University of Alberta

In the Footprints of Our Ancestors: Exploring the Reconnection to my Cree Ancestors (*âniskôtapânak*) and Ancestral Land in the Lesser Slave Lake area

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Indigenous Peoples Education

Department of Educational Policy Studies

Fall 2013
Edmonton, Alberta

Dedication

This work is for all our ancestors (*âniskôtapânak*) and Cree people (*nehiyawak*) from the Lesser Slave Lake area, for all the Elders and traditional knowledge holders who help to keep our Indigenous knowledge systems intact for our survival, and for future generations. This work is also dedicated to my son (*nikosis*), Damon, as a gift for him and for his cousins, their children and all of those not yet born. It is also dedicated to my brother Gordon, to my late sister Lorraine, and to my father Sam for the leadership that they provided for our family and many others whose lives they touched. You have inspired me to keep going in spite of whatever challenges we face. I will be eternally grateful (*ninanaskomon*)!

Abstract

This work reveals the relationship between Indigenous people and land, and then speaks to the place for ancestors and Indigenous knowledge in this relationship. It engages with Indigenous Research Methodology that honours Indigenous ways of knowing and being, drawing on the lived experiences of Indigenous people from the Lesser Slave Lake area and giving meaning and voice to the lives of the people. This study addresses the marginalization of the people, their dispossession of land, and the disconnection to Indigenous language and culture that occurred as a result of oppression, colonization, and subjugation of their traditional territories, knowledge, history and identities. The work examines the relationship that connects Indigenous Cree identity with the sense of belonging that is essential to Indigenous ways of knowing. This work draws on ancestral relationships of the past, reclaiming and validating Indigenous history and descendant identities in significant ways that will impact future generations.

This qualitative study draws on mixed methods of Indigenous autoethnography utilizing knowledge of the researcher's family as the foundation of the work, somewhat like a 'case' study, and weaving in narrative, expository and analytical writing. The work addresses the near invisibility of Indigenous presence in historical literature pertaining to the Lesser Slave Lake area, and seeks to create another, deeper, level of

understanding of community knowledge and local experiences. Ancestry is explored in a way that brings edification in a community, contextualizing the lived experiences of Indigenous ancestors into contemporary times, and addressing the legacy of state-imposed political identities that continues to impact Indigenous people in Canada today.

The significant engagement with genealogical and archival data in the study is supplemented with narratives of Indigenous voices from the community. The effect of this twinning of data brings the ancestors out of the shadows, and creates a bridge of reconnection for them with the ‘re-searcher’ and the contemporary ‘re-searched’. This work speaks to the legacy of pain that Indigenous people carry as a result of colonization, oppression, marginalization, and silencing. Further, it speaks to the challenges of accessing archival and genealogical data, of the unreliability of genealogical evidence, and of the need for validation and mobilization of Indigenous knowledge systems in support of the efforts to make visible that essential Indigenous vitality that has been hidden.

Acknowledgement

This document would not have been completed without support from many individuals. I apologize to any people whom I have inadvertently omitted here.

I am grateful to my ancestors for my life and for their guidance in this work. I am thankful to my brother Gordon Sinclair and his wife Valerie, for their longstanding commitment in conducting the genealogy research for our family, which formed the foundation of this work. If it were not for Gordon's tenacity, commitment, passion and determination, I would not have had access to the majority of the archival data included in this study. Thank you Gord, for igniting the fire in me to take this research to another level and for keeping me inspired to not give up. I am grateful for my son, Damon, and all my nieces and nephews and their children for helping me to have the motivation to finish this work, so that you will know your ancestral lineage and the ancestral connection to the land in the Lesser Slave Lake area. This work only represents a small portion of our family's stories. There are so many more to collect and share with each generation.

Thank you as well to Gordon Sinclair, Charlie Jackson and Fred Courtoreille for sharing your precious time and stories with me. Your stories are important to this work, to the Cree people in the Lesser Slave

Lake area, but also to the future generations of our children. I apologize for any mistakes I may have inadvertently made in this study.

Thank you to my parents, Edna and my late father Sam Sinclair, for my life and for all the experiences that led me to pursue higher education and to try make a difference in the lives of our people. Pop, thank you for that talk that you had with me when I was a young sixteen year old expecting a child, before I knew what parenting would be all about. Thank you for believing in me, that it was possible for me to go to university in spite of whatever challenges I would face. Thank you for teaching me not to accept ‘no’ for an answer, for being the great leader that you were for our family and for many other Aboriginal people in Alberta. Thank you for letting me record the many stories that you shared over the years. Mom, I thank you for your understanding and support for the time that it took to complete this work and for keeping the home fires lit for our family.

I am grateful to my siblings and their spouses for all their support in helping me to achieve this goal. Thank you to my sister Linda, for all the conversations that we had over the years about this work, for always being ‘in my corner’, for your love and support for all of our family, and being there for the many times that I could not. Thank you to my brothers and their spouses, Rodney and Colleen, and Rocky and Jane for believing in me and for your part in helping to keep our family strong. Jane, I am

grateful for the many walks and talks that we had over the years, and of course, for our longstanding friendship.

Thank you to my friend Sheila Hallett for your support and patience in waiting for me to complete this study. Sheila and Alex, thank you both for your friendship, and for sharing the gift of music that helped keep my spirits lifted to complete this work. Thank you to my friend, Denise Parsons for all of your love and support in so many areas of my life. Thank you to the many graduate students in the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPE) specialization in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. For those who already have attained their doctorates, Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer, Dr. Rebecca Sockbeson, Dr. Phyllis Steeves, Dr. Patsy Steinhauer, Dr. Jane Martin, Dr. Shauna Bruno and many others, thank you for the inspiration to finish. Thank you to Claudine Louis for your support and commitment to finish our doctoral studies together and also to Lisa Bourque-Bearskin for your support. For the IPE graduate students, AnnaLeah King, Rochelle Star, and others too numerous to mention, I wish you all the luck and support that you need in accomplishing your educational goals.

Thank you to my supervisor and mentor, Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax whose support over the years was invaluable in helping me to bring this work to fruition. Cora, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I am grateful to my stellar committee, Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer, Dr. Brenda

Spencer, Dr. Carolyn Kenny, Dr. Brenda Cameron, Dr. Rebecca Sockbeson, Dr. Eber Hampton, and Elder John Crier. Thank you to Dr. Carl Urion for being a part of my oral examination and completing the circle. All of the support that I have been blessed with helped to enrich my research experience in ways that exceeded what I thought was possible in academia. Thank you to Sandra Materi and Joan White for your tireless energy and patience in helping me navigate through the final stages of this work. I could not have done it without your assistance. I am also very grateful for the time and assistance that I received from Diane Lamoureux, Archivist, Grandin Province Archives, in helping me to access Oblate data and to gain some understanding in conducting genealogical research.

Finally, I thank my partner, Ken Makarchuk for believing in me, for reminding me to take one step at a time, for giving me the shoulder to lean on when I felt I could not take another step, for all his technical expertise, and for being the love of my life.

I am grateful to all of you and I love you all!

Thank you Creator for my life and all of life.

Hiy Hiy!

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

A. Introduction/Background/Purpose

This doctoral research examines how, for an Indigenous person, a sense of identity is reflected not only in culture and language, but also in connections that are shaped through shared ancestry (blood) and territory (land). Our Elders speak of the importance of knowing our history, our language and culture, knowing our relatives; in other words, knowing who we are. Elders are described by the late Métis scholar and Elder Joseph Couture as “the oral historians, guardians of the Secrets, as interpreters of the Life of the People, as unusual teachers and way showers to the People” (2000, p. 32). Indigenous people generally view Elders as the keepers of traditional Indigenous knowledge. This work is motivated by my belief that deepening the understanding of our own histories, our own Indigenous knowledge, our ways of knowing and being, serves to strengthen individual and collective identity, including familial and ancestral kinship ties.

So how do we as Aboriginal people (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) in Canada learn about our own histories when our pedagogical foundations of oral traditions are disrupted, damaged or destroyed by a variety of barriers, losses and other challenges? Traditional knowledge transfer in many of our families and communities has been broken or at

least seriously damaged by Canada's legacy of colonization and subjugation of our knowledge and our people. For some, it can result in a significant disconnect to our Indigenous ways of knowing and being which affects our identity, our well-being, our sense of belonging. We become further removed from our ancestral knowledge, from the history of our people, our land and our communities. Our local histories for the most part have deliberately or inadvertently become invisible like our ancestors have become in the landscape of Canada's past. For many people, such knowledge may not matter; however, it matters to me.

I chose the Indigenous Peoples Education (IPE) specialization because it afforded me the opportunity to explicitly position my doctoral studies within my own knowledge and experiences. Such a position allowed me to honour this work as the product of deep understanding achieved not only through intellectual processing, but also through physical, emotional and spiritual engagement with acquired information. I am an Indigenous woman of this land referred to as North America. My family roots are in the Lesser Slave Lake area of northern Alberta, Canada. Our people, *nehiyawak,* Cree peoples, in English. More specifically, we are sometimes referred to as *Sakâw*[1] Cree from Treaty 8

[1] In the Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary/*alperta ohci kehtehayak nehiyaw otwestamâkewasinahikan*, this term is defined as "a forest, bush" (p.181). The circumflex symbol ^ is used over a vowel to indicate a long sound typically used in

territory. Both of my parents, Edna Sinclair and the late Sam Sinclair, were born and raised in the Lesser Slave Lake area. Our ancestors lived off that land for at least five or more generations since the early to mid-1800s. There is a dearth of historical literature about the Cree people in the Lesser Slave Lake area. Our histories were not taught in school. The local history books[2] minimally include Indigenous people of the area. If we are to know our history, we need to create our own space to undertake such research. This study serves as a vehicle to explore my own historical ancestral relationships in my home community in northern Alberta, including family relationships with language and ancestral land.

So how do we make that reconnection to our histories, to our ancestors? How do we strengthen our identity as Indigenous people in Canada in light of the layers and categories that some of us have experienced since the status of our ancestors were first branded by the government, around the signing of the Treaties in Alberta? Métis scholar Joyce Green (2011) discusses the variance in our identities and histories, "The colonial and racialized history of Canada has led to many Aboriginal

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Standard Roman Orthography in this text. In the Wolvengrey dictionary, Cree Words /*nēhiýawēwin:itwēwina*, the word *sakāw* is defined as "bush, woods, grove of trees, woodland, forest" (2001, p.196). The macron symbol ¯ is used over a vowel in the Wolvengrey text to indicate a long sound used in Standard Roman Orthography. I use the term *sakâw* Cree or northern/bush Cree interchangeably in this study. I also refer to the term *nehiyaw* which is a Cree person; *nehiyawak* is plural for Cree people.

[2] The publication of the Kinuso and Swan River area where my mom's family is from was done in 1979; the Slave Lake publication where my dad's family was from was done in 1984.

identities, and thus, of histories and communities. Not all of us fit a formula, and not many of us fit only one formula" (p. 169). Our[3] family is such an example. Prior to 1985, we were considered Métis, and in earlier times, "Half-Breeds" or "Indians". At present, some of my siblings and their children and grandchildren do not have Indian status, while others have Status.

Most of our family obtained First Nations or Indian status in 1990 as a result of the 1985 Amendment to the Indian Act, commonly known as "Bill C-31" which allowed the reinstatement of Indian women who had previously "lost"[4] their Indian status. According to 2004 data from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada[5] (INAC, 2005) there were 113,354 individuals in Canada who were registered as a result of the 1985 Amendment to the Indian Act, known as the Bill C-31, as of December 31, 2003 (INAC, 2004, 2005, p. 6). According to basic departmental data (2005), Bill C-31 registrants represented 16% of the total number of those registered in the Indian Register as of 2003 (INAC, p. 6). More recent statistics from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (2009) estimate that

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[3] Reference to the collective term, 'our' family includes four generations: my siblings, our mother, our children and their children. When I refer to the extended family, it includes aunts, uncles, cousins, and their children.

[4] Prior to 1985, Indian registration rules favoured men. If an Indian woman married a 'White' man, Métis or anyone other than a Status Indian, her Indian status was cancelled. There was a double standard, that if an Indian man married a 'White' woman or a non-Indian woman, she would gain Indian status.

[5] Currently known as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

just over 117,000 people who lost their status because of discrimination of their parent or earlier ancestor have been reinstated (INAC, 2009, p. 3). The majority of those live off-reserve. Only 18% of those who acquired Status after 1985 live on reserve or on Crown land (INAC, 2009, p. 3).

The 1985 Amendment to the Indian Act allowed for the reinstatement of First Nations women and their descendants, but it also gave First Nations the rights to determine their own band membership codes to control who could become or regain band membership, who could live on reserve, and the provision of benefits to children of band members and spouses of non-members (Furi & Wherrett, 2003, p. 6). Until that time, Indian band membership and Indian status typically went together. Now, those who have Indian status but for various reasons are unable to acquire band membership often find themselves disconnected from their Indigenous communities and, in many cases, having less political influence than before their 'Indian' status was gained. Many Bill C-31 registrants/Indians do not have a collective land base where Indigenous languages are supported and First Nation identities are strengthened. Further, these Bill C-31 registrants do not have strong political voices within formal governance structures such as the Assembly of First Nations or other national representative organizations. In many ways, my experiences of marginalization as a Bill C-31 "Indian" within the broader Canadian society were even more forceful than those of my time as a recognized "Métis".

Our Indigenous ways of knowing and being are primarily revealed in our languages. According to the National Household Survey "NHS", 2011 census data reported by Statistics Canada (2013), there are over 1.4 million people in Canada who report an Aboriginal identity[6] (Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit, p. 4). Only one in six (17%) Aboriginal people in Canada who reported an Aboriginal identity can speak an Aboriginal language, declining by 2% from the 2006 census (Aboriginal Peoples and Language, 2011, p. 3). Families whose Indigenous languages are no longer being spoken are at greater risk of losing their language. With the loss of language, there is a danger of identity loss (Ermine, 1998).

In my extended family, including my parents' siblings and their descendants, there are only a few fluent Cree speakers remaining who are of my parents' generation. Cree fluency to my knowledge has not been passed down to my generation or the successive generations. The majority of us in our immediate and extended families do not have a functional command of our ancestral language. My sense is that we are not an anomaly among Aboriginal people in Canada, particularly those of urban based families. As the urban Aboriginal population base increases,

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[6] 60.8% identified as First Nations only, 32.3% identified as Métis only, 4.2% as Inuit only, 1.9% reported other Aboriginal identities, 0.8% reported more than one Aboriginal identity.

in conjunction with the fact that the majority of Aboriginal population in Canada are under 25 years of age, we risk becoming farther removed from the cultural nexus where our Indigenous languages are more likely to be spoken, on our ancestral land base. The 2006 Census data, indicates that off-reserve Aboriginal people are the fastest growing segment in Canadian society, comprising 56% of the Aboriginal population in Canada, up from 50% in 1996 (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2013). I discuss more about language issues of urban Aboriginal families in Chapter II, Urban Influences. I draw on Indigenous knowledge of Elders and traditional knowledge holders in various areas of my work, particularly in relation to Cree names and concepts. I intersperse Cree words in my research to expand my knowledge of the language and appreciation of the culture that is embedded in the language and to share that with the reader.

The scope of this study was intentionally limited to my family. I chose to use my family history as the foundation of my research, somewhat like a 'case study'/'autoethnography'. I include our family's story, primarily from my perspective, using italicized font and woven throughout this document to provide a 'voice from the inside', an Aboriginal perspective which is largely absent in the literature. My family is not unlike many Aboriginal families in Canada who have experienced the impact of national policies since our ancestors signed Treaties or were allocated scrip. Northern Alberta Indigenous people could choose to

accept Métis scrip in the form of land (240 acres) or money ($240), or they could take Treaty and be defined as Indian under the Indian Act; either way, the government's interest was the extinguishment of Aboriginal entitlement to land. The legacy of imposed political identities had serious implications for our ancestors and these continue to be felt by our people into the present day. In our family's history, some ancestors became band members while others, sometimes within the same nuclear family, took scrip. Both processes occurred simultaneously in northern Alberta in 1899. Our family may not be considered a microcosm of Aboriginal families in Canada, but there are thousands of families and communities who have been disconnected from their traditional land, their languages and their traditional cultures. Many of them, perhaps more from the Métis and non-Status population, will have experienced state imposed labels/identities which impact the sociocultural, political and in many cases, economic aspects of their lives.

I engaged with an Indigenous research framework for this study that includes seven principles of Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM)[7] as identified by Cree scholar, Cora Weber-Pillwax (1999). This study draws on the third principle of "lived Indigenous experience" as the foundation of Indigenous research, described by Weber-Pillwax (1999, pp.

[7] IRM principles are identified in Chapter III. A.

31 - 32). I incorporated my understanding of IRM principles that supported my theoretical view of the nature of Indigenous research throughout my work. In Chapter III, I engage with literature on methodology and theoretical frameworks, focusing particularly on those that align with my own Indigenous research methodology.

I draw on the work of Cree/Saulteaux scholar, Margaret Kovach (2009), in describing her writing style in first person narrative woven with expository writing and analysis:

> This is a research story. It is situated in a time, place, and context…Although the narrative style is present, the writing often shape-shifts to other forms. Like sweetgrass, it has three braids, comprising three writing styles: expository, analytical, and narrative. (p. 21)

I can relate to the analogy of the braid of sweetgrass; this work, I have tried to keep sacred from start to finish. Incorporating first person narrative, like Kovach, helps to keep me grounded and further, "honours the experiential while engaging the abstract and theoretical" (p. 22). Kovach chose to draw on her understandings of her culture that guided her on her journey to "keep it whole" (p. 22). I concur and in keeping with what I have learned from our culture, I cannot speak for others, only for myself. Using first person narrative in this study reveals my own subjectivity, while drawing on the stories of others, mostly family members, some of whom are no longer with us. I have a responsibility to present this research with honesty and integrity, as accurately as I can, to

be respectful of our individual and collective voices, while simultaneously meeting the academic requirements of this doctoral work.

In keeping with the anticipated qualities of Indigenous research, I situate myself in Chapter II, Researcher Location and describe my intentions, motivation, purpose and other related areas. Kovach (2009) discusses the connection between purpose and personal narratives through her discussion with Cree scholar, Cam Willett: “He affirmed Hampton’s advice that knowing purpose is wise in any endeavour, and that we find purpose within our personal narrative” (p. 119). I did not fully appreciate the prominence that narrative would have in this study until the latter stages of this research. I draw on Kovach’s work (2009) to demonstrate the connection that tribal peoples have with their land and its relationship with identity, linking the past with the present and ourselves with our kinships groups:

> Place gives us identity…..Place links present with past and our personal self with kinship groups. What we know flows through us from the ‘echo of generations,’ and our knowledges cannot be universalized because they arise from our experience with our places. This is why name-place stories matter: they are repositories of science, they tell of relationships, they reveal history, and they hold our identity. (p. 61)

There are multiple factors that affect our identities and sense of belonging, as Indigenous people in Canada. For this research I explore some of those interrelated factors as these have been exemplified in the lived experiences of our family, including ancestors. I engaged with relevant literature throughout the study; however, in the Literature Review

chapter, I addressed the following: 1) Valuing our Indigenous Languages, 2) Political/Legislated Identities, 3) Our History/Healing is in the Land, and 4) Re-searching our HiStories/Re-claiming our Stories. None of these topics received extensive or exhaustive deliberation, and any one of them could form a much more detailed and academically complex review.

