frequent discussions with spirit elders who visit him in his creative internal world and who teach him the truth about relationships. It has helped him to be well, to find his way back from darkness and to be able to find his exceptional inspired voice:

**Richard**: How do I become a better person?

**Old Woman**: If you want to help, reach out and help someone else. If you want to be happy, make someone else happy. If you want to know love in your life, show someone else love.

**Richard**: What about me?

**Old Woman**: Your life was never about you. It’s always about others. If you remember that, then you will become a better person. (Wagamese Facebook post, 2015, September 30).

And so there it is, redemption comes from our fellowship with others; our service to others is what brings about our own healing. When we forget about ourselves a little bit, our suffering retreats and other feelings take root which allow us to live more fully in the world. Richard and Marie seem to have practiced this and found their healing this way. Marie’s story,
like Richard’s, are stories about victory and promise. Their stories have moved us into a new phase because “finding innate resiliency and inner fortitude have begun to lift them out of social and cultural apathy and disorganization and into new stages of healing, a more healthy recognitions and articulation of the stories of their past” (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009, p. 23).

Because we have entered this new phase and recognize the strength of those who have survived, First Nation people may be standing on the precipice of transformative change. It can, as Wesley-Esquimaux quotes Magdalena Smolewski, “allow First Nation women to acquire more ‘tools’ that potentially could further strengthen their determination to create social stability out of chaos” (2009, p. 24). Narratives can heal and they are as rich and billowy as sage medicine as it settles over our senses and offer us clarity. A new compass pointed to a new direction.

7.2 Challenges with Education

Mainstream education continues to pump out high rates of Aboriginal drop-outs. Report after report documents the sad reality that Native youth fail miserably in the educational system. As Eriks-Brophy challenged in his article Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution, forty to fifty percent of Aboriginal Canadian students fail to meet basic numeracy and literacy skills, bottoming out at a dismal seventy-five percent dropout-rate (2008). Chronic poor academic performance and even poorer attendance rates move Native students permanently out the door. It seems the western response to these miserable statistics is to test and retest until a diagnosis can be found, which will ultimately renders a deficient analysis to be located in the Native child. There is little discussion about the systematic effort to oppress the Native student into submission. It always goes back to the student and their family without acknowledging that colonizing practices invited rejection from the Native community.
Rameka departs from the deficit model and shares a uniquely Maori view. In *Mori Approaches to Assessment*, we learn that Maori have abandoned an educational system which relied on 150 years of colonized oppression (2007, p. 128). New educational practices are organized around credit-based ideals. It is a rather different lens from where we traditionally assess the child. Rather than identifying weakness and putting energy into the requisite tasks, Maori look carefully at a child’s talents. Success is normalized and organized around Maori values of wellbeing, belonging, communication ability, contribution to the group and exploration of personal talents. Centering on individual talents, removes external “standardized” testing. The Maori believe knowledge lives within the person and is ready to be shared in order to enrich the lives of others. Great care is taken not to break the child’s spirit and this is protected this above all else. Much of Maori success hinges on strong relationships shared with students, families and communities. It is of critical importance that individual ability be explored to improve relationships among the community and its members. It follows that a credit-based assessment is needed if we are considering the future of the community. For healthy communities, we must build on strengths not weaknesses. Individual talents are explored and celebrated with the goal of bringing variety and richness to the community. Since westernized approaches have devalued the Native child, Native communities are reluctant to turn their children over to a system which may do more harm than good. Often westernized goals banished all identifying features of the Native child.

Among First Nations, there is a thin veneer of trust towards education goals. Negotiating their culture, language, identity and worldview always left the child with little understanding of who they were. Teachers come from privileged white paths and have been good students themselves who adapted well to the system. They have also, as Cherubini noted in his *Ontario Ministry of Education Policy and Aboriginal Learners’ Epistemologies: A Fundamental Disconnect*, observed 13,000 hours of teacher behaviour to model (Cherubini, 2008, p. 21).
Theirs is a world of western thought and hegemonic ideals. They will teach what they know and they know nothing about First Nation people. The classroom is a space owned by the teacher and far away from the view of community and parents. Cherubini (2008) sees that parental disengagement is a product of their loss of control since history has informed of this result. Parents see their involvement as restrictive and very much predefined from a patronizing veneer which demands that they serve the needs of the teacher. Parents are given tasks to assist the teacher and rarely asked for input. Successes are owned by the school and failures are the territory of parents.