I am optimistic that the documented knowledge of our familial roots will serve as the foundation of a deepened awareness of our Indigenous ancestry; one that permits our family's generation to stand firmly on the shoulders of our ancestors. When one family in a community does this, other families also gain and a ripple effect is created within the wider community. I anticipate that this research will contribute to the growing body of literature about the relationships between Indigenous people and land, particularly in the Lesser Slave Lake area; about the place of ancestors and Indigenous knowledge in this relationship; about the healing effects of Indigenous research methodologies that honour Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

I am very grateful (*ninanâskomon*) for this opportunity to offer a meaningful contribution to any of these areas of study and to conduct research congruent with my values, beliefs and principles as an Indigenous person. Further, this work allows me to work closely with my family (including those who have crossed over) and my home community, and it honours our lived experiences, and our Indigenous ways of knowing

and being. Most importantly, it honours our ancestors and brings them present into our lived experiences today.

B. Research Questions

I was told by a Cree Elder from northern Alberta, while working on my Master's thesis in the mid-1990s about the Cree people in the Lesser Slave Lake area, to "write what you know". Her words helped me to see that my struggle revealed my own lack of knowledge about our people's history in the area. The stories of the past that were shared among my parents' generation were primarily spoken in Cree. The disconnection that I felt from the Cree language separated me even further from our history. Such disconnections eventually led me to explore the ancestral relationships and interconnections that give meaning to the lives of Indigenous people in the Lesser Slave Lake area; this distilled into the purpose of this study.

I had planned to examine our family's relationship with the Cree language as it relates to identity. I wanted to explore historical influences that contributed to the disconnection of our people from their language. In an Indigenous graduate course examining the culture embedded in the Cree language (2008), I experienced a profound outpouring of the grief that I was carrying from not knowing our language and a realization of how that grief had contributed to a personal sense of disconnection from our culture and our ancestors. Deepening that awareness and acknowledgment of the grief is helpful in my healing journey which I

believe to be a life-long process. Although I wanted to explore the traditional knowledge embedded in our language as part of this research, I recognized that I could not adequately commit the time and attention such a focus would warrant and require. Therefore, I decided to incorporate Cree words that I consider relevant to the study, and as well to include those ancestral Cree names that I encountered in the genealogy research.

Further, I came to realize that although I had also intended to include historical land research in this study, that topic also was beyond the scope of what I could effectively complete in this study. I had planned to explore the history of the land in the Lesser Slave Lake area from around the turn of the 19th century, including policies relating to land titles and land transfers, such as the 1930 Alberta Natural Resources Act (Natural Resources Transfer Agreement), and their impact on the Indigenous people and land in the area. I also wanted to explore the formal and informal practices of the Indigenous peoples of the area in relation to land tenure and land use, including burial practices.

For this research, I chose to focus on the location of ancestral land in the Lesser Slave Lake area, including the location of burial sites of my father's grandfathers and his father's brother. The location of ancestral land was significantly more complex than anticipated so the parameters of land research were largely focused on locating the land where the above mentioned ancestors are buried. My understanding at the outset of this study was that they were buried in an unmarked gravesite that is currently

designated parkland. All three died in the 1918 influenza epidemic. I wanted to explore why the gravesites were unmarked, and further, why those who were buried there were not identified. I wanted to know what the common burial practices were at the time and whether or not there were other unmarked burial sites in the area.

This study is not so much an analysis of the disconnections from our ancestors, language and land that occurred as a result of oppression and colonization; it is more of a documented examination of the journey towards reconnection. This study is to explore the process of reconnection to my ancestors and ancestral homeland in the Lesser Slave Lake area as a means of reclaiming and validating our own familial and historical presence in that area. How does engaging with Cree ancestral relationships in the Lesser Slave Lake area affect identity? It helps to bring some visibility to our ancestors through telling our story. I had planned on exploring and documenting the healing aspect of this research experience, both personally and as a family. However it became clear over time that this research was, for the most part, a personal journey. I had intended to avoid autoethnography as a research method but it became apparent that it was a reasonable fit, especially in the process of documenting the journey from an insider's perspective. I draw on Indigenous Cree

knowledge and lived experiences of our Elders, community members and my family. I also draw on my own lived experiences, including recent years as a Graduate Research Assistant for a SSHRC-CURA [8]project, *Healing through Language and Culture,* which was in place for most of the terms of my doctoral studies.

C. Significance of the Research

I anticipate that this study will allow for an Indigenous voice from northern Alberta to be heard as it relates to the dispossession of land, the personal and collective disconnection to Indigenous language and culture, and finally the documented process of reconnection. The story will be the data as well as the validation. It helps to bring our ancestors out of the shadows, providing an element of visibility in our family and in our home community. It provides an Indigenous perspective of some of our own histories. Telling our story brings life to the statistics and illuminates the realities of policies that determine who we are as Indigenous people in Canada. My generation in our extended family in the Lesser Slave Lake area represents the first generation of disconnection to ancestral land, ancestral language and ancestral knowledge.

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[8] CURA is a Community University Research Alliance initiative that was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The project was a five year collaborative research study under the leadership of Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax.

D. Terminology

For this study I use the term ‘Indigenous’ which refers to the First peoples or Aboriginal peoples who are indigenous to their land. It is a more commonly used term in academia and on a broader international scope than the term ‘Aboriginal’. I capitalize the word as a proper name for the people, e.g., Indigenous people, Aboriginal people, Native people, unless using a direct citation that differs. I also use the term ‘Aboriginal’ as indicated in the Canadian Constitution, Section 35 which recognizes the following three groups as Aboriginal people in Canada: Indians (also known as First Nations), Métis and Inuit. I also use the term ‘Native’ which was a collective term that was more commonly used prior to the usage of the term Aboriginal. For example, the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP), a national Aboriginal organization that represents off-reserve First Nations people, primarily non-Status Indian people and Métis, changed its name in 1993 from the Native Council of Canada (NCC) which was formed in 1971 (Posluns, M., The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2010). I use the term ‘Native’ in reference to the timeframe it was used and when it is a direct quote.

The term ‘First Nations’ started being used in the 1970s instead of the term ‘Indian’ since many people considered the latter to be offensive. I use both terms interchangeably in this study depending on the time period and when it is used in a direct quote. The term ‘Indian’ is the legal term used in the Indian Act and the Constitution Act. ‘First Nations’ peoples or

‘Indian’ people refer to Status and non-Status people in Canada. Many First Nation communities have adopted the term First Nation rather than the term ‘band’. The issue of terminology related to Aboriginal status in Canada will be discussed further in Chapter IV, Section B, Political/Legislated Identities. With reference to Indigenous people in the United States, I use the term ‘Native American’ which is more commonly used in that country. I refer to specific nations whenever possible to emphasize the diversity among Indigenous peoples and to minimize the use of pan-Aboriginal/Indigenous terms. There is some variance in the spelling of various First Nations (e.g. *Anishnaabe, Nishaabe,* or Ojibway, Ojibwe etc.).

CHAPTER II – RESEARCH/RESEARCHER LOCATION

A. Intentions and Location of the Research/Researcher

> *I come from a close knit family of six—three boys and three girls. I am the youngest daughter. Our mother had nine children, two of whom did not survive childbirth. Our youngest brother, Kevin, only lived for nine months. I have an adult son, Damon and 16 nieces and nephews who have 19 children among them. My late father Sam and late sister Lorraine, passed away in 2005—both devastating losses for our family and community.*
>
> *Our brothers and sisters and I were raised to 'get along' with each other, to help each other and to help others especially those less fortunate than us. I consider my siblings and their spouses to be close friends. I think of my nieces and nephews like my sons and daughters. Since my late sister Lorraine passed on, I feel more protective of her daughter Kristin and her family; of her son Caleb and his daughter and Lorraine's eldest son, Sheldon and his family. No one can take her place in their lives, but I do look out for them and continually pray for their protection and wellbeing as I do for my own son, Damon. It is for all of our children, grandchildren and those not yet born that helped to keep my motivation strong to bring this research to completion.*

One of the fundamental principles of Aboriginal research methodology is that researchers locate themselves at the outset of their research (Martin, 2003; Absolon & Willett, 2005; Steinhauer, 2007; Kovach, 2009). Situating oneself during introductions is important in most Indigenous cultures. Introducing yourself, your family name, the names of your parents and sometimes your grandparents, as well as your home community or First Nation is expected. It is especially important when meeting older Indigenous people as it gives them the opportunity to make the connections to your family. It is not uncommon when I first meet people in the Native community of my generation or older, that they know of my late father, or my late sister or sometimes other family members. It

is a respectful way of meeting people and it establishes relationships and kinship ties.

Australian Indigenous scholar, Aileen Moreton-Robinson discusses the protocol for introducing yourself to other Indigenous people, “to provide the information about one’s cultural location, so that connection can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established” (cited in Martin, 2003, p. 2). Indigenous scholars, Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett (2005) consider locating self in research to be good protocol for research methodology as it provides the context of the researcher and further ensures that our “individual realities are not misrepresented as generalizable collectives” (p. 123). I hope that this research will be useful to others even though the focus is in a sense on our family. The intent is not that it will be generalizable per se, but that there may be some commonalities and relevance in the study, from which others benefit.

Absolon and Willett assert that good research needs the trust of the community and locating yourself is one way to gain that trust (p. 97). One cannot make the assumption that your community, including your family, know your values and beliefs, your intentions, your motivations; they need to be articulated and clear. Locating yourself for some is beyond an introduction of who you are and where you are from: “location is about relationships to land, language, spiritual, cosmological, political,

economical, environmental, and social elements in one's life" (Absolon & Willett, p. 98). Some of those areas of location are addressed in this study.

My intentions were to value our own ways of knowing and being by deepening my own knowledge of our family history, including oral history and traditional Indigenous knowledge. I hope that this work in ancestral reconnections helps others to value their history, their culture and traditional Indigenous knowledge and strengthen their identity and sense of well-being. My intention was that the research is meaningful for all those involved, including our family, our home community and that through knowledge mobilization, this study serves to motivate others to pursue their own stories, their own histories and their own lived experiences as well as those of their ancestors. Indigenous education is about service to the people; it is not about individual advancement or seeking status (Hampton, 1995).

Cree writer and educator, Janice Acoose (1995) discusses her intention and the guidance and empowerment she receives from *Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak* (all my relations) in writing her story, "Guided, sometimes painfully and uncomfortably, by those spiritual energies, I felt compelled to encourage others, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, to hear our voices, to understand and know our history, and to restore honour and integrity to our ways" (p. 32).

My first experience hearing an Indigenous scholar speak about the importance of knowing one's research motives and the myth of objective

research was at the first Indigenous scholar's conference hosted at the University of Alberta in 1995. The speaker was Chickasaw scholar, Eber Hampton. Until that point in my academic experience, I understood that 'objectivity' is what we were striving for as researchers; yet the internal tension I felt about 'objective research'—an oxymoron from my perspective—told me that Hampton was right. The power and the passion in his words had a deep impact: "Emotionless, passionless, abstract, intellectual, academic research is a goddamn lie; it does not exist. It is a lie to ourselves and to other people" (1995, p. 52). Being clear about one's motives in doing research is an integral aspect of Indigenous research. I reflected upon his heartfelt presentation many times, and cited him in my Master's thesis (1999) when examining the deeper motivation of my research (pp. 12-13).

I believe that one's motivation in doing research can have many layers. A motivator for me is not unlike what Hampton identified about his research and lifelong interest about how humans deal with misinformation. He said it went back to when he was a child in a classroom:

> When the answer came to me it was in the form of a 6-year-old little Indian boy by the name of Eber, sitting at a desk in a classroom looking at a picture of an Indian on a page in a textbook. (p. 50)

Similarly, in exploring a deeper motivation for my research, it took me back to my early experiences in elementary school in Slave Lake. I remember feeling discomfort when the teacher spoke of 'Indians'. Perhaps it was in a nursery rhyme in one of our texts—I do not recollect the exact

moment. What I do remember is that the ‘Indians’ in the textbooks were none that I knew, even though I knew that I was Indian. I also knew that the families of fair-haired children with a spotted dog in the textbooks were not my experience. Perhaps my young mind knew that the family in the storybooks were like the family of blonde children with a black and white spotted dog who lived down the street from us. It seemed that theirs was a ‘storybook’ life; ours was not.

It is one of the reasons that I value the lived experiences of Indigenous people. We were invisible in the classroom and all too frequently in our communities. In my Master’s research I addressed the invisibility motivation that continues to drive me today. At the time I was examining the decision making role of Métis women in the community. I recounted the recognition that non-Aboriginal women seemed to receive in comparison:

> I saw the strength of the women in our family, in our community… there were many strong females in the community whose roles were not unlike my grandmother’s role in the family. Yet I did not feel that they received the acknowledgement or recognition in the community that they deserved… It was as though the indigenous women were invisible, or at least “in the shadows.” Perhaps that was the root of my motivation: being invisible, not having a voice, not being equally valued. (pp. 13-14)

My motivation for doing research has not changed significantly from when I started on my academic journey. Perhaps it will be a life-long experience for me to continue to work towards helping to bring our people from out of the shadows.

Choosing our family history for this research created some inner conflict for me. I was raised with the value of being humble, a common value among many Indigenous cultures. Along with that is the value of looking out for the greater good of the collective, not to aspire for individual gain or recognition. This research is not about seeking recognition or limelight for me or for our family. It is about validation of our own histories and lived experiences, of acknowledging our ways of knowing and being, and respecting our ancestors and all our relations. Absolon & Willett (2005) state that because the intent of colonization was to "erase our roots, ancestors and traditions, we must work hard to recover all that we can" (p. 121).

This study provides the opportunity to reclaim our family's history—a recovery of sorts. I had anticipated that exploring ancestral history would likely reveal some painful experiences from the past; however I was not looking forward to delving into my own pain in the process. In a discussion about my work with an Indigenous scholar (February 2013), it was suggested that I examine my own issues around invisibility and secondly that my work was autoethnography, something I was trying to avoid. It was suggested that I take the time to write about what it has meant to feel invisible without land, without a band, without a history. I was told that it may be painful and that it would take courage to write, but that it would be worthwhile for me to do it. It was not something that I really wanted to address at a deeper level because I knew it was going to be painful, as it

had been when I explored what it was like for me being disconnected from our language and my grandmothers in one of my graduate courses.

What has it meant to me to feel invisible without land, without a band, without a history? My sister Linda (personal communication, February 2013) said that invisibility started with my birth. "Tell that story."

> *I was born at home just after midnight on Nov 1, 1955 in a small two room house in northern Alberta. We didn't have running water. There was no hospital and no doctor in town. The nearest hospital was over an hour's drive on a gravel road west of town. There was a nurse in town, Miss Attrux who everyone went to for any medical services that were needed. My mom told me that the night I was born, she and her best friend Pauline had dressed up my eldest brother as a woman for Halloween, complete with a brassiere full of oranges. She said that they laughed so hard, she went into labour. I don't know where my older sister Lorraine was, or my brother Gordon. The only person who remembers me being born besides my mom, is my eldest sister Linda. She remembers Mom and Pauline really laughing hard that evening. But later she remembers hearing my mom moaning in the bedroom. We only had curtains to separate the bedrooms. She didn't know what was happening. She must have been afraid but had no one to comfort her or explain what was going on. She was only three and half years old herself.*
>
> *Mom said her labour came fast. My dad must have been worried. He must have tried to reach the nurse but for some reason she wasn't available. We didn't have a telephone then. Dad rushed to get Sophie, the midwife who had delivered most of the babies in the community. This night however, she had been at the local tavern. Dad brought her home to help with my delivery. He stayed outside in the truck. Perhaps it was too much for him to handle. Mom said when I 'came out', I was slippery, (like newborn babies are) and the midwife almost dropped me. But luckily my aunt Pauline caught me. Pauline was my godmother—thank goodness she was there. She helped create the safety net for my arrival. She wanted to name me Reva. Mom chose that as my second name. Pauline later had a daughter, her only child. She named her Vera. Pauline passed away at an early age in the 1960s. She really was my mom's best friend.*

Many babies of my parents' generation were delivered by midwives in northern communities. In my family, I was the only one born at home. I'm the fourth child. My brothers and sisters were born in hospitals, mostly in High Prairie. I did not know of anyone my age who had been delivered at home. All I knew about my birth when I was young was that I was born at home after midnight on Halloween. Our neighbour Norman Trindle who was my dad's cousin always called me 'Punkin' when I was a child. I assumed it was because I was almost a 'Halloween baby'. Perhaps my home birth set the tone for my life path. There were no medical records for my delivery, no birth weight, no height, no time of delivery. Perhaps it contributed to the need for me to see the actual written records that provide evidence, validation in a sense of the events of our history. That feeling of being left out, of not being important enough to write about, of being invisible was reinforced in school, right at the outset from grade one. We never saw ourselves in the text books at school. There was no written history about our people, as if we did not matter. We weren't important enough in Slave Lake for the townspeople to keep accurate records, even of the burial sites and cemeteries where our ancestors lie. All of this sets the tone for this "re-search" for the evidence and the stories of our people, my ancestors in the Slave Lake area; seeking to be, no longer invisible.

It took me a few days to sit with the questions about what has it meant to me to feel invisible without land, without a band, without a history. It was painful; I cried a lot of tears while I wrote. It may seem insignificant to the reader, but it was hugely significant to me to write 'my story' about invisibility and disconnection.

I have often introduced myself in graduate studies as a landless, bandless, mixed-blood[9] *Cree—with Indian status. I say that with 'tongue in cheek'. My point is that we don't all fit neatly into commonly used categories of 'FNMI', First Nations, Métis or Inuit. It is not that simple. I am truly grateful for having been 'given' Indian status since 1990. But more importantly I am grateful for the genealogy research that my eldest brother Gordon did to get us our status. It tells us who our ancestors are. So what does having*

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[9] I use that term not exclusively because of the mix of our 'white' ancestry but because of the mix of Indigenous ancestry i.e. Cree, Ojibway, Saulteux etc. revealed in our genealogy.

Indian status mean? Does it mean because I am from the Treaty 8 territory, that I am a Treaty Indian. If so, where is our land? Where is my band? Where is my community? Who are our leaders, our chief, our councillors? Where do I exercise my political right to vote at the local level? Who represents our views at the national level? Is it the Assembly of First Nations (AFN)? It can't be AFN because it's only the chiefs who get to vote—we don't have a chief. Then is it the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP), the organization representing Aboriginal peoples living off-reserve? Does that organization have the resources and political infrastructure to support my political voice? Perhaps the question that needs to be addressed is, does acquiring Indian status without land, without a band, create more marginalization for some of us Indigenous people in Canada? Why does it feel like we have even become more invisible in the 'great Canadian landscape' than we already were?

I feel as an Indigenous person in Canada, in our home land, that we don't matter. Not having land is not about whether or not you own a home with or without a backyard. It's about not having a land base where your ancestors have lived, where they worked, where they fished, hunted and trapped, where they had their children and raised their families, the place they called home. It's about not having communal land for your family—for your parents, your brothers and sisters, their children, their children's children and those not yet born. It's about feeling disconnected from our community rooted in the history of our ancestors. Invisible.

We don't have visibility, almost no physical presence, not even in my home community of Slave Lake. There are no markers of the homes we lived in when I was a child. There is an empty lot where the house was that our dad built with the help of his friends in the late 1950s. I was about four years old when we moved into our 'new' house. I remember feeling like it was so big with three bedrooms and a bathroom with running water. And we had our own bedroom with a door even though there were five of us in that room. It seems like a lot now, but when we were young, we were comfortable. Our older brother had his own room. I was proud of our home, maybe because my dad built it with the help of his friends. We even had screen doors and a front lawn—well, the year after the potatoes were planted there. We moved from Slave Lake in 1967. We probably only lived in that house for about eight years. Dad got a job offer in Hinton that he felt he couldn't pass up. We cried when we found out that we had to move. Even up to the day the moving truck arrived, we still cried hoping that he would change his mind. None of wanted to move, not even Mom. I wanted my best friend Clarice to come with us. Finally Dad, said something

like, "well whoever is coming, had better come now because we're leaving". It turned out to be a good move in many ways but at the time, it was hard to leave. Our house was bought years later by the Sawridge First Nation. It eventually was levelled so it is now a vacant lot. Invisible.

Our grandparents, Kohkom[10] *and Moshom*[11]*, (Agathe & Alfred Sinclair) built a log house on their land just a bit northeast of the mouth of the Lesser Slave River. I don't know when the house was built but I think my Dad was born there in 1926. The house was empty for many years after Kohkom and Moshom died. Kohkom passed on before our Moshom, in 1964, the same year or close to the same year our brother Kevin died. He was only nine months old. He was born with the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck. Mom said his face was blue when he was born. The cord had cut off the oxygen flow to his brain. He never really fully developed. The doctor told Mom that he would have had brain damage. I remember his little body stiffening up when he cried. It seemed like he cried hard, like he was in pain. His death was hard on our family but it was especially hard for our mother. She had already lost two boys between my eldest sister and eldest brother; one was premature and the other died just after his birth. My sister Linda remembers when Mom got the news of Kevin's death over the phone. Linda said that Mom dropped to the floor. She must have been taken to the hospital because she wasn't at his funeral. In later years Mom said that our Kohkom told her in the hospital that she had to live for the rest of her family. Kohkom said she would be the one to go first. I think Kevin died in the spring. Kohkom died that same fall. Her death was also really hard on Mom because she was like a mother to her. Mom's mother died when she was just eleven years old. We have never seen a picture of our grandmother, Julie, yet all of my life, I have longed to see her. There was only one photograph of her that we'd heard of but never saw. Our 90 year old uncle, George Pierce, remembers having a picture of her holding him as a baby. He lost track of it over the years. Photographs of our ancestors are precious and rare. Invisible.*

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[10] *Kohkom* is the commonly used term for 'grandmother' (although it actually means 'your grandmother').

[11] *Mosom* is grandfather; however I spell it the way we pronounce it in our family.

Our Moshom died in 1974. Dad's youngest brother lived on Kohkom and Moshom's land next to their old house. He still lives there. But the old house is no longer standing. It had probably been empty since Moshom passed away. Highway 88 that runs north of Slave Lake toward Wabasca, Red Earth, and the northern lakes cuts right through my grandparents' land. The highway was built close to the old house, approximately 30 feet east of the highway. In later years, some people considered the old house to be an eyesore and wanted it torn down. To me it was an important land mark for the Sinclair family. My dad felt the same way. In the mid to late 1990s, he and I met with a government representative responsible for historical sites to preserve the building as a historical landmark. We were told that it could preserved, but that we would have to come up with half of the funding. We put it on hold at the time but planned to get back to it. Even up to his final days when he could no longer walk from the cancer that would take his life in 2005, Dad told me that he wanted to get back to the work that we still hadn't finished up north. He said that he enjoyed doing it. I knew what he meant, but told him that his health was more important at that time. The work could be done later. I cried after he went to sleep knowing that his work was already done in so many ways. He had interviewed several of our people from some of the northern communities for an oral history project that we worked on in the latter part of 1990s. He enjoyed travelling, sometimes with my son, and talking with people about their history. I was grateful for that and for the many times I had interviewed him and captured some of his history. But we both knew that there was more work to be done to preserve our own history and what few remaining land marks there were in our area. In the recent past, a local historian in Slave Lake had expressed interest to some of the relatives to preserve our grandparent's home as a historical site. Some relatives were interested in saving it while others started to dismantle it. Our family did not have any say in the matter—neither the house nor the land was in our late father's name. The house was still standing, albeit without a roof, before the fires ravaged through Slave Lake in 2011. The old house would no longer be a topic for dispute; it burned to the ground. Invisible.

I have heard it said many times that our people really were the first (I would add, adept) environmentalists. They didn't leave obvious traces of where they were. They were not sedentary people. They lived off the land and the water. Their environment sustained them. In our family, in the 1800s they moved to where they could support themselves and their families. Some of them worked in the fur trade but regardless of the work they did, they always lived off the land. It's interesting to me that some of us, like our family are living 'off the land' but in a displaced way. In the

context of relying on the land for sustenance, our family still hunts and picks berries and medicines, maintaining ancestral traditions. But in the sense of leaving historical traces of where they lived with the exception of our grandparents, there were no traces. There were no inheritances of family homes on cement foundations, no jewellery, or 'precious things' of value passed on to subsequent generations as I have observed in many non-Indigenous families. We had the stories and the memories that were shared among the adults, parents, aunties and uncles, grandparents etc., in the community. But with the loss of our ancestral language in our families and communities, the oral traditions fade away like the ancestors of our past. Invisible.

What is worse, being invisible or being silenced? Either of them do damage to our people, to our psyches, to our spirits. What is even more damaging is being silenced and invisible. (February 2013)

Invisibility of our people was one of the prime motivators that surfaced throughout my academic studies. It resurfaced as a significant motivator for this work as well. I thought I might have made peace with that issue by now, but perhaps there are always layers to healing that happen over time. I remind myself to keep moving in that direction of healing. For me, the direction in which I am compelled to explore is behind me, in the direction of our ancestors. I also see this as somewhat of an autoethnographic journey to find voice, my own and in a sense, that of my ancestors so we are no longer invisible. It is like "re-Cree-ating" our past.

B. Family Background

My late father, Sam Sinclair, was born on the southeastern shore of the lake in Sawridge, which later became known as “Old Town”. The town site was moved to its present day location after the 1935 flood at which time the name was changed to Slave Lake[12]. My father’s parents were the late Alfred and Agathe Sinclair. They lived in “Old Town” where they raised their family including several grandchildren. Some members of my father’s family also raised their families in “Old Town”. Our family was raised in the Town of Slave Lake. Sawridge First Nation borders the northeast margins of the town as well as other nearby locations. It was not uncommon for the local First Nations people to live in town. A few First Nations families lived on reserve when we lived in Slave Lake.

The Town of Slave Lake has a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people as it did when I was a child. However, it appears that the percentage of non-Aboriginal people in the community has increased exponentially as a result of the ‘discovery’ of oil and gas in the area in the 1960s. I consider Lesser Slave Lake my home community because it is where I was born and raised. As previously stated, it is the land that sustained our family for many generations, our ancestral homeland. My

[12] In an article submitted by Bruce Thomas in the local history text (1984), Pioneers of the Lakeland, indicates that Slave Lake was renamed in the mid-1920s (p. 221).

father's paternal grandparents were Donald and Madeleine (Hamelin) Sinclair. His maternal grandparents were Michel and Isabel (Cardinal) Courtoreille.

My mother's family are from the southwestern shores of Lesser Slave Lake. My mother, Edna Sinclair (Pierce) born in 1926, is a member of the Driftpile First Nation. She was born and raised in Kinuso and also lived in Canyon Creek. Her late parents were Donald and Julie Pierce (Chalifoux). Don Pierce, my maternal grandfather, was an American originally from Maine. His wife Julie Pierce, my deceased grandmother (*nohkomipan*), had seven children before she passed away when my mother was a child of eleven. I have never seen a picture of my maternal grandmother even though I have longed to see her all of my life. Her memory is kept alive through stories that my mom and aunts and uncles speak about her. My late great-grandmother, Marie Chalifoux, helped my grandfather, Don, raise his children when our grandmother passed on at the early age of thirty-three. Marie, a member of the Swan River First Nation never married. She had three daughters, Julie, Catherine and Philomene, whom she raised on her own.

Cree was my late father's first language, the language of his parents and grandparents. My mother was also raised with the Cree language as her mother and grandmother spoke only Cree. My maternal grandfather, Don Pierce, owned a general store in Kinuso (west of Slave Lake).He had to learn some Cree in order to communicate with the

Indigenous people in the area. English was the main language used in our home even though my parents were fluent in Cree. I have often wondered what the primary influence was that contributed to the Cree language not being passed down to the subsequent generations in our family. What impact did the residential school system have on the loss of language of my late father's family even though his parents never went to residential school? My father did not go to residential school either but some of his older "half" siblings did. I believe that the magnitude of the impacts of colonization extend far beyond the scope of the imposed residential school system. Our ancestors did not have to be products of residential schools to feel the pressure of the dominant society to disconnect from their Indigenous languages.

My late father was sent home from school in first grade and was not allowed to return until he learned to speak English. Cree was the first language of three of my grandparents. Unfortunately my parents did not pass their language on to their children. In later years, my father spoke of the regret he had that we were not taught the Cree language in our home. Most of the Cree we learned as children was from his mother, Agathe. My mother speaks Cree but she does not use the language regularly since most of us (her children and grandchildren) are not fluent Cree speakers, although we understand some of the language.

In my childhood years in Slave Lake, it was not uncommon to hear Cree being spoken by the generations of my parents and grandparents.

However, it was not common to hear it spoken by the next generation in our extended family. There were some families of my generation in Slave Lake who spoke Cree in their homes, but from my perspective, they were a minority. We heard Cree spoken a lot at home mostly through adult conversations. When I was a young pre-school child in Slave Lake, I remember playing on the floor listening to my mother visit with Cree speaking friends who stopped by for a visit. The late Irene Twin was one of her regular visitors. I never knew what was being said, but I loved the sound of the language like it was a song.

My father used the language more than my mother mostly through his work. When we were not in school, we would travel with him and our mother to various communities when he worked in community development. He also was a truant officer when we lived in Slave Lake, so missing school to travel with him was not an option.

Later when we lived in Hinton I remember travelling with him to small communities such as Muskeg and Susa Creek before Grand Cache was a town in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He always spoke Cree to the people. Sometimes we went to ‘Smallboy’s Camp’ and ‘Mackinaw’s camp’ south of Hinton. We would remain quietly in the vehicle sometimes within ‘ear shot’ while he met with the people. I always wished that I could understand them and would carefully watch their body language for any clues. It did not help. He regularly met with people in the Hinton area

some of whom were Saulteaux or Ojibwe (*Anishnaabe*), but Cree was the common language used.

For several years when we were in Hinton, my father had his office set up in our home. He was a Native Liaison Officer with the provincial government so he was always in contact with the local Aboriginal people. We would hear him conversing in Cree on the telephone or in person with Aboriginal people who came to our house. We also had several male relatives (cousins and uncles) mostly from Slave Lake who lived with us off and on for a few years; two of them were my father's brothers who spoke Cree fluently. They worked for a logging company started by my father to create employment for Aboriginal people. I have fond memories of coming home from school as a young teenager in Hinton, hearing my mother talking Cree on the phone to her friends and laughing until she had tears in her eyes; it was music to my ears. She says that stories are funnier in Cree.

Our family was raised Roman Catholic, under the firm guidance of the women in the family, our mother and grandmothers. The influence of the church was strong in our lives as it was for the majority of Aboriginal people in the community. When I was a child in Slave Lake, I wanted to become a nun like my grade three teacher, Sister Etienne. In my eyes, she was like a saint, always cheerful, kind, and compassionate. In later years, I admired her even more when she moved to the Congo to help the people there. Sister Etienne's enthusiasm as a teacher, her kindness and

generosity made me look forward to being in school and to do well as a student. The local Catholic ‘sisters’ had a club for young girls where we learned songs (some of them in French), made crafts and did other fun activities. I experienced my first leadership role as President of the Catholic girls’ club sometime between 9–11 years of age. I thrived in the girls club and in Sister Etienne’s class—they were safe places where I felt equally valued as my non-Aboriginal peers.

Later, in my adult years, stories of sexual, physical, emotional and mental abuse were unveiled over time by residential school survivors. I was aware that some of my aunts and uncles on my Dad’s side of the family went to what they called, the ‘mission’ in Grouard. Although some of them stated in previous interviews that they were not treated badly, I knew that one of my late uncles (Danny) had terrible experiences in the mission. Uncle Danny was my godfather. Although his father was a L’Hirondelle, my father and he were as close as full brothers. He was in the mission longer than any of his “half” brothers and sisters, from the age of three to thirteen years. Later in his adult life he struggled with alcoholism, not unlike many residential school survivors, until he found his way to sobriety over 40 years before his passing in 1998.

Such knowledge about abuse that Aboriginal children endured in residential schools left me disillusioned and disheartened with the Catholic faith. I could not reconcile the hypocrisy of the physical and sexual abuse that was increasingly becoming evident over time with church doctrine to

be ‘good’ Christians. From my perspective, the deceit and dysfunction of the church as well as the severe abuse of power had gone on far too long. In my recollection, it was unheard of for our people to challenge the nuns, the priests or the church regardless if their actions and/or behaviour were wrong and/or inappropriate. I remember hearing people talking about priests who had fathered children, not specifically in Slave Lake but in some northern communities. It seemed to be an accepted reality but not openly discussed. Our people seemed so accepting, or perhaps in some cases more tolerant, of the ‘church’ than vice versa.

In the Lesser Slave Lake area, the majority of the Aboriginal people were Cree, mostly followers of the Catholic faith, including our kohkom, Agathe, who was a devout Catholic. She passed away in the early 1960s before the truth became evident about the rampant sexual abuse by Catholic priests that devastated so many of our communities across the nation. How would my grandmothers and great grandmothers have dealt with that ugly truth if they were alive today? It likely would have been heartbreaking for them. Perhaps it was a blessing that they passed on before the ‘fall from grace’ of the Catholic Church, at least from my perspective.

It saddens me when I think of the commitment that thousands of Aboriginal families made for over a century as they traveled hundreds of miles—by horse and wagon in the early days—to the annual pilgrimage in Lac St. Anne, an hour west of Edmonton to practice their faith. My late

father told us that his mother, Agathe, made a commitment to make that journey every year from Slave Lake to Lac St. Anne from the time my father was an infant after his life was saved by traditional medicine[13]. He was expected not to survive from a bad case of pneumonia when our kohkom desperately called on a local 'medicine' woman to save him. He was left with her for a few days. When he was returned in good health, our kohkom was very relieved and grateful. My father continued the tradition of taking our family to the annual pilgrimage in Lac St. Anne until his last trip in 2005, four months before he lost the battle with cancer at 79 years of age. We continue to take our mother to the pilgrimage although it is not the same since the passing of our dad. The annual pilgrimage to Lac St. Anne has been a part of the history of many Indigenous families in western Canada and continues to the present day.

It is an interesting contradiction that many priests, especially in the north, learned Indigenous languages to preach and proselytize in our communities; yet so many of us Aboriginal people do not know our languages today. It was ironic to me that in 2008 a group of us Indigenous graduate students studied the Cree language taught by a Catholic priest, Father Paul (now deceased), who was also known in the north as

[13] My dad shared many such stories with us over the years. I recorded and documented a few of them, some of which were used in my masters' thesis.

"*Maskwa*[14]*" (bear).* He learned to speak Cree fluently during the time he lived in communities north of Slave Lake. He told us that in order to be fluent speakers, we would need to study and practice speaking the language daily. I have not yet had the luxury of time to concentrate on learning the language on a daily basis. However, I do appreciate his knowledge and appreciation of the Cree language, and his dedication in working towards keeping it alive.

C. Welcoming the Sacred in the Research

I think of this research journey as a sacred ceremony. I assume responsibility in considering the impact of my motives and intentions on my family and community, one of the principles stated by Indigenous scholar Weber-Pillwax (1999). Such responsibility in Indigenous scholarship can be overwhelming at times. For the past several years, I had been praying for guidance while working on my doctoral studies, but my work was not advancing at the pace that I had anticipated. I was inadvertently resisting integrating the sacred aspect of my research into my work; it felt like it was too personal to share with others. I participated in discussions about Indigenous ways of knowing and being but I was not creating the space for the sacred in my research, even though prayer and

[14] It sounds like *muskwa*.

ceremony are a very important part of my life and my identity. What I came to realize is that for me, it was essential to integrate all aspects of myself in my work—mind, body and spirit. It was about being true to myself.

My late sister Lorraine used to say, "Seek your truth, speak your truth and then stand by your truth." Sometimes standing by your truth may mean standing alone, which requires courage. I told her one time that challenges in life seemed to be easier for her because she had so much courage. She told me that it was not so much about courage as it was about ‘feeling the fear and doing it anyway’. I admired that about her; she never let fear stand in her way.

It helped me to write when I thought of my role as the person holding a sacred eagle feather in a talking/healing circle, giving the carrier of the feather permission to speak. Only the person who holds the rock or eagle feather or talking stick is allowed to speak uninterrupted (Sinclair, 1993, p. 26). Although this is not a talking circle, I use the analogy because it freed me to ‘write what I know’ from my own perspective, knowing that others will have their own perspectives and truths. I participated in many talking/healing circles since I was introduced to them in the late 1980s by my late sister. Speaking one’s truth in the safety of a sacred circle is in itself a cathartic healing experience. The difference here is that my words are recorded on paper for others to view; in a sacred circle what is spoken is generally meant to be kept confidential. The idea

for me is to write as if in a sacred ceremony speaking for myself, not for others. That was the manner in which I was able to bring my Master's research to completion, with daily prayer and eagle feather in hand, whether in my ‘mind’s eye’ or literally in my hand.