In order to redefine education, it would have to reflect learning needs of the dispossessed and would require a radical departure for the old way of doing things. As Mezirow would say, it call upon us to change our “habits of the mind” (1997). Once changed, there is no going back to what is safe, even if we wanted to. Education is not neutral in its position. Our curriculum is shaped by European thought, its preference for telling history from the settlers’ point of view, its pedagogical practice of dividing disciplines and reordering their value and its dynamic of placing worthwhile knowledge in books with teachers as its primary purveyors. We could call these “habits of the mind” because we simply accept, without question, that this is the way it is and should be. In Mapping the Field of Indigenous Knowledge in Anti-Colonial Discourse, Wane (2008) extends this idea to our Native understanding of ourselves. So conditioned are we by these ideas that we have come to accept as fact that our colonizers have less work to do. We are doing it for them. We traded in our culture and language for western ways of being just because we believed them.

Marie avoided all manner of institutionalized education, preferring to keep an arms-length approach, since it was her view that she lacked necessary acumen to participate. During my elementary and secondary school years, I recall few occasions where she would freely interact with the school or its teachers on our behalf. Usually visits to our schools were prefaced by
‘required attendance’ on her behalf for a variety of reasons, more often a result of some misbehavior from one of us kids. For her, and us by association, school was never looked upon as a partnership between families; rather, it was a necessary obstacle to move us closer to independence, if we could somehow discern our point of entry. Families, especially poor ones like ours, were reminded often how our behaviour needed to reflect those of other more successful families. We knew that more often than not, disadvantaged students were assessed according to successful school behaviours and less so their ability (Mykota, 2006).

We live in a capitalistic society and curriculum is carefully selected to uphold capitalist ideals. In this society, individual merit is celebrated and success is predicated on individual talents and efforts. From this stance, ability rankings are ‘fairly’ applied because, it is reasoned, everybody had a chance. IQ tests rationalize this practice. The result, though, is minority groups are locked out from participating. Lowered expectations are matched with reduced essential content. The deed is done; access is denied and the door is closed. Academic failure is inevitable and the family is left to pick up the pieces. It all becomes what Gale calls the “Discourse of the Disadvantaged” (2002, p. 12). Simply put: it means that discourses about the disadvantaged nature of marginalized peoples are located in the individual and their circle, never beyond. Such discourses posit questions like “Why can’t the child read?” (p. 12). Then look to the student’s background for the answer. Disadvantaged people are always under attack for their presumed inferiority and lack of equality. Origins of inequality are found in pockets of ethnicity and socioeconomics. The minority child is often found living in poverty and the politics of poverty is clear: blame the victim for where they are. It is an unrelenting attack on the individual’s psyche which ultimately wears them down and leaves them doubting themselves at every turn. They simply don’t feel they deserve better and are poorly equipped to withstand relentless assault. Native students are encouraged to learn how to behave more like their successful white, middle class counterparts. The message is this: if their behaviour could match successful children, then
access would be granted. This is, Gale argues, ‘the hidden curriculum’ and when it fails, as it surely will, the minority student and their family will be to blame.

It is fair to say that most of the Depotier offspring and subsequent descendants have struggled with finding their place in institutionalized education. All of her siblings and many among my generation seemed to navigate this territory with great difficulty. Many of us have indeed have many of the risk markers: poverty, family violence, unemployment, alcohol and drug addictions and multiple life transitions with a peppering of rancorous personal temperament which fell out of line with conventional education. This situation would significantly interfere with our positive psychosocial wellbeing and would not set us up very well to be the desirable student in the typical classroom with the typical classroom teacher. Surviving them where we could, though, has given us something else, something equally useful: resilience, a thing of fortitude. It was with great interest that I watched Marie cross the divide which separated her as she established herself in this less than hospitable domain. Not only was she determined that we find our place; it turns out, that she had an irrepressible need to be included as well and find her place. Resilience, in this definition, is less about finding the space willingly given and more about occupation when inclusion is found lacking. Such a person arrives with a much different orientation and is not so interested in pleasing.

As far back as 1972, The National Indian Brotherhood, now Assembly of First Nations (AFN), presented their views on education in the policy paper Indian Control of Indian Education to the Minister of Indian Affairs. Education was presented as an entity that should instill the Native child with “pride in one’s self, understanding one’s fellowman and living in harmony with nature” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 1). They further qualified that pride should encompass recognition of individual talents that would prepare children to function in both the outside world and prepare them to live in harmony with their teachings and their environment.
Interestingly they addressed the differences between the two cultures, dominant Eurocentrism and indigenous perspectives. “The gap between our people and those who have chosen, often gladly, to join us as residents of this beautiful and bountiful country, is vast when it comes to mutual understanding and appreciations of differences. To overcome this, it is essential that Canadian children of every racial origin have the opportunity during their school days to learn about the history, customs and culture of this country’s original inhabitants and first citizens” (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972, p. 2). Non-Native people, they advise, must be ready to recognize the value of another way of life: to learn about Indian history, customs and to truly learn about the history of Canada, not just about the history from the colonists’ perspective. For my mother the door was firmly slammed: she was locked out and her Native world was discounted. Curiously through, while she was locked out, non-Native people were locked in by a value system they thought worked for everyone. They blindly accepted that their way was universally applicable and the few who ventured out to deal with Native students could not understand why their good intentions were rejected.

Since the historic paper was presented by the National Indian Brotherhood in 1972, The Assembly of First Nations has updated the paper under the title of First Nations Control of First Nation Education; It’s Our Vision, It’s Our Time (2010). The central values are still there and perhaps goes further by discussing the lack of commitment from the 1972 paper, “Although affirmed the ICIE 1972 Policy has never been supported in a meaningful manner by federal, provincial and territorial governments” (AFN, 2010, p. 6). The paper summarizes their view on education to be one of “lifelong learning…from prenatal to Elder level and [including] systems that are holistic, high quality, linguistic and culturally-based. First Nation lifelong learning systems must be founded on First Nation languages, cultures, histories, philosophies, world views and values, as these are the heart of our identity” (p. 8). Within the document they call for provincial systems to be inclusive of First Nation experience so as “to ensure all people of
Canada have a high level of cultural competency regarding Indigenous people” (p. 13) and believe that teachers are key in the process as they write: “teachers and support staff must achieve cultural competency through ongoing Professional Development, designed and delivered by First Nation professionals and elders at the local and regional levels” (p. 14).

7.3 Truth and Reconciliation

At the time of this study, the whole notion of what could be accomplished with the Calls to Action found within Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) was being bandied about. I wondered what such a concept would mean to a woman like Marie since some of its goals speak directly to her experience. She was somewhat familiar with the term so I asked her what this term meant to her. She was caught off guard and eyed me suspiciously but I reassured her there was no right or wrong answer and that I was just seeking out her opinion. Without any pause whatsoever, her answer was, “well I guess it really means making something right that was done wrong. I think that’s what it means.”

“Can you reconcile that?” I ask.

Well, you have to try. It’s like an apology. You’ve got to try. Reconciling won’t make you forget what happened, but it makes coping with the wrong things better. And the truth part is very important. Canada has got to tell the truth about what happened right here in their own land. We hear about the bad experiences the refugees face in their faraway lands, but not enough of what happened to Native people right here in Canada. Things maybe people don’t want to face because they’d rather believe other things that don’t challenge them. Like Canada is the land of opportunity and that Canada is filled with kind, polite people who are working to help other people all the time. Some of that may be true as long as we are not talking about the Indians on this land. What do people think
happened to those kids that were forcibly removed from their homes and sent away? The parents had absolutely no power. What happened to those kids and what do you think that did to the parents? Let’s stop pretending Canada is always that kind place, a refuge for all others who suffering from things that governments did to them. It happened right here in this country and let’s not be afraid to discuss it because the effects are still with us today. Native people are still looked upon as troublesome. I’ve had enough of us being the problem, the Indian Problem. I hate those words, like we are always the ones creating the problem. Stop using the words that make us out to be the bad guys here. So negative. We have got to start looking at things differently if we really want changes and we’ve got to stop talking so negative about Native people.

As Marie touched on the part of language and how we frame our thoughts, I was brought to think on a recent education meeting I attended in Scugog. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss some very real soon to be implemented changes in education that would be rolled out at the school level as a result of Calls to Action from Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). Surrounding First Nations, school boards, government agencies, advocacy groups, students, teachers and community members were invited to discuss education as it pertained to Native students. It is important to remember that our language is a reflection of our thinking and the meeting was a case in point. As is the manner of the day that we live in, all kinds’ people were in attendance, in effort to grapple with ideas from documents resulting from The Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I had brought two high school students who were ensconced at a separate table for them to meet other youth and to discuss the same heady issues as were the adults filtered throughout the room. At my table there was a person from Indian Affairs, a Native man who worked with First Nation post-secondary youth at Georgian College, a newly appointed superintendent with our school board, a moderator from the organizer who basically kept the conversation rolling, a classroom teacher, a person newly in a position who basically kept quiet
and whom I learned nothing about and then myself, an educator from a First Nation. We were given a few warm up exercises but by mid-morning we were well into the material.