In Aboriginal communities, spirituality is generally accepted as part of who we are and what we do, albeit spiritual beliefs and practices may vary significantly in any given family, community or nation. In my experience it is not uncommon at gatherings of Indigenous people that events begin and usually end with a ceremony, a prayer or an invocation usually by a recognized Elder. However, in mainstream non-Indigenous academic institutions, that is generally not the case. As an Indigenous student, I chose to make space in my work for the sacred since it is a significant part of my life.

Roxanne Struthers (2001) states her intention to conduct sacred research in Indigenous communities: “to share a personal approach to research that was culturally sensitive, balanced, harmonious, circular, sacred, natural, holistic, and unfolded with fluidity and grace for the researcher and research participants” (p. 125). Her intention resonated with me and reinforces my belief that conducting this research in a sacred manner may serve to be rewarding not only for myself as the researcher, but for my relatives in the past, present and future. My late sister, Lorraine Sinclair (1993) spoke of what she learned from the late Chief Robert Smallboy about sharing knowledge: “He said, “knowledge does not belong

to you, give away what knowledge you do have and that makes room for more knowledge. Give that away and eventually it will become wisdom" (p. viii.). The intention of this research was to share the research experience as well as the outcomes.

Acknowledging the sacred in my work honours my spiritual essence. It frees me to speak openly. I have heard it said that as researchers we should write how we talk, especially when we feel 'blocked'. I believe that writing can be a challenge for many Indigenous people since knowledge transmission was and in many ways continues to be oral. Some of us are only a generation away from illiteracy[15]. The process of putting words to paper seems to take the spirit out of the words. In some way, making space for the sacred on this journey may help to bring life to the words. Perhaps that life will be revealed in the reconnection to our ancestral knowledge—giving voice to those who have gone before us. I heed the words of Manu Meyer (2008), "Knowledge that endures is spirit driven" (p. 218).

D. Urban Influences

Since the age of twenty-one, I have lived most of my adult life (36 years) in urban centres in Alberta, primarily in Edmonton with a five year

[15] I typically do not use the word 'illiteracy' because it has a negative connotation which implies a lack of knowledge and skills. With the exception of my mother's father, three of my grandparents spoke only Cree. They did not read or write English.

stint in Calgary. My late father's work as a Métis leader in Alberta led to the relocation of my parents to Edmonton from Hinton in the mid-1980s. I had already been living in Edmonton since 1977. Today most of our family including my mother, my sister, her husband and family, two brothers and their spouses and families reside in the greater Edmonton area. My late sister's children and grandchildren with the exception of one, also live in the Edmonton area. My eldest brother, Gordon lives in Slave Lake with his wife Valerie and their family. I believe that their presence there helps to keep our connection to our homeland alive and is strengthened with ceremonies that we hold on the land as well as our family's ongoing visits. Not living in the community limited my 'insider' knowledge of the people and the land. I relied primarily on personal and family connections throughout the study.

The urban Aboriginal population in Canada has increased from 50% in 1996 to 54% in 2006 compared to 81% of non-Aboriginal people who were urban dwellers in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008, p. 12). Statistics Canada 2011 census data (2013) indicates that the Aboriginal population is significantly younger than the non-Aboriginal population; the median age is 28 years for Aboriginal people compared to the median age of 41 for non-Aboriginal people (Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit, National Household Survey 2011, 2013, p. 16). The 2006 Census data (2008) indicates that 59% of urban Aboriginal people reside in census metropolitan areas compared to 80%

of the non-Aboriginal population (Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations, 2006 Census, 2008, p. 12).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' report indicates that the main issues affecting our people in urban centres are "identity, a void of government policy, accessible and appropriate resources, and the gaining of an effective voice in governance and decision making" (Ward & Bouvier, 2001, p. 5). The authors acknowledge that "While the source of who we/Aboriginal people are comes from our/their history, our/their language and culture, it is also shaped by interaction or in relationship with others" (p. 6). In my experience without a direct connection to our family's homeland and home community on a daily basis, my identity gets nurtured largely by cultural experiences with people in my immediate environment; my family and my peers who have become like my family.

Hampton (1995) considers a "strong relationship to the land, for survival and spiritual renewal," as an essential characteristic of Indigenous cultures (as cited in Ward & Bouvier, 2001, p. 7). He says that being removed from a space that "affords more opportunity for a connection to one's natural surroundings may mean the weakening of many cultural dimensions," which he describes as "crucial to Indian education" (cited in Ward & Bouvier, p. 7). Urban living affects many of these dimensions (Ward & Bouvier, p. 7). Hampton describes those dimensions or "standards" such as tradition as "an affirmation of Indian education through continuity across the generations, or the Indian sense of place,

land and territory, are a struggle to maintain identity in disconnected urban environments" (cited in Ward & Bouvier, pp. 7-8).

Mi'kmaq scholar, Bonita Lawrence (2004) discusses the important role of family in maintaining an Aboriginal identity in urban based populations, "In urban contexts, where other bonds of identity (language, band, territory, or clan) may no longer apply, family becomes all the more important for grounding a person as Aboriginal" (p. xv). Although the city is home for most of my immediate family, we still maintain a strong connection to our family's place of origin. For me, that relationship is strengthened through my own prayers and participation in ceremonies on the land.

A recent study of urban Aboriginal people (Environics Institute, 2010) about their identity, their values and experiences indicates that although urban Aboriginal people consider 'the city' their home, they retain "a strong sense of connection to their ancestral communities or places of origin (p. 8). These links are considered, "…integral to strong family and social ties, and to traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture" (p. 8). The connection to land for Aboriginal people is critical. Lawrence (2004) considers it to be more important than for non-Aboriginal 'settlers: "For Native people, land is about community, culture, history, and ancestral connection…being a part of a land-based Native community is at the heart of what being Indigenous signifies" (p. 191). Band membership is also significant for urban Aboriginal people. Lawrence asserts that in its

absence urban Aboriginal people “struggle very hard to find ways of anchoring their Native identities in collective ways” (p. 191).

Ward and Bouvier (2001) discuss the effects of the colonial legacy with which we are faced as Aboriginal people: “This legacy is the dispossession of land and the slow erosion of languages and cultures through legislation and policy, which resulted in a breakdown of systems that ensured survival as Indigenous people, then and now” (p. 9). They go on to say that the burden of a colonial history is not removed by moving to an urban centre (p. 9). I believe that urban based Aboriginal people may be faced with greater challenges to maintain their traditions and identity but it is possible. In my experience, a significant factor in helping to strengthen that connection has been directly and indirectly through post-secondary educational institutions which were urban based.

In the late 1970s, my late sister, Lorraine was introduced to traditional Indigenous knowledge from Elders in a Native Communications multimedia training program offered through what was then known as Grant McEwan Community College. That experience sparked her interest in learning about traditional knowledge which she shared later with many others including her family, children and siblings. She went on to learn from many traditional teachers and healers over the years and founded the Mother Earth Healing Society in the late 1980s. She assumed the role of ‘firekeeper’ of the society and held hundreds of weekly 'talking/sharing circles’ over the years until she was too ill to continue. Even up until the

last few months of her life, she continued to share her knowledge with organizations in the city especially those who were working with Aboriginal children's services, in schools and in foster care programs. It was as though she had to share everything she could up until her passing in 2005.

My initial exposure to traditional knowledge was vicariously through my sister's experiences which she was so willing to share. Occasionally I sat in on sharing circles held weekly at the office of the Mother Earth Healing Society, albeit somewhat reluctant initially. Later in the early 1990s when I moved back to Edmonton, I began to attend sharing circles and workshops facilitated by my sister. Eventually I began to participate in traditional ceremonies with Lorraine, other family members and friends. The opportunity to continue to learn from other Elders and traditional knowledge holders was mainly through the university, initially in my undergraduate degree in Native Studies and later during my doctoral studies in the past several years.

It takes commitment on the part of Indigenous educators to expose their students to traditional knowledge holders in whatever capacity that they can, whether they are educators in K-12 or in post-secondary institutions. In an article on urban Aboriginal education, Lil'wat scholar, Lorna Williams (2000) discusses her commitment in working as an Indigenous educator so that Aboriginal children take pride in their heritage

recognizing the important role of educational institutions in shaping their identity:

> A firmly established First Nations identity will aid them in reaching out for the opportunities available in the city without having to feel that in order to belong in Canada, to participate as citizens in this country, they must divest themselves of their identity. I continue to work for the day every Canadian, new immigrant or old, will be knowledgeable about First Nations and will accept the fact that First Nations history, values, and traditions are intricately woven into the fabric of Canadian identity. Education is the most powerful institution in any society, and teachers are its most powerful agents. (p. 145)

It also takes resources which are almost impossible to obtain to educate students about the richness of traditional knowledge which is evident in their Indigenous languages which the majority of Aboriginal people in Canada do not speak. Mohawk scholars, Marlene Brant Castellano, scholar Lynn Davis, and Louise Lahache and (2000) speak of the challenges urban Aboriginal people are faced with in the area of language revitalization in the schools:

> In urban settings, where students of many Aboriginal backgrounds and languages mix, the technical challenges for attaining fluency through schools are enormously difficult. In light of the systematic destruction of Aboriginal languages through assimilative schooling, the inability of schools to repair what has been broken represents perhaps the greatest betrayal in the education of Aboriginal people. (p. 252)

Métis scholar, Bouvier (2001) believes that our identity begins with and resides in our languages and that “we need to create institutions that nurture Indigenous languages and their continued development” (Ward & Bouvier, p. 189). The Environics study (2010) on urban Aboriginal people,

indicate that “Eight in ten urban Aboriginal peoples totally (57%) or somewhat (25%) agree that Aboriginal peoples have to take steps to protect their cultural traditions from outside influences” (p. 65). The study also reveals that urban Aboriginal people especially First Nations and Inuit people feel that, “language, and Aboriginal customs and traditions are the most important aspects of Aboriginal culture to be passed on to future generations” (p. 62).

For five years as a doctoral student, I was afforded the opportunity to deepen my awareness of the wealth of traditional knowledge embedded in our Indigenous languages, in particular Cree, through my involvement with the CURA research project, *Healing Through Language and Culture*. I have learned and continue to learn from traditional knowledge holders from various communities in the province, both urban and rural. Some were affiliated with the CURA project; others are personal connections or are connected with my family. However, if it were not for the resources available from the CURA project and the vision of my supervisor/mentor as well as her ongoing support, my experiences in the doctoral program in Indigenous Peoples Education would not have been as rich and meaningful as they were.

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Indigenous Research Framework

There is a growing body of literature that indicates Indigenous Research Methodology (IRM) is central to the support of Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous scholar, Cora Weber-Pillwax (1999) identifies several fundamental principles that underlay Indigenous research methodology:

> (a) the interconnectedness of all living things, (b) the impact of motives and intentions on person and community, (c) the foundation of research as lived indigenous experience, (d) the groundedness of theories in indigenous epistemology, (e) the transformative nature of research, (f) the sacredness and responsibility of maintaining personal and community integrity, and (g) the recognition of languages and cultures as living processes. (pp. 31-32)

The principles are all encompassing and support my theoretical view of the nature of Indigenous research. I engaged with literature of Indigenous scholars primarily as it relates to IRM, Indigenous research, Indigenous education and other relevant literature throughout the dissertation.

In deepening my own understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, of an Indigenous worldview, I draw on a widely read academic article entitled, Aboriginal Epistemology (Ermine, 1995). Indigenous scholar and ethicist/researcher, Willie Ermine (1995) describes the meeting over 500 years ago of two disparate worldviews that had “diametric trajectories into the realm of knowledge” (p. 101). Ermine

(1995) asserts that: “One was bound for an uncharted destination in outer space, the physical, and the other was on a delicate path into inner space, the metaphysical” (p. 101). He says that, for Aboriginal people, that inner space is “the universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self, or the being” (p. 103). His work and others validates my understanding of valuing that inner space where our own knowledge lies, making space for the growth of deeper wisdom.

Ermine states that Aboriginal epistemology is: “grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown” (p. 108). He says it was the self that provided the richest source of information by “delving into the metaphysical and the nature and origin of knowledge. Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self” (p. 108). Cree scholar, Michael Hart explains “knowledge” in a conversation with Margaret Kovach (2009), and supports the view that knowledge extends into the realm of the sacred. He states that knowledge “is what helps people move forward in their lives. It may help one person, or it may help many. …However, it [knowledge] is beyond one person in that it is between that person and the sacred world” (as cited in Kovach, 2009, p. 72).

It is reassuring for me that Indigenous scholars, such as Weber-Pillwax, who has been on the forefront of defining Indigenous Research Methodology (1999), reinforce that our ways are not inferior, substandard or inadequate. On the contrary, Weber-Pillwax questions whether the

university has the capacity to make the space to advance her own knowledge as an Indigenous scholar:

> I must seek the visionary's space because the primary source of teaching and guidance comes from the spirit world. The place where I wait must be a place of compassion, stillness, humility. The environment for indigenous research is found where the spirit of the researcher finds these qualities. (p. 44)

It is encouraging to see evidence of increased numbers of Indigenous scholars who are speaking to the need of valuing our own lived experience and knowledge in academia. Weber-Pillwax (1999) reminds us that Indigenous scholars should not perceive themselves as researchers at the margins of a larger and better society. She cautions us not to devalue what we know, but to value our own experiences, values and knowledge that will guide our research:

> ..we are not simply dispossessed and oppressed peoples who must strive to build intellectual bridges from our world into a foreign world which will judge the quality and content of our intellect before it decides whether or not to accept us as scholars. We have our own experiences on which to base our research. We have our own languages, our own philosophies, our own values to guide our research… Our intentionality and relationships with our communities will determine all aspects of the research we undertake as indigenous scholars. (p. 44)

It is an important reminder not to devalue that which we know and have lived [and continue to live today]. It strengthens my own courage to honour our own knowledge, not just in our everyday lives, but in the academy as well.

At the Sixth Annual Aboriginal Education Research Forum, *Shawane Dagosiwin* held in Winnipeg, April 13-15th, 2010, Anishnaabe

scholar Kathy Absolon provided a keynote address about her experiences with Indigenous research in the academy. She spoke of Indigenous research encompassing three things: 1) it is about who we are; 2) it is about what we know; and 3) it is about where we come from (Absolon, 2010, keynote address). It reinforced for me, my intention to use an Indigenous research framework centered on 'who I am', 'where I come from', and 'what I know' as a place to start. Using Indigenous research methodologies allows and encourages Indigenous researchers to be "who they are while engaged actively as participants in research processes that create new knowledge and transform who they are and where they are" (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, p. 174).

Pueblo scholar, Gregory Cajete (2008) identifies elements of strength in Indigenous research and includes a creative process that incorporates these essential elements:

> Gaining first-hand knowledge of community needs through "action research"; developing a comprehensive understanding of the history and "ecology" of a community'; implementing strategies for regaining control of local communities'; creating models based on lessons learned and application of research practices that work; and cultivating networks for mutual support. (p. 204)

Cajete says that Indigenous research that is "grounded in Indigenous values and needs is an essential element in the implementation of an educational process grounded in Indigenous sensitivity and vision" (p. 206). There are numerous elements and principles from which to draw in conducting research within an Indigenous framework.

Cree scholar, Evelyn Steinhauer (2002) engages with the work of several Indigenous scholars on the topic of IRM. She suggests that using IRM principles such as those defined by Weber-Pillwax are not simple, “It means that the researcher must know the cultural protocols, values, and beliefs of the Indigenous group with which they are studying” (p. 73). Steinhauer (2002) says that Weber-Pillwax also states that the researcher must ensure that, “the three “Rs—Respect, Reciprocity, and Relationality—are guiding the research” (p. 73). Cree scholar, Leona Makokis (2001) considers it important to be guided by the natural laws of, “love/kindness, honesty, sharing, and determination/strength which help the researcher to “understand the importance, validity, and sacredness of the information being shared” (2001, pp. 96-97).

B. Indigenous Knowledge/Indigenous Education

During the first few years of graduate studies, my intention was to focus on the revitalization of Indigenous language—in particular *Sakâw* Cree in northern Alberta. I felt that our Cree language and culture was central to my research; however I was concerned that not being a fluent Cree speaker could potentially be a significant hindrance. Over time and after several discussions with my peers, family members, and my mentor/doctoral supervisor, I finally accepted that the direction of my research needed to change. I needed to reexamine my focus.

It was in a heartfelt discussion with my supervisor in May 2008 that the shift in direction began to reveal itself. She listened carefully and took

notes as I spoke about what was closest to my heart. I talked about my family and my ancestors and the sadness that I felt about the sacred land where they are buried in the Lesser Slave Lake area. I could not talk about it without tears. We had several discussions about the need for me to find a focus for my work with which I was comfortable. She had previously suggested that I focus on my family and my home community, but I was reluctant. I was not confident that I would find the traditional knowledge in Slave Lake that I felt I needed to access. Many of the local people of my late father's generation and older have since passed on. I have not lived in the community since I was young, so I was out of touch with the traditional knowledge that remains there and in surrounding communities.

However, as my mentor, Dr. Weber-Pillwax, pointed out, sometimes we may look too hard at something and miss out on what is really there—it may require a shift in our focus before we can see clearly.

I began to see that the heart of my research is the connection with our ancestral homeland, where the footprints and the bones of our ancestors lie. After a short research presentation that I did for the CURA research team in the fall of 2009 in Ottawa, I was reminded by Cree scholar/Elder, Stan Wilson that our relationship with the land also includes our relationship with the water. I came to realize that traditional knowledge is not only in the people; it is in the land, in the water and in all life that supports the people, and it is in our language and our culture.

In a critical engagement about the connection of knowledge/s with place, drawing on their experiences and theoretical positions, the authors/scholars, Shultz, Kelly & Weber-Pillwax (2009) describe their conversation as "a scholarly endeavour based on our understanding of the importance of dialogue as an educational praxis that takes us into the conflicting and often liminal spaces of identity, inclusivity, bordering and belonging" (p. 336). They describe their conversation as a way to "contextualize and elucidate the intent of this issue to move beyond the belief that the Western is the only intellectual tradition or knowledge system available to us as educators" (p. 337). Weber-Pillwax looks to her language to describe the deep connection between place and identity:

> I am reminded of a Cree word, *nitisiy*, meaning my navel. When I say *nitisiyihkason*, I am saying "my name is …" so the connection between my name (or what I call myself) and my navel is clear. The deeper meaning of this term is shown in the practice of burying the umbilical cord after it detaches from the baby's navel in the place that is recognized as the baby's ancestral or family home territory. This ongoing cultural practice indicates clearly the significant connection between place and identity for thousands of Cree people of Canada…The umbilical cord is buried in that place where you are supposed to be and where you belong. Place, then, is a part of who you are, a part of your identity. (p. 338)

The practice of burying umbilical cords in our home territory was not carried on by my parents' generation, which is not to say that it was not practiced by others in the area including my ancestors. For me, the deep connection between identity and place lies in the reconnection with our own histories, including the land where our ancestors' bones are buried—in our case, in the Lesser Slave Lake area. That some ancestors

were not buried in the town cemetery with their names etched in granite headstones does not mean that they have no history there. The history of a people does not get wiped out because there are no remaining visible landmarks, such as gravesites, historical buildings, or sacred sites e.g. medicine wheels that can be found in southern Alberta in Blackfoot territory. We carry the history—as some make reference—as 'blood memory'. Weber-Pillwax (2009) discusses the theory of blood memory that is tied to a people: "The theory is if you have the blood of Cree ancestors, you have the Cree memories connected to those ancestors. But it's really your choice as to whether you use that or let it go" (Shultz et al, 2009, p. 339). I choose to honour that connection or re-connection.