Educators often use descriptors, tags that are more aptly ‘teacher-ease’ jargon which instantly places them in the pocket of educated. Throughout the years, I’ve heard many. It’s a doublespeak which is meant to be simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. The classroom teacher at our table was very young and well-intentioned and had little experience working with First Nations. She instantly struck up a conversation with the Georgian College First Nation man. They were talking about how to best incorporate First Nation experience into the curriculum. She was using the term often of going to ‘her Native community’ and this was her way of addressing her neighbouring First Nation territory as ‘her Native community’. Now I have heard many non-Native people talk like this, so the poor teacher was not the only one at fault here. It’s a term which sounds paternalistically offensive to people from colonized communities and I wonder why intelligent, educated people with good will can’t see this, though I suppose it harkens back to our differing perspectives and points of entry. I could tell this Native man was visibly uncomfortable with this term and wasn’t surprised when finally he could not contain himself anymore and addressed it, “I have to say that I take offense to being called YOUR Native community. That denotes that you own us. I don’t address you that way; I don’t say that I will go talk to MY non-Native community about this or that. I hear that term a lot and I’ve got to tell you that I don’t like it. If you want things to change and have real partnership, then you’ve got to start thinking about the language you use. You don’t own me, I’m a man and I don’t own you. So let’s start there.” He was right of course. The poor woman was crushed as she now understood that she had offended the man whose company she obviously enjoyed; but, it was better for all of us to hear that the buzz words ‘my Native community’ were not appropriate for communities struggling for autonomy.
We are definitely at a new crossroads with respect to Native people in Canada and we are pressed to consider how education factors into the discussion since Native people like Marie recognized its power easily. Marie is especially interested in the Truth part since it begins with acknowledging the wrongs that have been done. It doesn’t erase them, but does admit to mistakes made. Part of that is having Native people tell the stories and talk about their traumas and how they have led them to where they are today. Not only are we Native people interested in talking about our traumas, though that is certainly part of it, we are keen to demonstrate that the ground we stand on has shifted and we stand with new wholeness born from belonging and remembering. Wesley-Esquimaux says it beautifully, “we need to reach down deep, so that we can reach up higher” (2009, p. 27). We are now in the business of reaching higher. The stories about our grandmothers and mothers and ourselves are the ones that will become the stories our daughters and sons will carry. It is time to relish in our victories. The stories about survival in the face of presumed and almost certain defeat are stories about moving resilience and strength. They are good ones for our children to carry and they lighten their load.

Recently I’ve been reading up on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and had the good fortune of hearing Murray Sinclair speak on his life’s work at the Inspire 2017 National Gathering for Indigenous Education and feel incredibly proud that we have such a leader in our midst. He spoke with such conviction, such eloquence to a packed audience at the Fairmont Royal York Hotel, all without a note or teleprompter to hold our attention. Though I was keen to learn more, I had to be realistic with my time and opted for the summary version of some odd 500 plus pages. I read “Reconciliation is not possible without the knowing the truth…For indigenous peoples, stories and teachings are rooted in relationships… Through stories, knowledge and understanding about what happened and why, are acquired, validated and shared with others” (TRC, 2015, p. 272).
This perspective in the report validated Marie’s experience and it was good to know that telling her story is not only about her healing, but also about Canada’s. Telling the truth is where we start. The report goes on to examine the influence of storytelling and life writing by introducing author and social work scholar Qwal ’sih’yah’maat (Robin Anne Thomas) who is quoted, “I never dreamed of learning to listen in such a powerful way. Storytelling, despite all the struggles, enabled me to respect and honour the Ancestors and storytellers, while at the same time, sharing tragic traumatic inhumanely unbelievable truths that our people lived. It was this level of integrity that was essential to storytelling…When we make personal what we teach, we touch people in a different and more profound way” (TRC, 2015, p. 272). Native experiences are essential on the path to improving relationships and begin with the stories which open our hearts. It’s a basic need to be understood and develop understanding both ways. Then and only then can we move together and build a new relationship from our efforts to reconcile.

Though we are in a new era of Truth and Reconciliation, our provincial curriculum is proving to be sturdy to the core and finding it difficult to keep pace. Although marked its shameful history and how it dealt with its First Nation people of Canada, educational practices continue to reflect a preference for hegemonic ideals. Its colonial base is proving to be rigid with a continuing preference for curriculum which does little to engage the typical Aboriginal youth. Teacher education, or rather reeducation, remains an unmet goal; however, with much of our general Canadian public in the dark about First Nation’s issues and history, it will be a steep hill to climb indeed. Our Canadian curriculum does not acknowledge its colour blind discourse, nor its history of oppression.