Stan Wilson (1995) discussed Minniconju Sioux traditional knowledge holder/scholar, the late Lionel Kinunwa's, words about cellular memory in an article on honoring spiritual knowledge:

> Lionel said, "We have memories. Our ancestral memories are in your blood, they're in your muscles, they're in your bones, they're in your hair, and those memories are there." He said that many of us do not pay attention to those memories because we are too busy paying attention to what`s going on in the modern world. We don`t pay attention to our historic memory. That`s why when we hear the drum, our spirit is moved. This is because the vibrations of the drum stir old memories—our ancestral memories. These memories come out of our molecular structure of our being. This is also why when you hear someone speaking your own language, your molecular structure picks up those vibrations, because each language has its own particular patterns and you feel good that somebody is speaking your language. (p. 65)

Weber-Pillwax (Shultz et al, 2009) raises the important issue of how young people educated in the Western educational system become

disconnected with their roots. She says, “Western systems of education support that by “going for your head” and requiring a constant intellectual focus. So what happens is that you get disconnected from your feet, your roots; there’s no connection with your roots anymore” (Shultz et al, 2009, p. 339). Lynnette Shultz (Shultz et al, 2009) supports that view in her discussion about the problems with the insistence on rationalism in the European ways of knowing and the importance of being grounded with our roots:

> Rationalism was disciplined into the system and with that came the hierarchy, with men on the top, and everyone else below. So didn’t we all just learn to look up? We learned to be uninterested in our feet, our roots… By always looking up, we have completely lost where our feet are; we have lost our groundedness. When we can all put our feet on the ground, I think that would be a time when the hierarchy shifts. (Shultz et al, pp. 339-340)

I believe that as people Indigenous to this land, we can recreate that connection by exploring our ancestral roots. We do not have to wait for the educational system to change. We can proactively reconstruct our own historical relationships to land through our research by honouring Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous pedagogies. The significance lies not only in the relationship with the land though that is critical; it is also in relationship with the water. *Nishnaabekwe* (Ojibwe woman) scholar, Leanne Simpson (2008) discusses the important responsibilities that are held by the *Nishnaabe* women with respect to their relationship to the land:

> *Nishnaabe-kwewag*, as grandmothers, mothers, aunties, sisters and daughters, have some very important responsibilities when it comes to the land and the matters concerning the nation. Our relationship with the land is based on those responsibilities and our relationship to water is central. The water, Nibi, teaches us about relationships, interconnection, interdependence and renewal. (p. 205)

At the outset of this paper I stated that knowledge of one's culture, language and history may be considered Indigenous knowledge, also referred to by some scholars as 'Aboriginal' knowledge. Marlene Brant Castellano (2000) lists some of the characteristics of Aboriginal knowledge: "personal, oral, experiential, holistic and conveyed in narrative or metaphorical language" (p. 25). I consider this study to have some of those characteristics in that it is primarily a personal narrative based on the experiences of our family, historically and contemporarily.

In an article about Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous education, Gregory Cajete (2000) describes the derivation of Indigenous knowledge: "from communal experience, from environmental observation, from information received, and from the visions obtained through ceremonies and communion with spirits of nature" (p. 190). He draws on a metaphor from the environment to describe knowledge: "Knowledge, like a cloud, comes in and out of being. Knowledge comes to us when we need it. It evolves and develops. When things are needed, they come" (p. 190). That is true in my experience and I trusted (albeit sporadically) that the knowledge and resources I needed to bring this research to completion would be there when needed.

I was in attendance at the first *autochthonous* (Indigenous) scholars' conference at the University of Alberta when I first heard Eber Hampton (1995) discuss accessing knowledge that unfolds through our memories:

> "Memory comes before knowledge. Every person's life contains experiences and memories of these experiences. The way it works for me is that I forget those things until I unwrap them, until I actually roll out the sacred medicine bundle of my life and look for those memories. I pick them up and touch them and feel them. And each memory gives me knowledge. (p. 53)

The wisdom of his words, 'memory comes before knowledge' stayed with me since then. They became even more meaningful to me as I connected with my ancestral genealogical data, in particular, with my grandmothers as discussed in Chapter 6, Ancestral Data.

At that same conference, Cree scholar/Elder, Stan Wilson (1995) reminded us of the importance of remembering what kept our ancestors in balance with their environments, and that we need to acknowledge ancestral help in writing [and I would add, 'righting'] our research:

> We Indigenous peoples have been preoccupied for too long with what has kept us off balance. We need to shift our attention to what it was that kept our ancestors in harmony with their environment. We need to regain that perspective and make ourselves adjust to that regained perspective. Is this spiritual? Can we teach it? If we don't teach these things and if we don't acknowledge the work and help of our ancestors in our writings and our research, will we do any better than the white scholars who have forced us to hear only their side of the story for so long? (p. 69)

C. Healing/Transformative Aspects of Research

I used an Indigenous framework for my research which has been and continues to be healing for me. Indigenous scholars, Cora Weber-Pillwax (1999, p. 43) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 117) consider healing/transformation to be a key principle/element in conducting Indigenous research. My view on what my educational experience in the Indigenous Peoples Education specialization has become in the past few years is congruent with Cajete's (and other Indigenous scholars') understanding of what education should be for Indigenous people in the 21st century. Cajete (2000) presents some thoughts and ideas about healing and transcending the effects of colonization and exploring a contemporary philosophy of Indigenous education (p. 181). He discusses a shared understanding among many Indigenous peoples that education is about helping an individual find his or her face "which means finding out who you are, where you come from, and your unique character" (p. 183). Cajete (2000) says that the intention of Indigenous education is finding the special work that allows you to fully express your true self—"Your heart and your face" (p. 183). He says that in its truest form Indigenous education is about learning relationships in context:

> This context begins with family. It extends to the clan, to the community and tribe, and to all of the world. The purpose of Indigenous education is to help the individual become a complete man or woman. The goal is completeness. (p. 183)

Leanne Simpson (2008) discusses our responsibilities as Indigenous people to teach our children what their roles were and should be as a means to transcend the systems of patriarchy and the legacy of colonialism:

> I believe it is our responsibility as mothers and aunties, and as fathers and uncles, to nurture boys who are incapable of upholding that system of patriarchy and colonialism. We must work with our men to redefine masculinity so that the gentleness with the land, and the women, and with our children is honoured as it once was. We must create communities in which we value the contributions of individuals, in which we once again have a fluidity around gender roles and responsibilities, and in which we respect all the forms of diversity that our societies used to foster so beautifully. (pp. 210-211)

I agree with Simpson's view that it is ultimately our responsibility to nurture the qualities we want in our children and the values that we want them to uphold. However, our reality of living in a society that is built on patriarchal values and overarching colonialist belief systems that affect us in all aspects of our lives including governance structures and institutional systems makes it even more challenging to realize what Simpson calls an "Indigenous resurgence" (p. 211). I do accept that responsibility in my life personally and try to live my life upholding Indigenous values and belief systems.

My academic experience has been primarily as a student and minimally as an instructor in a post-secondary institution. However, in my doctoral studies, I can relate to the healing aspect of the Indigenous education experience that Cajete (2000) describes. He considers teaching to be "a way of healing and a way of life" (p. 187). He says that there is a

“Tao” of teaching that is a “complementary working of relationships” (p. 187). He says that Indigenous people understand the Tao of teaching which is really about “finding face, finding heart, finding foundation, and doing that in the context of family, of community, of relationships with the whole environment” (p. 188). Cajete (2000) says that as a teacher, he uses a cultural historical foundation so that students have a thorough understanding of where they come from and further that “Indigenous educators have to be willing to turn history inside out and upside down” (p. 188).

I believe that it is in our roles as researchers and educators that we can facilitate positive change in our communities and educational institutions. This research experience for me helps to lay the foundation towards transcending what Cajete (2000) calls the “colonial shadow of history and of Western science” (p. 188). Cajete and other Indigenous scholars’ work supports my belief that as Indigenous students, we need to bring our hearts into our Indigenous educational experience and understand and value the histories and traditions of our families, communities, and nations and strengthen those relationships as well as with our environment.

Waponahki scholar, Rebecca Sockbeson (2011) discusses the late Walter Lightning’s work (1992) on the teachings of Cree Elder, the late Louis Sunchild. The teachings understanding the heart and mind as one entity (Sockbeson, p. 87). Sunchild's teachings as written by Lightning

inspired Sockbeson to raise some poignant questions that resonated with me as an Indigenous researcher:

> What would happen to our research if we thought with our hearts, if we embraced our hearts as deeply connected to our minds? What if we recognized openly in our lives that our Indigenous minds are sophisticated and that our epistemologies reflect and contain that mind and sophistication? (pp. 87-88)

Indigenous scholars (Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Smith, 1999) consider the transformative aspect of research to be integral to Indigenous research. Abosolon and Willett (2005) suggest that as our individual stories are told and retold, the research becomes transformative for the researcher and the researched (p. 123). This work seeks to recognize and honour Cree ancestors and value Cree knowledge so that it will serve to nurture subsequent generations.

In this case, the 'researched' in a sense is my family, but on a deeper level, it is in relationship with our ancestors and the land. Absolon and Willett (2005) discuss the relationship between location in research and healing as follows: "Our ancestors gave us membership into nations and traditions; location both remembers and 're-members' us to those things. The recovery processes of location facilitate healing by restoring pride in ourselves" (p. 123).The issue of location seems to have particular relevance for families like ours who acquire First Nation status but are not accepted members of a Band/First Nation. This could speak to a heightened sense of belonging in members of urban Aboriginal families who may be disconnected from ancestral lands/territories/locations. Janice

Acoose says that “doing research and writing encourages re-creation, renaming and empowerment of both Indigenous peoples and non-indigenous peoples” (cited in LaRocque, 2010, p. 21).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) says that process, which includes method and methodology, is highly important in all community approaches. She says that, ”the process is far more important than the outcome. Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination” (p. 128). My late sister, Lorraine Sinclair, cultural teacher and founder of the Mother Earth Healing Society, would often say that for Indigenous peoples, the process is as important as the goal; I would add that the journey is as important as the destination.

I drew upon an Indigenous model in the research process that Lorraine Sinclair (1993) referred to as a healing circle process in her unpublished document which “begins with me and moves to family, community, Nation and Mother Earth” (p. iv). The research process starts with me. It was my expectation that the research process would then spiral out to involve family, community and nation. I anticipate that the research will continue to spiral and expand beyond the completion of this study. A spiral model is not linear and is considered an iterative process as described by Hampton (1993) with reference to papers he submitted to the Harvard Educational Review for a special third world issue: “It progresses in a spiral that adds a little with each repetition of a theme

rather than building an Aristotelian argument step by step" (p. 262). Hampton discusses his awareness of the deeply ingrained iterative structure that was his preference, as well as that of other third world writers:

> Almost all the pieces by third world authors were criticized by the other editors as repetitious whereas I found new meaning in each turn of the spiral. An iterative structure is made explicit in the six-directions pattern of Heaven, Earth, East, South, West, and North that I use in this paper. I fear that it may seem exotic or needlessly esoteric, but in my culture it is both mundane and clarifying. (p. 262)

The IRM framework with which I engaged in this work involved an iterative process of continually reviewing layers of archival ancestral data and having ongoing discussions and meetings primarily with my eldest brother while undergoing layers of analyses throughout the process. On a lesser scale, the process was inclusive in that I shared the data with other interested family members as I encountered new findings or challenging aspects of the research. I did not utilize sharing circles with the family as anticipated since the nature of the research required intensive engagement with archival data and document analysis. The process helped me to continually analyze, revisit, rethink and refine as I wrote.

I draw on the work of Cree scholar, Michael Hart (2002) who says that by closely examining sharing circles as:

> a representative of the many Aboriginal helping techniques and processes, we can begin to develop a greater understanding of the relationship between sharing circles and an Aboriginal approach. We can also come to a deeper understanding of how an Aboriginal approach applies to helping and healing. (p. 61)

Métis scholar and anti-racist activist, Fyre Jean Graveline (1998) discusses the use of the circle process to help build community connections: As a tool for personal healing and transformation, it provides reciprocity to community members who come in to share their stories and experiences" (p. 177).

Anishnaabe scholar, Jane Martin (2001) discusses the benefits of using talking circles as a research process in her work:

> I believe that the circle took on a life of its own and allowed a spiritual community to develop among the women. Our prayers invited the grandfathers and grandmothers to come close and hear our words and in this way, we shared something bigger than ourselves… Using this method also allowed for the opportunity to use a tradition that exists within the culture. In this way, we honour not only the other individuals within the circle, but we also honour our ancestors and the university community by sharing our cultural ways with them. (p. 159)

Many aspects of my research experience in the past several years in the doctoral program have involved sharing circles and ceremonies. However, this research did not involve specific sharing circles with my family for the data collection. The nature of this study largely centred on the research and gathering of genealogical data and document analysis which was not conducive to utilizing sharing circles. Instead I focused on incorporating my own perspective for this study. This research experience is like the beginning a sharing circle process that will continue beyond the scope of this study. I discuss more of that in the conclusion.

Cree scholar, Shawn Wilson (2008) considers that for Indigenous people, research is a ceremony (p. 69). He explains that it ties and holds the relationships that went into the development of his book in this way:

> The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between our cosmos and us. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. Through going forward with open minds and good hearts we have uncovered the nature of this ceremony. (p. 137)

I kept that sense of the sacredness of this work and that it is a ceremony at the forefront of my mind throughout the study. It seemed especially critical because of the nature of engaging in work with our ancestors.

D. Indigenous Autoethnography/Case Study: Square peg in a round hole

It was challenging to find a theoretical framework that would fit with this study and still fit within the dominant discourse of research methodologies and theoretical frameworks for research. In an effort to identify what something is, sometimes the path requires an exploration of what it is not. This was like a ‘case study’ in that it is an in-depth investigation of a single group or event, but it is not within rigid parameters that will generate or test hypotheses. Robert Stake (2008) acknowledges that case study “is a part of a scientific methodology, but its purpose is not limited to the advance of science” (p. 141). He says that case studies “are of value in refining theory, suggesting complexities for further investigation as well as helping to establish the limits of generalizability” (p. 141). My

sense is that the dynamic nature of my research may not be an appropriate fit with parameters of qualitative case study research.

This work has elements of the Native autobiography as noted by Laura Beard (2010), “Native autobiographies often reflect the sense of belonging to a place, where the place is not just a setting for the story of the life, but a part of the story, a part of the sense of identity of the character or narrator” (p. 115). Primarily it engages with the sense of belonging to place as significant to individual and familial identity; it is not about my life in the context of an autobiography. Beard cites Sioux scholar Gwen Westerman Griffin about the relationships between “Native lands, Native identities, and Native stories”: “if you listen to our stories, if you really listen, you can hear our land” (p. 114). That is the essence of my work—I cannot do justice to our family’s ‘story’ without acknowledging the interconnectedness of the relationship between the land and identity—that relationship is sacred.

When I look to what seems to be considered the seminal guide for graduate students engaging with qualitative research and social research methods, the Denzin & Lincoln handbooks come to mind, in particular the edition, Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies (Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis, 2008). The authors discuss the use of autoethnography in research and compare the use of the term *native ethnography* to *indigenous ethnography*. They draw on B. Tedlock’s work (2000) in defining Native ethnography which “can be distinguished from indigenous

ethnography in that native ethnographers are those who have their origins in non-European or non-western cultures and who share a history of colonialism, or an economic relationship based upon subordination" (as cited in Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis, p. 351). The authors distinguish Indigenous ethnography as that "which may be conducted by anyone researching their own community" (p. 351) which does not fit for my work. The former definition is a closer fit, although I prefer to situate my research within an Indigenous reality, and that the research was conducted within an Indigenous research framework.

I looked to ethnography, more specifically, autoethnography as a research method to determine if it was a more appropriate fit for my work. Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis discuss the need for self-reflection of the researcher in both:

> Ethnography is not simply a collection of the exotic "other"; it is reflective of our own lives and cultural practices even when discussing another culture. Autoethnography involves the use of cultural richness for self-reflection and understanding the nature of the encounter. (p. 348)

I used reflexivity in my work. However, my work is not a collection about the exotic "other" as many ethnographical accounts of the past. I could relate to Métis scholar, Emma LaRocque's recent work, "When the Other is Me" (2010). In conducting reflexive research using somewhat of an autoethnographical method, I considered an important question that Holman Jones (2005) raised, "How much of myself do I put in and leave out?" (as cited in Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis, 2008, p. 348).

I also engaged with Ellis & Bochner's work (2000) in describing what autoethnographic researchers are required to do in using autoethnography as a research method: "gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations" (as cited in Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis, p. 348).

This movement of self from "outward" to "inward" is presented here as a tension that needed to be reconciled by the researcher/writer. The tension that I experienced was about the depth of the gaze required in various aspects of the research. The data gathering of archival research requires a close up perspective, a micro-view. It brought to mind teachings from a medicine wheel of the mouse in the south direction. I could see my mouse-like behaviour scurrying about in several directions with a close up micro view of the ancestral data. It was an ongoing challenge for me to rise to the heights of the eagle in the east direction with a broader perspective of the work (a bird's eye view) that was required in the data collection and especially in the analysis of the data. The aspect of the research process that required looking inward was journaling and writing the narratives.

One of the benefits of reflexive narrative in research that I support was stated by Ellis and Bochner (2000): "Autoethnography is a relatively recent form of writing that permits readers to feel the moral dilemmas

confronting us as researchers, to think with our narratives instead of simply about them" (as cited in Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis, p. 358). An important question that is raised by Tomaselli, Dyll, & Francis in conducting reflexive or autoethnographic work, such as when "someone from within a community conducts a reflexive indigenous[16] ethnography is this: How does one write one's self into, while staying outside of the self-same, text" (p. 367).