As Orlanski observed, while working with Canadian non-Native teachers, they were unwilling to accept that change was needed. He noted a familiar discord that teachers dismissed the notion of changing curriculum since it was, “some sort of movement steeped in political
correctness” (2011, p. 139). Still others, he noted, possessed an attitude about teaching the “wrongs of the past… [as] tantamount to creating victimization” (139). Significant numbers of teachers held the view that formal Canadian curriculum was neutral in orientation and therefore, changing anything irrelevant. This is the Truth part before we can build on Reconciliation efforts; one before the other that seems to be on shaky ground. There are other reasons for their inertia, but it seems that the individual teacher will decide the merits the findings. Such dismissal affects Native communities in many ways. It does little to affirm the good will of the report when practice is still a long ways off. It’s the old proverbial ‘where the rubber meets the road’ and apparently the car and driver still belongs someone else.

I’m thinking about Richard Wagamese and we have a one-sided conversation in the virtual world on the matter. “Richard, I’m wondering, we need to make so many changes and sometimes it’s all so overwhelming if we’ll ever get there. I wonder about my high school students who don’t feel welcomed anywhere. That’s got to be a little bleak for them.”

Richard reminds me that we all have a role in this problem and that role is framed from a colonial experience. Sometimes, he shares that it’s hard to keep a positive attitude, but we must. He shares an incident that happened to him back in 2013 after he had visited a community in order to work with youth and provide some measure of mentorship and came away feeling entirely defeated. On this particular visit, he arrived and witnessed crippling malaise. No youth were signed up, no adults appeared, no social service workers and no teachers were interested. When it was discovered that he was there to work with youth, young children of all ages were dropped off as though he were performing casual daycare and no adults offered to stick around. Some would reappear at the end of the evening to collect honorariums. His plans to work with teens quickly evaporated and he abandoned that goal as he set to organizing painting activities for very young children. The session quickly dissolved into chaos and he was left feeling defeated.
The hardest battle in our fight to save our children is against ennui. If you haven’t encountered the word before, it means something about a ton heavier and a lot deadlier than simple boredom. It means a lifelong sort of tiredness. It means a lassitude, an unrelenting feeling of nothingness. It means you give up trying, dreaming or seeing yourself doing something better…It’s the system that brings people to that. It’s the Indian Act. It’s an imposed welfare mentality. It’s generation after generation of crushing isolations and poverty. It’s the deeply ingrained belief that there is nothing else possible and that no one sees us or cares about us in any way. It’s the entire relationship of Canada and her relationships with Native people focused despairingly on our most vulnerable…Ennui. The acceptance that this is all there is and all there ever will be. Fighting that is where our greatest battle has yet to be fought. There is still much work to be done and we had better roll up our sleeves and get at it. (Globe & Mail, 2013, August 24)

“Richard,” I said, “That’s disappointing, but there’s more you ought to know. You are doing great work and your influence is reaching our community. I believe we’re getting somewhere. Don’t give up. I hope you read my message I sent to you in messenger on December on just this past year:”

Hi Richard. I am a First Nation teacher on a First Nation in Ontario. I thought you should know that the filming of your novel “Indian Horse” is causing quite a stir on our First Nation. You see, some of young students have been selected as extras for the film adaptation and they are really quite beyond themselves. They are even earning their first paycheck. It’s unlikely, in their young years, that they’ve read the book, but it is generating quite the buzz and I will have to add more copies for multiple reads. I had read the book some time ago and have lobbied for the inclusion of more First Nation authors in our curriculum rather than the dry disconnected reads our youth are continually forced to read and ultimately dismiss. It is exciting to see our youth stand a little taller and claim their place and to do it so proudly. I’m a firm believer that we often do not know the lives we touch and so for this reason, I have decided that this is something you may find interesting. I thought you should know that a tiny little First Nation, Alderville, has connected with you and appreciates the contribution you have made to the Canadian literary landscape. We have others like you (and each like yourself are uniquely
visionary) and we need to bring the rest of Canada up to speed on what constitutes an authentic Canadian voice. So pleased that this film is being made and I hope you feel the same. Many thanks. (Catherine Davis, email correspondence. December 13, 2016, 7:55pm)

“Well, actually never opened that message. Sorry,” he says. “I appreciate your kind words and I’m glad to hear that my book is causing that kind of activity in Alderville.”

“I also want you to know that we have a First Nation room at the high school, a provincial high school and your book is there now. They have even starting to use Indian Horse as reading classroom material. It captures our youth’s interest. It’s about hockey, First Nation experience, residential school and so Canadian to the core, written with such a splash of elegance. It’s been a long time coming to have our voices present in this way.”

“Well thanks, but I can tell you there are so many others. I meet them all the time around this great land of Canada.” He answers humbly.

“Richard, another thing. I have been writing about my mother’s history. Do you have any advice for me?”

“I’ll give you best advice I ever got. It was from my good friend Norval Morriseau. He said to me: work for the story’s sake. It means leave your ego at the door” (staff writer, Globe & Mail, 2014, July 4).