In this research, I am the writer engaging with reflexivity; however the voices of others are included primarily in chapters V & VI of the study. Perhaps in this work, there is an even greater sense of responsibility and concern for maintaining the integrity of the participants' words. Those involved are my family and community whose relationships I value and do not intend in any way to disrespect. The intention of my work was not to disengage relationships, but to strengthen relationships—strengthening our *wahkotowin*.

In a chapter entitled, "Towards Redefining Indian Education", Hampton (1993) writes for "both Indian and white educators", following his impulse to "interlace narrative vernacular with academic discourse", hoping to speak "person-to-person" about what he cares about so deeply

[16] Keeping in mind their use of the term "indigenous' refers to anyone researching their own community rather than to mean Indigenous in how it is used in my work with reference to the first peoples of the land.

(pp. 261-262). Similarly, our family's story from my perspective written in narrative vernacular, is woven throughout the work with both sets of readers in mind. Tensions in adhering to this approach for presenting my research included the dilemma of balancing the expectations of the Western intellectual traditions of the academy with those of Indigenous communities (Kaomea, 2004).

Julie Kaomea (2004) discusses her attempts to reconcile conflicting expectations that she faces as a Native Hawaiian intellectual by developing a hybrid "Hawaiian/Western research methodology that draws from and speaks to both indigenous and western ways of knowing and being" (p. 28). She follows the Hawaiian tradition of storytelling by writing a personal narrative with the hope that the reader will gain a shared set of understandings and meanings which will "bring the abstract theoretical conversations surrounding indigenous research to an accessible level by generating discussions of what indigenous research methodologies might look like in practice" (p. 28).

Though I did not have a clear vision of the exact theoretical framework that my work would fit at the outset of this study, my sense was that like Kaomea, I would draw on both Indigenous and Western theoretical frameworks. From my perspective, excerpts of reflexive narrative woven throughout the study provides commentary on the critical thinking process and sharing the experience simultaneously describes personal processing of new learning. This process supports and grounds

the work in epistemological frames that are meaningful for my family and community as well as for the academy. Meyer's (2008) work serves as validation for me, about my belief in not getting too caught up with theory: "It's not about how well you can quote theory; it's whether those ideas affect how you act" (p. 221). I looked to such Indigenous scholars' work, such as Meyer's (2008) as a guide for my research experience:

> Make your work useful by your meaning and truth….Knowledge that does not heal, bring together, challenge, surprise, encourage, or expand our awareness is not part of the consciousness this world needs now. This is the function we as indigenous people posit. (pp. 221-222)

As I learn, I share that knowledge with others. Many community teachers have said, "What good is knowledge if it is not shared?"

CHAPTER IV - LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Valuing Our Indigenous Languages

There is considerable interest by Aboriginal people in Canada to learn and retain our languages, yet there is a lack of resources and program support for Indigenous language retention and revitalization. Resource allocations through federal programs such as the Aboriginal Language Initiatives are abysmal. Battiste & Henderson (2000) discuss the devaluation of our Indigenous languages in Canada and the lack of political and institutional support for maintaining and preserving them:

> Most Eurocentric governments and academics encourage the continued destruction of Indigenous languages. Canadian governmental officials and academics offer excuses that the Indigenous language problems are too complex, when in fact they do not perceive the value of Indigenous languages and thus do not care about their revitalization…. They do not want to know about the consequences of destroying Indigenous languages, instead they seek to immunize themselves from blame. These thoughts are part of a bigger problem: the implicit state theory of European cultural and linguistic superiority. (p. 84)

Without legislated policy like the Official Language program which supports the French language in Canada and the absence of political will of the federal and provincial government, there is no hope in making meaningful strides towards maintenance of Indigenous languages in our homeland. Sadly, the onus is on the already over-burdened shoulders of Indigenous people to maintain our languages without adequate government and institutional support.

The focus of this study is not language loss, but it is necessary to address somewhat the issue and impact of intergenerational Indigenous language loss in our families. The disconnection from the language of our ancestors serves to alienate our people from our identity, our land and our communities. It is not our fault that we do not know our languages.

The Indigenous language spoken in the Lesser Slave Lake area is *Sakâw* (bush/northern) Cree. Plains Cree speakers are primarily from the Treaty Six territory in central Alberta. There is some variation between Northern and Plains Cree some of which can be seen in the Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary (LeClaire & Cardinal, 1998) but the differences do not seem to create a language barrier. During my doctoral studies I was fortunate to have had access to traditional advisor/Elder John Crier from Hobbema. His depth of understanding of the Cree language and Cree ways of knowing and being, have been invaluable to me on this journey. It is interesting to me that my experience in reconnecting to our language has been primarily through my academic endeavors.

My interest in the Cree language was strengthened during my undergraduate years in university. I had transferred to the University of Alberta from the University of Calgary in 1990. I enrolled in a Cree language course and other Native Studies courses. I was eager to study the Cree language and to learn as much as I could about our own peoples' history. I was thirty years old and was undergoing a shift in my spiritual beliefs and practices as well as in my 'formal' Aboriginal identity

influenced by our family's change in Indian status. I studied Cree for three years in university and learned about the grammar and structure of the language.

Despite these studies, it was not until I was immersed in a graduate course in my doctoral studies that I came to experience the richness of the language first hand. The course was co-taught by Dr. Weber-Pillwax and traditional knowledge holder, Elder John Crier. It was a ceremonial experience using Indigenous Cree pedagogy. It provided the sacred space and the opportunity for me to identify and acknowledge the pain and grief that I carry as a result of the loss of the Cree language in our family. I have been interested in learning about our language for over 20 years; however it is only the last few years that I came to really understand in a deep way, that our language is replete with knowledge and wisdom of our people. To me, it is the heart of our culture.

Ermine (1995) discusses the fragmentary self-world view of Western education systems that does not support Indigenous ancestral knowledge of going inward to seek one's truth and disconnects us from our languages and cultures which are the resources that connect us to our life force:

> The mind-set created by fragmentation impedes the progress towards inwardness that our ancestors undertook. Only through subjectivity may we continue to gain authentic insights into truth. We need to experience the life force from which creativity flows, and our Aboriginal resources such as language and culture are our touchstones for achieving this. It is imperative that our children take up the cause of our languages and cultures because therein lies

> Aboriginal epistemology, which speaks of holism. With holism, an environmental ethic is possible. (p. 110)

It is my belief that it is not only the children but also the parents and grandparents who need to carry that torch whether we know our languages or not; we can still do our part to support the preservation of our languages and cultures as they are the source of our Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

I can relate to the deep rootedness of Indigenous epistemology and the ancestral relationship that Waponahki scholar, Rebecca Sockbeson (2011) refers to in her work:

> It is the same place where I feel the spirit of those ancestors who came before me, who suffered so deeply for me to be here. It is the place where the spirits of my ancestors are present in my study; not to articulate and engage with these aspects of my Waponahki epistemology would undermine and compromise the depth and potential of my scholarship to contribute to the intellectual advancement of Waponahki knowledge. …Mobilizing Waponahki epistemology speaks to a space of hope that is layered in our language revitalization. (pp. 362-363)

Sockbeson (2011) discusses the connection to our ancestors that is embedded in our Indigenous languages. She explains that the Mi'kmaq term for shadow, *N-jijagamij* also means our ancestors, the ones who have come before us, "the visible reminder that we are never alone and that our ancestors are always taking care of us" (p. 122). Similarly, since Mi'Kmaq and Cree are in the same Algonquin language family, there is similarity in some of our words. "*Nih-jikastemin* implies flow of thought processes, consciousness, memories of the people" (Crier, J., personal

communication, July 10, 2013). The Cree words for reflection and shadow share a similar root word. In the Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary (LeClaire & Cardinal, 1998) reflection is *cahkâstesinowin*[17]; her/his shadow can be seen—*cikâstesin.*

Indigenous scholars, such as Marie Battiste (2000) discuss the value of traditional knowledge in our languages and the importance of preserving Indigenous languages:

> To allow tribal epistemology to die through the loss of the Aboriginal languages is to allow another world of knowledge to die, one that could help to sustain us. As Aboriginal people of this land, we have the knowledge to enable us to survive and flourish in our homeland. Our stories of ancient times tell us how. Our languages provide those instructions. (Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision, p. 202)

Our identity as Indigenous people is integrally linked to our languages and our land. Our language reveals the connection Indigenous people have to the land (McLeod, 2007, p. 6). Bouvier (2001) considers our Indigenous languages and identity as an integral resource that requires institutional support: "we need institutions to focus on this important resource so further generations have the opportunity to study it or to study the language" (Ward & Bouvier, p. 189). Willie Ermine says that "it's the language that holds the ethos of how we are supposed to be

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[17] C is pronounced like a "ts"

with each other and how we are supposed to be with the land" (as cited in Ward & Bouvier, p. 189).

B. Political/Legislated Identities (Outside Naming)

My mother was the first in our family to acquire First Nations status in 1988 as a result of Bill C-31. Her mother, Julie, had lost her status when she married a non-Aboriginal man, my grandfather, Don Pierce. My late father and my siblings acquired Indian Status in 1990 as a result of research conducted by my eldest brother, Gordon into the Sinclair family genealogy. Despite this formal federal recognition of my family's Indian status, we do not have band membership or 'band' status. Since both parents had Indian status, such status was passed down to our children's generation but it will end there unless members of this generation marry status Indians themselves.

When I was growing up as a child in Slave Lake in the mid-1950s to the 1960s, there was no obvious distinction made between First Nations (then commonly known as Treaty Indians) and Métis (known as Half-Breeds or *âpihtaw kosisan*). Our parents taught us when we were young, "don't ever be ashamed to be Indian," I do not recall them using the terms "Métis" or "Half-Breeds" in our childhood years; they said "Indian," so it is logical that I thought of myself as an Indian.

In 1968, Trudeau had just been elected with the promise of a "Just Society" for Native people in Canada. In 1969, the federal government under Prime Minister Trudeau's leadership, introduced the 'White Paper'

on Aboriginal policy to cease negotiating any further treaties with Native people, repeal the Indian Act, transfer responsibility of Indian Affairs to the provinces, and basically eliminate separate status for Native people. The threat of the assimilationist policy of the “White Paper” mobilized Aboriginal people across the country which strengthened the Aboriginal organizations (the term “Native” was used at that time) politically. In 1970, they responded with their own document, entitled, "Citizen’s Plus", which became known as the ‘Red Paper’. The document challenged all the proposals put forth in the White Paper.

Prior to that, in 1969, the late Harold Cardinal had just written his best-seller, *The Unjust Society*. In a later edition of his important book, Cardinal (1999) says the hope that was created during Trudeau’s leadership was short-lived with his public announcement “that the federal government was not prepared to guarantee aboriginal rights and that the Canadian government considered the Indian treaties an anomaly not to be tolerated in the Just Society” (pp. 14-15). Cardinal wanted to open the eyes of the Canadian public to show what it meant to be an Indian in Canada:

> to document the betrayals of our trust, to show…how a dictatorial bureaucracy has eroded our rights, atrophied our culture and robbed us of simple human dignity. …the ignorance and bigotry that has impeded our progress, the eighty years of educational neglect that have hobbled our young people for generations, the gutless politicians who have knowingly watched us sink in the quicksands of apathy and despair and have failed to extend a hand. (p. 2)

Cardinal along with many Aboriginal leaders and Aboriginal organizations across the country were calling for radical changes in policies that could positively affect the dire economic and social conditions of their communities. They were challenging the government of the day to enable them to take their rightful place in Canadian society.

I remember my father using similar words in the late 1960s: “we need to take our rightful place in Canada as Native people.” In 1967, our family moved to Hinton because of our father’s new job as a Native Liaison Officer with the provincial government, working with Métis and non-Status Indians. Until then, I had not heard of the term “non-Status Indians”. It was then, in my early teenage years, that I started to become aware of the different categories being assigned to Native people, particularly in relation to political organizational structures. I remember my father correcting me when I spoke about being Indian, telling me that we were Métis. For several years, he served as a Board member and President of what was then known as the Métis Association of Alberta.

Even though our family acquired First Nations status as a result of “Bill C-31”, I do not want to be labelled as a “C-31”. The majority of my family, including my mother, my sister and her children, my youngest brother and his children, my late sister’s children, and my son and I, have Indian status. However, two of my brothers had their status revoked by the Registrar in 1997. The Registrar, an INAC employee, has the responsibility of maintaining the Indian Register, which is the official record

of registered Status Indians in Canada. The Registrar maintains the sole authority in Canada to determine the names to be “added, deleted or omitted from the Register” (INAC, 2003). Names of Indians, who were band members, were recorded on lists by agents of the government between 1850-1951 (INAC, 2003). Prior to that “as early as 1850, the colonial government in British North America began to keep and maintain records of persons who were recognized by the federal government as members of an Indian band” (INAC, 2003).

In 1951, several amendments were made to the Indian Act that increased “Canada’s role in administering the identities of Indians and their bands” (Palmater, 2011, p. 42). It created an Indian Register that distinguished those who were registered band members and those who were not: “those entitled to both registration and band membership were recorded on a band list, and those entitled to be registered but not entitled to band membership were recorded on the General List” (Palmater, p. 42). The *Indian Act, 1951* privileged the male Indian as noted by Palmater (2011):

> This *Act* solidified the privileged position of male Indians in regard to registration and band membership. Even if women married Indians from other bands and did not lose their status, their band membership was automatically transferred to their husbands’ bands. (p. 42)

The 1985 Indian Act amendments were implemented to rectify gender and racial discrimination, but as Cardinal (1999) asserts, “has created its own host of new identities, and with them new problems” (p.

xiii). Cardinal discusses the new class of Indians not unlike our family "who meet the legal requirements to be recognized as 'status Indians' but do not meet the requirements to be legally considered members of an existing band or reserve" (p. xiii). This has resulted in what Cardinal identifies as "a legal hocus pocus in which recovering 'status' has little or no meaning" (p. xiii).

Gaining Indian status for some of our family members was short lived. As previously stated, some members had their Indian status revoked. In 1995, our father and two brothers received registered letters from INAC that their names would be deleted off the Indian Registry. The explanation given was that the Registrar determined our family received Indian status in error. Our father appealed the decision through the legal system; however the decision of the court case was finalized in 2004. They were not successful in regaining their Indian status. In an annual publication of modern Canadian Métis case law, Métis Law Summary [18], Métis lawyer, Jean Teillet (2006) indicates that: "New facts had come to light that Sinclair's great-grandparents had in fact taken scrip, and therefore he was not entitled to registration as an Indian" (p. 6).

My brother, Gordon, argued that the government was aware when he applied for our Indian status, that our great grandfather Michel

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[18] In 2010, the title of the publication changed to Métis Law in Canada.

Courtoreille and his parents had taken scrip in 1899 (Appendix D). So it should not have been considered “new facts” to them. Although Michel Courtoreille took scrip his wife, Isabel (Aubichon Cardinal), did not take scrip. She died in 1898 before Treaty 8 was signed. At that time, family members could take scrip on behalf of deceased family members; however, there are no records that anyone took scrip on Isabel’s behalf. For almost a decade, the Indian status of our family was like being caught in ‘legal limbo’. Since Gordon’s Indian status was revoked, he has not given up seeking to find ancestors who were Band members of a First Nation in order to regain Indian status for himself and his family. Although the court case was lost, our family, with the exception of our two brothers and their children, were able to retain Indian status. From my perspective the Indian registration process is flawed; as family members, we have the same parents, grandparents and ancestral lineage. The situation raises questions about what and who can gain through the resulting tensions, with potential family conflicts and community divisions that are created under such decision-making of the state authorities.

Mi’kmaq scholar, Pamela Palmater (2011) discusses some of those divisions evident in recent amendments to the Indian Act for example. She considers the stark contrast between “the constitutional promise made to Indigenous peoples by Canada” to protect their “distinctive cultures and identities for future generations” with the Indian registration and band

membership provisions of the 1985 Indian Act amendment (p. 101). She identifies some of the divisions as a result of the 1985 amendment:

> The *Act* imposed a scheme of registration on individuals which gives them different types of status with differing rights. It divides families, communities and nations, and has divided Indigenous nations into smaller local communities whose members are often at the lowest ends of the socio-economic indicators in Canada….The divisions within Indigenous communities now find form in the political representation of Indigenous peoples as well. The federal, provincial, and even local band governments attach different legal, social, economic, political, and cultural rights to the various classes and sub-classes of Indigenous peoples. (p. 101)

Such divisions can be significant especially for those, as Palmater points out, who are often on the lower rungs of the socio-economic indicators in this country, such as many Indigenous people. For those who are positioned in higher levels of the socio-economic strata in society, entitlements such as access to post-secondary education for example may be insignificant compared to families on the lower socio-economic scales.

Recent legislation (Bill C-3), enacted in 2011, allows grandchildren of women who lost their status through marriage to non-Indian men to become entitled to Indian Status. It is expected that approximately 45,000 people will be eligible to be registered as Status Indians[19]. Métis scholar,

[19] Indicated in the Registration Process for Bill C-3 applicants on the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development web site.

Joyce Green (2011) considers this another inadequate amendment to address gender inequity in the Indian Act[20]:

> Recognition by the state, or "status," has always been a tool of the colonial government intended to identify a discrete community for policy attention--the ultimate objective of which was assimilation--and to limit the financial liability of the colonial state…One danger of an authentication formula, designed for the purpose of colonial legal and administrative clarity, is that it would subject Métis, in all our diversity, to an external legitimation process…And as history has shown, only some will be legitimated. Further, such a process indicates that colonialism has been so effective that some Aboriginal people rely on externally imposed criteria for internal recognition. (pp. 166-167)

Though the long term effects of this piece of legislation remains to be seen, in the short term, it allows for the reinstatement of the grandchildren of women who lost their status on the Indian register. Palmater (2011) asserts that both the 1985 and 2011 amendments still results in the federal government retaining "control over the determination of Indian status and even band membership for the majority of bands in Canada" (p. 43). I need to further reflect on whether the pursuit of Indian status as a result of both of these amendments is not indicative of relying on what Green (2011) identifies as "externally imposed criteria for internal recognition". Evidence of internalized colonization manifests itself in many

[20] Originally obtained from a blog posted as part of the Federation Equity Issues Portfolio's 'Transforming the Academy: Indigenous Education' series for the Congress 2011 programming.

ways including the engagement of relying on external criteria as defined in various amendments to the Indian Act to define our identity.