“Good advice, so I guess that means you don’t get in the way? How will I know if I am? When I am a part of the story too and I am trying to be honest?”

“Think of it this way: my teacher and good friend Jack Kakakaway would say ‘the head has no answers and the heart has no questions. Think on that for a minute’” (Wagamese Facebook Post, February 4, 2013).
“Hmm, I am. That’s genius! I see, the heart knows and we should always trust in that. So clear! I get it! Let your head question, but not lead. Lead with your heart and you will find the way.”

Richard flashes that smile and he is all kindness as he puts my awkwardness at ease, “Write like you’re walking through the bush at night with a flashlight. You can’t see the territory. You can only see the next step ahead of you. You can only place one foot ahead of the other, but you can always get where you want to go that way. It’s not about perfection, and security and knowing where you’re going. It’s about that one sure, soft placing of the foot that creates your entire journey, trusting the inspiration that lights your way” (Wagamese Facebook Post 2013, February 4).

That’s true. I never really knew where Marie’s stories would take us. As they evolved, they breathed a life all their own and I wanted them to be the main event without crowding them with my ideas. It’s really quite simple. I think I understand. A little. Marie’s stories are important and I feel that I’ve done my best to honour her voice and tell her story. Before I am ready to let Richard leave, I felt that I had one more important question to ask. “Richard, stories are all unique. I realize that. I’ve tried to write that way too. Is there one best way to do it?”

That smile never leaves his face and with patience he summarizes, “All that we are is story. From the Moment we are born to the time we continue on our spirit journey, we are involved in the creation of the story of our time here. It is what we arrive with. It is what we leave behind. We are not the things we accumulate. We are not the things we deem important. We are story. All of us. What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we’re here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship- we change the world, one story at a time…”(Richard Wagamese Facebook Post, 2014, September 19).
I’m still thinking about Richard and this story and just what a good story can achieve. “The power of the story is the ability to bring us together. The magic of a story is its power to keep us together. The wonder of a story is its ability to do all of that without our even noticing” (Richard Wagamese Facebook Post, 2013, September 19th). I have tried to do that, to close the distance between you, me, Marie, us and bring us into a new understanding together. Miigwech Richard, live on in spirit and may your words continue to dance across pages, generations and time. Miigwech to you the reader, for taking the time to share in this one good story, Marie’s. And most importantly, Miigwech to Marie. Without her, there was no story.
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Appendix A
Research Questions

Topics and Questions for Guided Conversation

Introductory Video Interview; Defining Self

1. Could you introduce yourself
2. What things do you think you missed by not living on your reserve?
3. Explain why you haven’t returned to your home reserve?
4. Since you know that I will be interviewing about your personal life experiences, please give me your thoughts on that?
5. How does your life experience help non-native people, like teachers?

1. Early Life as Remembered on First Nation Kipawa
   a. What about your early experiences on your First Nation called Kipawa?
   b. What are some of your earliest experiences as a child living in Kipawa?
   c. Tell me about your parents and siblings? Where did your parents come from? How would you say you were raised with your siblings?
   d. What were the cultural practices in Kipawa? Language and customs?
   e. What kind of institutional influences were there at play on the reserve as you recall as a youngster? Indian agent? Education? Social Services?
   f. What the role of women within the community of Kipawa? How did the gender roles reflected within the family?
   g. What were your early educational experiences like? What do you remember about teachers?
   h. What was the relationship your reserve had with the surrounding community?
   i. Tell me the experiences of your older siblings who were developing relationships with non-native people.
   j. Was there any felt racism or exclusion felt on the reserve?

2. Leaving Kipawa and Childhood; Urbanization and dislocation
   a. What were the circumstances surrounding the decision to leave Kipawa?
   b. Tell me about what the new urban community felt like?
   c. What kind of relationship did your family have with surrounding community?
   d. Where any cultural traditions retained? Language and customs, beliefs?
   e. What kind of institutional influences were there at play in your new community?
   f. What the role of women within your new community? Other children, neighborhood families?
   g. Did you feel that your family had any support out in the wider community?
   h. Tell me a little about your educational experiences. What kind of education did you think you were getting? What was your experience with non-native teachers?
   i. Was there any felt racism in this community?
3. Adult Life: the dismissed Native woman, yet not able to fully participate
   a. Tell me about your early work history.
   b. Tell me under the circumstances that you met you husband.
   c. Tell me about your siblings? How did the scenario of status and non-status as it relates to your siblings and marriage?
   d. Where did you first live when you married?
   e. What challenges did you face uniquely as a young married Native woman living with a non-native man?
   f. Where there supports available? Family? Friends?
   g. Tell me your thoughts on how poverty and various abuses were felt in your off reserve experience?
   h. How did you handle the challenge? Tell me a little how you handle this difficult time?
   i. How was this differently experienced as a Native woman?
   j. Tell me about your view about the possibility of returning the reserve if the off-reserve experience didn’t work out?