There are many complex internal and external factors that contribute to a person's sense of identity. The focus of my work is not exclusively on Aboriginal identity; however it is an integral aspect of this study. I examined literature about the formation of identity and consciousness among the northern Cree and Métis, as described in Weber-Pillwax' doctoral work (2003). She makes observations on how "identity formation is connected with and affected by such additional environmental elements as physical geography including land, knowledge and education systems, economic and governing systems, languages, values and spirituality" (pp. 18-19). Smith (2005) says the identity of "the native" is considered:

> complicated, ambiguous, and therefore troubling even for those who live the realities and contradictions of being native and of being a member of a colonized and minority community that still remembers other ways of being, of knowing, and of relating to the world. (p. 86)

Métis scholar, Heather Devine's work (2004) on the Aboriginal ethnogenesis of her family history reveals that arbitrarily assigned ethnic labels by outsiders can be quite different from personal and familial understandings of identity (p. xviii). Weber-Pillwax (2003) discusses the reality of the impact of the legal definitions or "outside naming" on Indigenous people:

> If the impacts of these legal definitions could be confined to theories on paper, there would be minimal concern with their

> impacts on identity formation in Indigenous communities. The reality is, however, that the effects of this "outside naming" has been and continues to be a destructive element in the development of Indigenous peoples and their communities in general, and to the normal processes of individual identity formation in particular. (pp. 58-59)

Labels assigned to us by outsiders, can change with the swipe of a bureaucrat's pen, part of the colonial legacy of Aboriginal history in Canada. *Mi'kmaq* scholar, Bonita Lawrence (2011) discusses how the Indian status system has been used against us, disconnecting us from each other and from our land:

> Canada has been able to use Indian status to define who can be considered Indian in ways that have alienated whole communities from any access to a land base and permanently fragmented Native identity through an extremely patriarchal and racist system that has torn holes in the fabric of Native societies. (p. 229)

Weber-Pillwax (2008) addresses a similar exclusionary process drawing on a Metis[21] family's experiences on an Alberta Metis settlement using pseudonyms and a composite narrative based on real life situations (p. 193). She acknowledges that those experiences are not "necessarily representative of Metis life in general", but share common characteristics that other Metis in Canada may recognize (p. 193). She provides one of the family member's assessment of the injustice and discrimination that they face within their family based on provincial legislation and by the

[21] The term 'Metis' is used here in line with the work of the author.

settlement council: "…government legislation has split families through legal identification mechanisms and this has resulted in intense suffering as well as ongoing undermining of basic Metis family structures and personal and familial well-being" (p. 203).

Anishinaabe writer, Kateri Akwiwenzie-Damm (1993) asserts that colonizing governments such as Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand have used language and the power of words "backed by military power to subjugate and control the Indigenous people of the land" (p.11). Government imposed labels and definitions of "Indian" identity are used to promote assimilation and eliminate the "Indian problem" and have resulted in complicated definitions of Native identity, "all of which have political, geographic, social, emotional, and legal implications" (pp. 11-12). Damm goes on to describe some of those definitions of Native identities:

> There are status Indians, non-status Indians, Metis, Inuit, Dene, Treaty Indians, urban Indians, on reserve Indians, off-reserve Indians; there are Indians who are Band members and Indians who are not Band members. There are First Nations peoples, descendants of First Nations, Natives, Indigenous peoples, Aboriginal peoples, mixed-bloods, mixed-breeds, half-breeds, enfranchised Indians, Bill C-31 Indians. There are even women without any First Nations ancestry who gained "Indian status" by marriage. (pp. 12)

Palmater (2011) discusses various exclusionary aspects of the Indian Act: "discrimination involving gender, marital status, and blood quantum are the major forms of both residual and new discrimination in the *Indian Act,* others issues can be equally exclusionary" (p. 108). She

refers to the Métis scrip process that Canada uses for determining identities of the descendants of Métis or Indians:

> The claim involving Métis scrip takers for example, is based not on sex, *per se*, but on the legal determination of individual identities as Métis versus Indian, based on financial choices made by their ancestors. Unlike Indian women who had their status taken from them, descendants of scrip takers have not been reinstated. (pp. 108-109)

I believe that we need to be cognizant that government-imposed labels can serve to divide us in ways that are long lasting and detrimental to our individual and collective wellbeing as Indigenous people. Families such as ours that are experiencing different entitlements associated with the respective labels assigned by the state are in a precarious situation that has the potential to create resentments and divisions among family members. It could pit us against one another if we are not applying a critical lens to the consequences of externally applied labels that privilege individual family members over others. Akwiwenzie-Damm says that we will not reach consensus on the labels, but instead, we must assert our own definitions of who we are and:

> reject the imposed definitions of a colonizing system which would reduce us to nothingness with misrepresentative, overly-broad trivializing labels of identification.…By freeing ourselves of the constricting bounds of stereotypes and imposed labels of identity, we empower ourselves and our communities and break free of the yoke of colonial power that has not only controlled what we do and where we live but who we are. (p. 24)

The existing policies of colonizing governments can take away our languages and wipe out our cultures but no one can take away our blood

connection. It is inherent. Further, we as Indigenous peoples can do our own research to reconnect us to our own knowledges, our own histories and our own ways of being. Smith (2005) says that research was used as an oppressive tool like schooling but is “gradually coming to be seen as a potential means to reclaim languages, histories, and knowledge to find solutions to the negative impacts of colonialism and to give voice to an alternative way of knowing and being” (p. 91).

Palmater (2011) suggests that we need to rethink Indigenous identity and belonging:

> perhaps if we switched our concept of Indigenous identity and culture from a focus on singular criteria such as status, blood quantum, residency, marriage partner, or tradition, and concentrated on the totality of our connections to our Indigenous nations, we could escape the archetypal identity which freezes us in the past…. Connections to the community through common history, familial ties, territory, and culture have more relevance in determining Indigenous identity, rebuilding Indigenous nations, and protecting future generations than any one subjective criterion. (p. 189)

There are many factors that affect personal and collective identity, which are not addressed here. What is central to this study is the healing aspect of reconnection and reclamation of our family history and Indigenous ways of knowing, which may have positive effects that will ripple out beyond the scope of our family. Hampton (1995) says that the “identity of Indian people is that which links our history and our future to this day, now” (p. 22). I consider my work to be in line with what Hampton describes in the East door, the direction of spring, “To educate ourselves and our children, we must start with who we are, with the traditions, the

values, and the ways of life that we absorbed as children of the people" (p. 22).

C. Our History/Healing is in the Land

My interest in the history of our family and our relationship with the land is to explore how an Indigenous person's sense of identity is shaped and reflected in culture and language, and in the reconnection to the land. One purpose of this research is to strengthen the sacred relationship between our family and our ancestral land. The importance of the peoples' relationship to land is stated in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996): "When Aboriginal people speak of the land they mean not only the ground that supports their feet; they also include waters, plants, animals, fish, birds, air, seasons—all the beings, elements and processes encompassed by the term 'biosphere'" (Vol 1, p. 631).

Weber-Pillwax (2003) asserts that the land is the historical record of the people:

> The land itself is a map where the trapper and hunter, the bush person, can locate individual and shared history. Location is important because land is in actuality the text that serves as the historical record of events in the life of an individual or a people. The sites along a rail and the trail itself are living records, like mnemonic devices, triggering memories of the past….They are living records in that they will be transformed by the people themselves according to the needs of the people themselves. (p. 183)

Our family does not have a collective land base; yet I feel a connection to the land in the Lesser Slave Lake area. This connection was enhanced through our late sister, Lorraine who ensured that our family

participated in traditional ceremonies in the Lesser Slave Lake area as often as possible. Several of the ceremonies were conducted near a sacred burial site located in the Lesser Slave Lake area, approximately three hours northwest of Edmonton. Although it is designated provincial park space, it is an area that our family recognizes as the burial site of our ancestors. The site is located near the Marten River Campground north of Slave Lake. No visible demarcation exists to point out this area as a sacred gravesite. A small area, it is contained by a partially standing snow fence and is hardly noticeable from the roadway through the thickness of the trees. The area is used for Parks equipment storage so there is a locked gate to bar general public access to the area.

In order to access the burial grounds, my family follows a process determined by the parks administration who gives permission for access. Provincial park staff have accommodated us in this manner over the past twenty plus years that we have requested to access the area for ceremonial purposes. It troubles me, however, that nothing indicates the area as a sacred burial site. It seems disrespectful to me that our ancestors are buried there along with ancestors of other families and yet there is no visible acknowledgement of that.

Over the years I have asked myself why it is that I did not make it a priority earlier in my life to address the invisibility aspect of this unmarked burial site. I deferred to my sister's leadership in our family hosting four annual ceremonial events for our ancestors, on the advice of Elders she

had consulted with about the site. However, it still nagged in the back of my mind that there was unfinished business at that sacred site. Since the passing of our sister and father in 2005, that sense of unfinished business has re-surfaced with my work through this research project and my related connections in the Lesser Slave Lake area.

This research has nudged me to move out of survival mode and my personal comfort zone and to find my own courage. It has led me to engage deeply with this 'unearthing' of our ancestors, illuminating their existence so that we might honour them, and reconnect with the earth derived from our ancestors as the essence of our identity. In a discussion about my research regarding the land aspect, Elder John Crier said, "your sense of essence is determined by the land" (personal communication, October 2009).

Chickasaw scholar Sa'ke'j Youngblood Henderson and Mi'kmaq scholar Marie Battiste (2000) raise some important concerns about Indigenous burial grounds. They discuss the importance of such sacred sites for Indigenous peoples:

> Ancestral burial grounds or sites for spiritual ceremonies are considered sacred land, and the spirit of such sites are of central importance. Threats to the integrity of sacred and historical sites come not only from the development projects and legislation but also from archeological endeavors. The search for culturally significant objects often leads archeologists to burial grounds. Indigenous peoples have asked that these objects be left in the ground and that graves not be disturbed out of respect for the dead and in recognition that the burial grounds remain the collective property of Indigenous peoples. (p. 111)

The authors, Battiste and Henderson, (2000) draw attention to the historical popularity of collecting Indigenous human remains “for many years in North America” including “human skulls and other materials” which, in some situations, “remain in private hands” (p. 114). They provide several examples of such thefts and confiscations in Canada and the United States of America. I highlighted a few such examples here:

> For example, in British Columbia between 1875 and 1800, grave-robbing and confiscation were so generalized that by the early 1900s New York City housed more Indigenous skulls, skeletons, poles, canoes, baskets, feast bowls, and masks than British Columbia (Hume 1989). …Additionally, a large number of burial sites have been looted by academic archeological digs: the Canadian Museum of Civilization has about three thousand partial or complete skeletons, and at least seventy-one of the Smithsonian collections are from British Columbia and Ontario (G&M 1989). (as cited in Battiste & Henderson, pp. 114-115)

I fully support the need for protection of Indigenous burial sites in the Lesser Slave Lake area. It is particularly challenging to have any impact without official socio-political infrastructure and legal jurisdiction over our ancestral burials sites. Battiste & Henderson, (2000) call for policies and laws to support the involvement of Indigenous people in such areas that are central to our heritage:

> Indigenous peoples must be involved in designating archeological sites, in designing interpretive materials, and in managing resources. However, control over excavation is outside their jurisdiction. In some Canadian jurisdictions, Aboriginal groups are consulted as a matter of courtesy before excavation permits are issued…. Generally, however, no consistent policies or laws are in place to ensure that Indigenous peoples control this central element of their heritage. (p. 111)

This work may help to create some awareness about the importance of protecting our sacred burial sites in the Lesser Slave Lake area and generally about the centrality of our relationship to land.

Michael Hart (2002) discusses the important relationship that Aboriginal people have with the land including the intimate relationship with the land as reflected in the spirituality practices of many traditional Aboriginal peoples (p. 49). He acknowledges a need for Aboriginal people to reconnect with the land:

> Such a reconnection helps people to see life in a broader sense that incorporates both the physical and spiritual realms. All the foundational concepts can be observed and learned through this connection. It also helps people in their journey to *mino-pimatisiwin*[22] since establishing these connections are part of the centring processes. (p. 49)

I have lived with that deep need for reconnection to our ancestral land. I know through experience that I cannot fully understand the significance or importance of relationship with ancestral land by reading the literature. Native Hawaiian scholar, Manulani Meyer (2008) says, "Genuine knowledge must be experienced directly" (p. 224). She views land as more than a physical place and describes the vital relationship that Indigenous people have with their environment as providing an example of epistemology of place and people:

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[22] The good life (Cree, 'n' dialect)

> Indigenous people are all about place. Land/*aina*, defined as "that which feeds," is the everything to our sense of love, joy, and nourishment. Land is our mother…. Land/ocean shapes my thinking, my way of being, and my priorities of what is of value…. One does not simply learn about land, we learn best *from* land…. How you are with land or in the ocean tells us something about you. (p. 219)

Meyer (2008) discusses how the land is an epistemological cornerstone that sustains and nurtures us:

> Knowing with land should help you find out more about your own self, and when that process begins as a researcher, you start to open your own phenomenological inquiry into *your* origins of space… And what you bring to your knowing influences all that you do, write, and offer to the world. (p. 219)

Such work informs my own thinking and supports me as a researcher engaged with an inquiry into my own "origins of space' through this journey of ancestral reconnection.

Cree scholar, Neal McLeod (2007) draws on the words of the late Vine Deloria Jr., Lakota writer, who noted: "Indigenous people tend to envision their collective memory in terms of space rather than time" (p. 6). McLeod (2007) expands on the importance of place in connection with stories and communities:

> It is the sense of place that anchors our stories; it is the sense of place that links us together as communities…. Through stories and words, we hold the echo of generational experience, and the engagement with land and territory. (p. 6)

He discusses the linkages of stories of his ancestors to places of importance to the Cree people: "Names, places and stories ground a people in the world. They give a people a narrative structure to organize

their experience, and through which they can link to the past" (p. 94). I draw on his work to emphasize the centrality of place in the land and stories that reconnects me with my ancestral community in this study.

D. Re-searching our HiStories / Re-claiming Our Stories / Re-searching our Story

This research is the giving of voice to the land and to our relatives who have gone before us. It is about resisting the primacy of the historical discourse of the dominant culture; it is not a point of valuation, but of recognition and appreciation of the voices of Indigenous peoples in the Lesser Slave Lake area. Métis scholar, Bonita Lawrence (2011) says for Indigenous peoples, telling our histories "involves recovering our own stories of the past and asserting the epistemological foundations that inform our stories of the past. It also involves documenting processes of colonization from the perspectives of those who experienced it" (pp. 69-70). This study includes narratives from local residents in the Lesser Slave Lake area from their perspectives based on their experiences in relationship with the local community and the land in Chapter V.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) discusses 'researching back', 'writing back', or 'talking back' in post/anti-colonial literature which has involved "a 'knowingness of the colonizer' and a recovery of ourselves, an analysis of colonialism, and a struggle for self-determination" (p. 7). Cree Métis scholar, Emma LaRocque (2010) discusses the use of voice as 'resistance scholarship' and states: "The important thing is that we all have

the right to speak, the right to be represented fairly, and the right to express ourselves true to our lives, experiences, and research" (p. 32). She goes on to cite Abenaki filmmaker and poet, Alanis Obomsawin, about the importance of our people having a voice:

> To be heard is the important thing, no matter what it is we are talking about… and that we have a lot to offer society. But we also have to look at the bad stuff, and what has happened to us and why…. We cannot do this without going through the past… because we are carrying a pain that is 400 years old…We don't just carry our pain. We're carrying the pain of our fathers, our mothers, our grandfathers, our grandmothers…it's part of this land. (as cited in LaRocque, p. 32)

LaRocque acknowledges the 400 year old pain that she carries that is part of this land: "I too carry the pain of my mother, my father, my sister, my brothers, my nieces and nephews, my grandfathers and mothers, my aunts and uncles. And I carry my own pain" (p. 33). She emphasizes the need to tell the story of the dehumanization of Aboriginal people in context: "to me it is not enough simply to tell the story, it is equally important that we name, locate, and situate the 'story'" (p. 33).

As Indigenous people, we consider telling our stories to be imperative. Our stories are integral to our identity, to our culture, to our survival. Our knowledges have been passed down orally through our stories for thousands of years. Our stories are important to us; however, it is also important to consider how those stories may be perceived in the academy. Native American scholar, Brian Brayboy (2006) addresses this consideration. He uses his personal experience to address conflict which he faced in the academy about what appears to be a disconnect between

personal narratives and community stories, and theory. He draws on the wisdom of his people, the Lumbee "tribe", more specifically his mother, who tells him that "our stories are our theories" (p. 426). He expands on the conflicting notions of what the academy considers "good theory" and theories that are revealed in "stories" for Indigenous people:

> stories serve as the basis for how our communities work. For some Indigenous scholars (and others), theory is not simply an abstract thought or idea that explains overarching structures of societies and communities; theories, through stories and other media, are roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities. (p. 427)

Brayboy identifies differing epistemologies and ontologies as being at the heart of this conflict (p. 427).

Stó:lō scholar, Jo-ann Archibald (2008), coined the term "storywork" in reference to taking the use of stories and storytelling seriously in education and as a way to give back (p. 3). She lists seven principles that she learned from Elders about using First Nations stories and storytelling, these principles form a Stó:lō and Coast Salish theoretical framework for educational purposes, and include: "respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy" (p. ix). Such principles helped to guide this re-search of our 'his/stories' work, some of which are explicitly stated, others which are implicit in conducting ancestral research that I considered sacred.

This study builds upon research conducted for my Master's thesis[23] (1999) in the mid-1990s in the Lesser Slave Lake area. The regional historical component of my research drew largely on the literature (published and unpublished) of non-Indigenous authors (Sawyer 1981, Babcock 1975, Baergen 1967). I engaged with the work of Métis scholars/authors (Dickason 1992, Redbird 1980) and other non-Indigenous authors (Dobbin 1981, Foster 1985) who wrote about the Métis history in the northwest. For the historical role of Métis women I relied on the available literature of that time, primarily non-Indigenous scholars that was available to me at the time, Sylvia Van Kirk (1980), Jennifer Brown (1980), and Peterson & Brown (1985). My intention in that study was to provide a contribution to the RCAP literature about Aboriginal women from a regional Indigenous perspective. The work was not included in the RCAP publication on Aboriginal women due to differing perspectives in the final stages of the project; however, the work itself served as a significant source of primary information for this present work. I drew on the interviews conducted with my late father related to his knowledge of the history of the land and the people in the Lesser Slave Lake area that pertained to this study.

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[23] On the Role of *Nehiyaw'skwewak* (Cree women) in Decision Making Among Northern Cree

For this research, I drew on the work of Métis scholar, Heather Devine (2004), based on a comprehensive reconstruction of 240 years of the Desjarlais family history from southern Saskatchewan. She followed the family kinship networks across North America, focusing on how those networks "influenced the social, economic, and political decisions of their members, and second, on how these networks and decisions ultimately shaped the ethnic identity and related collective rights that their descendants inherited as members of Indian or Métis communities" (p. 16).