4. Bill C31: Its’s fallout and legacy
   a. How were your siblings treated with respect to marriage? Boys? Girls? Status vs Non-Status issue?
   b. What do you understand about the difference?
   c. How did this difference in treatment affect you?
   d. When you contacted your reserve during the time you were off reserve, tell me what kind services or supports were you able to access? What was the reaction of members still living in Kipawa?
   e. How is this different among Native women?
   f. Tell me your thoughts on the change of status as a result of Bill C31. Has recent revisions to Bill C31 corrected all past previous grievances? If it hasn’t, the what, if anything, needs to be done, considered?

5. Current Issues
   a. What are the most serious issues affecting Native women and their families today?
   b. How is your relationship with the reserve today? In terms of family? In terms of the administration of the reserve?
   c. What causes do you attribute this to?
   d. What are your thought on racism? Does it still exist, in your opinion and elaborate on why or why not.
   e. What are your thoughts on society’s greater acceptance of native culture?
   f. What positive examples do you see at work in education or otherwise? What can you attribute to the difference?

Concluding Summative Interview: Defining role of experience
   1. What is your definition of a successful life?
   2. Why do you think your story is important for others to hear?
3. What do you think of your own narrative? Your experience as a wife? Parent? Have you left out anything that you would like included that wasn’t covered in the previous questions?

4. Tell me how you feel about sharing your experiences and about being involved with this kind of research.

5. What does education mean to you?

6. How can teachers learn from your experience and better teach native students in their class? Give me an example where this could work well with native students?
Appendix B

LOI and Consent Letter

Letter of Information & Consent Form

Marie: An account of a disenfranchised First Nation woman from Kipawa

This research is being conducted by Catherine Davis (Master of Education, Candidate) under the supervision of Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapler, in the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles (http://www.ethics.gc.ca/default.aspx) of Canadian ethics guidelines, and Queen's policies (http://www.queensu.ca/urs/research-ethics).

What is this study about? The purpose of this research is to understand the experience of one woman as it pertains the reality faced by disenfranchised First Nation women of Canada. Canadian governments of the day had long standing practices of legislating Native women of the heritage and deeming them ineligible to be recognized from their First Nation. It was a practice that related to Native women only and not towards Native men in the same circumstance. This study will require 5 interview sessions at 60-90 minutes each. Additionally there will be 2 videotaped sessions; at the beginning and the end of the study. They will also be 60-90 minutes in length. The study aims to access your personal life story as a disenfranchised First Nation woman of your small region in Quebec. It is a topical issue since we will be reviewing your perspective as it related to First Nation women in Canada. We will investigate, through your experience and narratives, how the disenfranchised First Nation woman’s experience is uniquely Canadian and what impact it might generate.

Benefits and known risks of the study? This study is well positioned as learning tool within the educational field. Non-Native teachers are better equipped to work with First Nation students when they have a better understanding of First Nation issues, especially when a large number (more than 75% according Canadian census) of First Nation peoples are living in urbanized centres. There are no perceptible risks, beyond your comfort level with sharing your personal life history. This will be respected with upmost sensitivity and anything deemed uncomfortable will be immediately reviewed for you approval.

What is involved to participate in this study? There are different levels of participation in this study: two video-taped sessions at the beginning and end of the study (introductory and summative in nature); and five one hour theme focused interview weekly for five weeks for approximately one in duration. In total, you will be requested seven hour commitment of your time to be involved in this study.

Is my participation voluntary and without compensation? Yes. Although it be would be greatly appreciated if you would answer all material as frankly as possible, you should not feel obliged to answer any material that you find objectionable or that makes you feel uncomfortable. You may also withdraw at any time with no adverse consequence. Should you wish to withdraw or have a break during any other sessions, all you have to do is ask. I will discontinue any efforts in video-taping or audio-recording and there will be no negative consequence. Should you wish to withdraw entirely from the study, you only need to convey your wish to me (telephone or email) or you may wish to contact my supervisor (see below). You will be asked to indicate whether or not you would like your data removed from the study. I will send a confirmation letter back to you acknowledging your request to be removed from the study either with or without your data.

What will happen to my responses? Since you have expressed an interest to have your name used, you will be required to specifically give your permission to have your full name within this study. The results of this study may be published, further disseminated, talked about and shown at conferences or other gatherings. The goal of the project is to teach, to change and ultimately to educate. It is our hope that this
study, learning through your life story, will be an impetus for deeper conversations about First Nation issues. You will be given a copy of the finished study. Copies of our written exchange will be saved in hard copy format and kept with other data of this study in a locked filing cabinet. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with this study. Written narratives will be encrypted on my personal computer.

The interviews will be recorded and you will be given a copy. Your responses and corrections are welcome at every stage. The two video-taped sessions will be shown to you in their full length, as well as in any edited form. Your approval must be given before they are to be shared. If you would not like them shared, that will be respected and the video tapes destroyed. In this case, they would not accompany the final submission which will form this thesis.

What if I have concerns? In the event that you have any complaints, concerns, or questions about this research, please feel free to contact Catherine Davis at (905 376 7221) OR Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kapler at (613 533-6205 x 77238). Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or Chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

Again, thank you. Your interest in participating in this research study is greatly appreciated.

Please sign one copy of this Letter of Information/Consent Form and return to the researcher. Retain a second copy for your files

I have read the following statements above and have had all questions understood concerning the study and what is involved. I understand that I will have 2 sessions videotaped: one at the beginning and one at the end of the study. As soon as this application has been approved, I understand that I am required to volunteer for 5 one hour sessions once a week in order to complete the study. I wish to freely participate in these interviews, but understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I also understand that I may choose to not answer questions which may make me feel uncomfortable I freely consent to participate in this study.

I agree that the interview can be audio recorded (Circle one) Yes No

I agree to participate in 2 video sessions (Circle one) Yes No

I am aware that I must give my full approval for any of (Circle one) Videotapes to be shared for the purpose of this study and with my approval Yes No

May be shared at other venues, conferences and may include the general public
I agree to have my name used in this research for the purposes of the Researcher’s study on the Disenfranchised First Nation woman From Kipawa. (Circle one)

Yes  No

A copy of the final report and anything written bearing my name will be shared with me prior to submission for clarity and accuracy (Circle one)

Yes  No

I wish to have a hard copy of the completed Thesis for my records (Circle one)  

Yes  No

Yours Full Name:________________________________

Your Signature:____________________________________________________________________

Date:________________________________

Address: _____________________________

Phone Number:________________________

This study has been granted clearance by the General Ethics Board according to Canadian research ethics principles (http://www.ethics.gc.ca/default.aspx) and Queen’s University policies (http://www.queensu.ca/urs/research-ethics)"
Appendix C
EGREB Letter

October 05, 2015

Ms. Catherine Davis
Master’s Student
Faculty of Education
Queen’s University
Duncan McCaffrey Hall
511 Union Street West
Kingston, ON, K7L 3N6

GREB Ref #: GEDUC-814-16, TKAQ = 6918573
Title: "GEDUC-814-16 Marie: An account of a disfrocked First Nation woman from Kapowa"

Dear Ms. Davis:

The General Research Ethics Board (GREB), by means of a delegated board review, has cleared your proposal entitled "GEDUC-814-16 Marie: An account of a disfrocked First Nation woman from Kapowa" for ethical compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (TCPS 2 (2014)) and Queen’s ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines (Appendix 6.14) and Standard Operating Procedures (405.001), your project has been cleared for one year. You are reminded of your obligation to submit an annual renewal form prior to the annual renewal due date (access this form at http://www.queensex.ca/grebgre.html; click on “Events”; under “Create New Event” click on “General Research Ethics Board Annual Renewal Closure Form for Cleared Studies”). Please note that when your research project is completed, you need to submit an Annual Renewal Closure Form in ResearchNow indicating that the project is "completed" so that the file can be closed. This should be submitted at the time of completion; there is no need to wait until the annual renewal due date.

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the GREB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period (access this form at http://www.queensex.ca/grebgre.html; click on “Events”; under “Create New Event” click on “General Research Ethics Board Adverse Event Form”). An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change of an unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s). You are also advised that all adverse events must be reported to the GREB within 48 hours.

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the GREB. For example, you must report changes to the level of risk, applicant characteristics, and implementation of new procedures. To submit an amendment form, access the application by at http://www.queensex.ca/grebgre.html; click on “Events”; under “Create New Event” click on “General Research Ethics Board Request for the Amendment of Approved Studies”. Once submitted, these changes will automatically be sent to the Ethics Coordinator, Ms. Gail Irwin, at the Office of Research Services for further review and clearance by the GREB or GREB Chair.

On behalf of the General Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Sincerely,

John Freeman, Ph.D.
Chair
General Research Ethics Board

c: Dr. Rebecca Luce-Kaplan and Dr. Lindsey Macmunn, Supervisors
Dr. Richard Rawal, Chair, Unit REB
Ms. Erin Wickland, Dept. Admin.

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