Devine's work (2004) is impressive and an excellent resource for readers interested in Métis history and genealogical research generally; it is not exclusively about the Desjarlais family. For example, I located useful information about my paternal great-grandmother, Isabel (Cardinal) Courtoreille's great-grandfather, Joseph Cardinal. Cardinal, born on April 23, 1766[24], was a member of a family of outfitters based in Montreal whose activities in the fur trade date back to the 1680s (p. 226). The Cardinal surname is a common name in the central and northern Alberta communities. Devine (2004) indicates that Joseph Cardinal and his relatives were:

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[24] Oblate records indicate his date of birth as 1756. Devine's work validates his birth date as 1766 through accessing an electronic database, the Research Program in Historical Demography (PRDH) from the University of Montreal that contains records of the population of Quebec from the 1600s to 1799.

> among the earliest *Canadien engages* identified in the Athabasca fur trade of the 1780s. Their activities took them from the lakes of Northern Manitoba to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. There they intermarried with Indian women or metis women raised in an aboriginal social environment. (p. 226)

This study is not a complete reconstruction of our family history such as that represented by Devine's comprehensive research. It is about examining the relationship between our ancestral lineage and identity related topics, such as land and language.

Neal McLeod's work (2007) on Cree narrative memory speaks to elements of the framework for this research. McLeod draws on the narratives of his family which provides a format for the reinterpretation of the history of Indigenous peoples as well as incorporating Cree worldviews and Cree narrative structures. He suggests that Cree narrative memory is "more than simply storytelling… As the storyteller weaves his tale, there are elements of description and analysis: the storyteller describes events and experiences, but also analyzes this experience" (pp. 7-8). McLeod discusses the interplay of time, and the cultural traditions woven within this concept:

> Cree narrative memory is an ongoing conversation, a constant play between present, past, and future. Participants in this conversation have spoken many languages and have had a variety of ways of seeing the world. However, the Cree language and traditions are the threads that hold this particular fabric together. (p. 95)

In this study (primarily in chapters V& VI), I include narratives of immediate family members and others distantly related, drawing on

memories of the past, weaving in descriptions of the past and the present, and analysis of both examined through a predominantly Cree lens.

McLeod (2007) acknowledges the limitation of capturing only parts of the broader collective memory in his work:

> No story is complete in itself. Anyone who attempts to link various pieces of stories together into a larger story is always limited. There are always details of stories which we may not know and which we will learn in time. Even our understanding of narratives is incomplete at any given moment. The perspectives and vantage points are as unlimited as experience itself. (p. 8)

My work captures pieces of a collective narrative that previously was excluded or partially included in the shared history of Lesser Slave Lake. The future holds endless opportunities to build on a collective Indigenous narrative of the area.

Bonita Lawrence (2011) considers the importance of writing from the perspectives of Indigenous nations to give a fuller account of history so that, “Indigenous peoples are not cast as faceless, unreal ‘stick figures’ lost in a ferment of European interests, but as the living subjects of their own histories” (p. 77). She concludes by saying: “It is the voices of Indigenous peoples, long silenced, but now creating a new discourse, which will tell a fuller history” (p. 77). Lawrence’s phrase, “reasserting a silenced history” (p. 77) describes my intention in this research, along with anticipation that I will gain some knowledge of our own history.

In Kovach’s work (2009), Cam Willet discusses how ceremonies helped him in his academic studies to realize that he’s not alone, and

further, that Indigenous peoples' knowledge and legacy cannot be wiped out; the land holds the legacy of the people:

> ..if you put your tobacco down and you go to ceremonies, I believe that all transcends time and space. You can't be lost or killed because all you have to do is sweat and ask, and the songs will come back to you. That's the power of them. Our knowledge and legacy can never be erased. We are very strong and that makes me proud. The legacy of our people is this land. (as cited in Kovach, p. 119)

The question that this raises for me is, "what happens to Indigenous people in the absence of land?" I examine my own relationship with land, as it relates to identity in the final chapter of this work. Prayer and ceremonies are central to this research, which is discussed in the next chapter.

I engaged with Kovach's work (2009) on Indigenous methodologies in the latter stages of this study. It was encouraging to me that the author's discussion with Cam Willett addressed the significance of being "holistically true to one's worldview" in Indigenous research (p. 120). I support Willet's assertion that, "epistemology ought to be congruent with life choices in general, not just in research" (p. 120). His discussion about traditional knowledges that value "dreams, the ancestors and the timelessness of ceremonies" is part of what I intended to draw on at the outset of this work (p. 120). Kovach's concluding statements in the chapter on Indigenous Methodologies particularly resonated with me in this work; utilizing an Indigenous research framework the author says, requires:

> a purpose statement about one's own self-location and worldview, and that this meant honouring the *kôkoms* and *mosôms* by remembering them….Knowing why we are carrying out our research – our motive – has the potential to take us to places that involve both the head and heart. We need to know our own research story to be accountable to self and community. (p. 120)

For this study, I engaged with an Indigenous research framework drawing on traditional knowledges, which included locating myself holistically, honouring our ancestors, acknowledging their guidance, and making space for work that connects the head and the heart.

CHAPTER V – DATA COLLECTION

> "Research is a verb, not a noun. It's alive. It changes. It follows where it leads not where you thought it would" (Hampton, personal communication, October 2012).

The key areas of research in this descriptive data collection section are as follows: Accessing Indigenous Knowledge, Genealogy, Ancestral Land and Burial Sites, and Narratives. The first section on accessing Indigenous knowledge, as introduced or partially discussed in previous sections, is an important aspect of conducting research within an Indigenous framework. I perceive the ceremonial aspect of data collection as re-searching from behind, from our ancestral lineage, transcending the physical. Similarly, I consider researching from within, to include dream access and other ways of knowing that may be more of an intuitive/visceral nature. The use of narrative in this work provides an opportunity for expression of accessing Indigenous Knowledge.

A. Accessing Indigenous Knowledge

I participated in cultural gatherings and ceremonies to deepen my own understanding of our traditional Indigenous Cree knowledge systems. All of that is integral to informing my work which utilizes an Indigenous research framework in reconnecting to my ancestral lineage and ancestral land. Throughout my doctoral studies and during the research process, I participated in ceremonies in various locations as the opportunities arose. I have been very fortunate to have had access to Elders and traditional

knowledge holders through my involvement in the Community University Research Alliance (CURA) and Network Environments for Aboriginal Health Research (NEAHR), research projects supported by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) under the leadership of Dr. Cora Weber-Pillwax. I attended numerous sharing circles, research circles and other ceremonies with my supervisor, my peers/support group, the IPE graduate students and others.

For this research, I participated in ceremonies with a Cree Elder from northern Alberta, my brother Gordon and his wife Valerie, as they were key participants in my work. I wanted to begin this research journey with ceremony. At one of the ceremonies held early on in the study, near our ancestral land, my brother and I were each given an eagle feather. Receiving the sacred eagle feather helped me to be grateful for the opportunity to do this research and to be constantly mindful of the sacred nature of such responsibility. It was important to me to respect the sacredness of this journey especially since the research involved our ancestors and their burial sites. I also consulted intermittently with a traditional Indigenous knowledge holder from Hobbema whom I had come to know throughout my doctoral studies, and whose knowledge and experience I trusted.

As I engaged with the ancestral work, particularly as I worked on the narratives about my grandmothers and great-grandmothers, I

prepared a space for my ancestors as if they were seated close to me, working with me. I would smudge the space and the mint tea and food offerings that I prepared for them as I worked. In the last several weeks of this work, it became a daily ritual that helped me to feel deeply connected to them.

Throughout this study, I was cognizant of my dreams which I considered to be a form of accessing inner guidance. I dreamt a lot about my work and at times made notes as soon as I awoke from dreams that seemed to be relevant to the research. It is becoming more common that Indigenous scholars make reference to the importance of dreams and inward knowing in their research (Hampton, 1993; Ermine, 1995; Wilson, 1995; Weber-Pillwax, 2003; Steinhauer, 2007; Sockbeson, 2011; and others). I did not include a separate analysis for Accessing Indigenous Knowledge, as that analysis is embedded within the Narrative sections of this document. In addition to being attentive to my dreams, I drew on inner guidance that occurred outside of the dream state. I drew on events that I had experienced even prior to my doctoral studies such as finding a large rectangular shaped stone with a huge ‘footprint’ embedded in the stone. The stone was found on the shores of Lesser Slave Lake near our ancestral burial site, a location that became central to this research. Many times following prayers and offerings, we would walk along the shoreline picking stones that we were drawn to. The ‘footprint’ on this stone was like the image on the drum that I refer to in the narratives section. It was like

the first ‘step’, like an ancestral step, that led me to this research; the drum was the second. It felt to me that they were meaningfully connected.

B. Genealogy

My initial plan was to begin with collecting historical data in various archival repositories including on-line research. I also planned to conduct individual and group interviews as well as sharing circles within the family. I wanted to explore ancestral connections beyond Lesser Slave Lake to other communities and First Nations in Alberta wherever our maternal and paternal kinship ties would lead. I had hoped to draw on the expertise of other researchers who had had experience conducting genealogical research for First Nations and Métis people, as well as connecting with members of First Nations who had families with the same surname as some of my ancestors. Obtaining genealogical research of families in our lineage that were connected to other First Nations communities outside of the Lesser Slave Lake area did not prove to be as successful as anticipated, so I chose to keep my focus on the Lesser Slave Lake area.

My brother Gordon provided me with the majority of the genealogical records that formed the foundation for this study. He had collected them since he first began his research to gain Indian status for our family over twenty-six years ago. His work assisted well over 200 members of the Sinclair families and other local families in the Lesser Slave Lake area to regain their Indian status. Gordon provided me with documents from his research at various intervals throughout the study.

There was a significant setback in accessing his data created by the fire in the Town of Slave Lake in late spring of 2011. The documents that he had planned to gather for me were in storage in their home in Slave Lake. The majority of the homes that were burned in Slave Lake were located in the south-east area near where my brother and his family lived. Sadly, several homes were lost nearby, including a whole row of houses across the alley from their home. Although their home was spared, it was months before Gordon would have the time to locate the genealogy data as he had other priorities to address because of the fire.

I had hoped to organize the archival data before conducting any community interviews in Slave Lake. In the interim, I focused on supplementing the archival data that I had, so that I would be better informed about our family genealogy. I located current and archival maps of the area as points of reference for land discussions. As he located them, Gordon provided me with numerous maps of the area that he had collected over many years of research. In addition, I obtained copies of archival photographs of Slave Lake and Grouard and organized them in binders. I gathered historical family photographs, some from Gordon as well as others. I had planned to interview local elderly family members and other residents in Slave Lake for this work. For a variety of reasons including health issues of the elderly and ramifications of the fire, I decided to focus on the archival data with a plan to supplement it with narrative.

The task of organizing genealogical and other archival data that I had acquired at various intervals was extremely time-consuming. The records had been obtained from multiple locations including churches and archival facilities primarily from northern Alberta, Lac La Biche, Edmonton, St. Albert, Calgary, Ottawa and other locations. The sources for several of the documents had not been recorded. In order to keep accurate records of the data, I obtained genealogy software and linked approximately 200 names of family members going back six generations in some cases. Simultaneously, I worked on tracing the source of the documents while attempting to supplement the data for ancestors that needed more research.

A significant amount of my time initially was spent at the Provincial Archives of Alberta familiarizing myself with Oblate records and government documents. I supplemented the existing data with on-line research for genealogical records, census data, employee records, etc., from various databases such as the National Archives of Canada, the Hudson's Bay Company records, the Métis National Council, the Research Program in Historical Demography[25] (PRDH), the extensive

[25] *Programme de recherche en démographie historique* (PRDH) housed at the University of Montreal.

'ancestry.com' and 'ancestry.ca' databases[26], and others. Church records were not available on-line. I had to contact various Catholic dioceses from locations in Alberta where my ancestors were located at various times in our family history. I had some success with acquiring 'new' ancestral data. The archival and genealogical records were supplemented with oral knowledge provided by my eldest brother and other family members. In addition, I searched for burial records of my immediate ancestors and worked on locating and mapping burial sites.

I was able to make some contact with Indigenous people in other communities with the same surnames of some of my ancestors in order to explore whether or not we shared the same ancestry. Early in this process, the names of two sisters had been provided as significant leads to the Sinclair family's 'Indian' status. These two sisters, identified as Indian women, had married two Courtoreille brothers and one of the brothers was my paternal great-great-grandfather, Alex(is) Courtoreille. Multiple ways of spelling the women's names and the vagueness of most of these records did not provide enough information to locate their place of origins or their identities with any certainty. In line with the patriarchal social and legal British systems of colonization, it is unfortunate that many genealogical documents place more emphasis on the male lineage than

[26] The genealogical databases founded and operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints based in Utah.

the female one. This fact was obvious in the archival records and is part of the invisibility of our women in the records; the other part is that Indians were often simply recorded as ‘Indian’ man or woman, especially in marriage records where that person is not ‘Christian’ with a Christianized name to record.

The genealogy records indicated Cree names, particularly for ancestors who were further back in the lineage. In an effort to reconnect to our language and the identity of my ancestors, I’ve included their Cree names as noted on the documents. I drew on the expertise of Cree traditional knowledge holder, John Crier, who is knowledgeable about Cree ways of knowing and being as well as the etymology of Cree words. It is impossible to be certain of the meaning of the ancestral names without knowing the context of the time. There are several Cree names mentioned in this document that will require research beyond the scope of this study. In many cases, the Cree names/words in these genealogy documents are not commonly used today. An added challenge was the variations in the spelling of the Cree names. I noted the inconsistencies as indicated on the documents. I provided some interpretation of the Cree names in Chapter VI, Ancestral Data. In addition, many of the genealogy records were recorded in French or had a mix of French, Cree and English. I drew on the translation skills of French speakers and archivists to translate the French on our ancestral records to English.

C. Ancestral Land & Burial Sites

I had planned to trace ancestral land for this research, which was based upon archival documents that Gordon had collected about the lands on which our ancestors lived in the Lesser Slave Lake area. I reviewed numerous documents with various legal descriptions of their land. Most of the records appeared to be scrip land; another was homestead land. One of the documents pertained to a band list of the Kinosayo First Nations indicating reserve land of my great-grandmother Marie Chalifoux and her family. I also located 16 interviews with First Nation Elders in the Lesser Lake area that were conducted in the 1970s about the topic of land and land surrenders. Some of the Elders interviewed were relatives on our mother's side of the family. I did not include an analysis of the above mentioned land and land surrenders as my focus was on ancestral land on the east side of the lake.

I anticipated that the data collected would augment family history from the genealogy research. Because of the complexity and time-consuming nature of conducting land research, along with its financial requirements, that aspect of this research was not a significant part of the study. However, I was able to compile a list of names of ancestors connected to legal land descriptions in the Slave Lake area. I did a historical title search of seven pieces of land (quarter or half sections) for the following ancestors: Michel Courtoreille, Donald Sinclair, and Alfred

Sinclair. The results are discussed in Chapter VI, Findings and Data Analysis.

> *I spent a significant amount of time tracing unmarked burial sites of my paternal great-grandfathers who died in the 1918-19 influenza epidemic. As previously stated, the documents of burial sites and death records specific to these ancestors were obtained from various sources including: my brother Gordon; the Alberta Genealogical Society; Vital Statistics and the Roman Catholic Church registry. The first list in my possession was provided by my brother who had obtained it from our relative, the late Norman Trindle, not long before his passing. Norman lived in Slave Lake all of his life. The list had been given to Norman by a local non-Aboriginal man, who had had many roles in Slave Lake including the role of the 'judge'. I continued to seek out other documents to validate the data from the first list that I had. I created several charts to compare the data from the various sources in an effort to determine accuracy. The data analysis of the burial site records are discussed in Chapter VI.*
>
> *I also worked on locating burial sites in the Slave Lake area and mapped the four that I was able to locate. The archival data indicated two historical sites that were not on record with the local town office, or the provincial government department responsible for the management of historical resources in Alberta. I was unable to access the Sawridge Traditional Land Use Study to determine if there was existing data about the historical grave sites. I was able to obtain maps of the Sawridge cemetery from the Municipal District office in Slave Lake as well as the University of Alberta library.*

In addition, I located data about burial sites obtained from an archaeological report at the Royal Alberta Museum which referred to an "Indian" cemetery and a "White" cemetery. When I was given access to research field notes at the Royal Alberta Museum as noted in the Narrative section below, I came across this information documented by Diana French (1980), about cemeteries in Slave Lake from the last page of Dr. French's archaeology field notes:

Field notes - Lesser Slave Lake Canal Project, Permit #79-090:
Diana E. French
Archaeological Heritage Consultants Ltd.

p. 11
Found an old Indian cemetary [sic] on south side of Lesser Slave river, near mouth. Likely a prehistoric site here. Also opposite side of river near mouth in vicinity of Hines cabins. High potential also in Provincial Park on old sand dunes and beach level. Sawridge Creek running through town, also looked good. High terrace heading south from town on west side of road (old lake bench) is extremely high. White cemetary [sic] is located up here.

Saturday July 21
Left Lesser Slave Lake c.a. 9 p.m.
Arrived Edmonton 12:15 p.m.

I obtained permission from the Royal Alberta Museum to cite the above excerpt. It was of interest to me that the reference to the cemetery by the mouth of the river was identified as the 'Indian' cemetery. That cemetery is likely the old Sawridge cemetery. The 'White' cemetery on the south part of town, to which Dr. French refers, is the cemetery that is used today.

D. Narratives

This section includes narratives engaging with some historical knowledge of local Indigenous residents, including interviews that I did with our late father, Sam. The narratives draw on their experiences as well as my own, supplemented with documented data from various sources of research in the area. I organized the narratives under themes, primarily related to dislocation of land. Analyses of the narratives are included in Chapter VI of this study.

a. Land Disconnection

(i) Big Point

Big Point is on the north side of the lake, where our *kohkom* Agathe (Courtoreille) Sinclair, was born. The Courtoreille family lived there. My brother Gordon had informed me in previous discussions that our great-great grandfather Alexis chose that area for his family to live. Our great-grandfather Michel, Alexis' son, listed Big Point, Lesser Slave Lake as his address in the 1899 "Halfbreed" Scrip application included as Appendix D in this study.

Gordon had a discussion with Fred Courtoreille who told him that Alexis travelled around the lake and chose that location as an ideal place to live and that no one else lived there (personal communication, May 30, 2013). For many years I had been curious to know what was on the north side of the lake and wondered why no one lived there. I did not know that area was where Big Point was located.

When I located Big Point on a map of LSL, I was reminded of the image on a hand drum that I obtained prior to 2004. I prayed with that drum for guidance in applying to graduate studies to pursue my doctorate. The image to me was overlooking Lesser Slave Lake from the eastern shores of the lake where our grandfathers and grandmothers lived. One of the images that stood out for me when I first saw the drum was a 'person in a boat' on the water facing the opposite direction which for me was west. The 'boat' was slightly closer to the right side of the drum which I considered to be the 'north side of the lake'. The 'person in the boat' was facing northwest 'across the lake' from the town of Slave Lake towards where Big Point is located.

I discovered in 2012 that Big Point was a site that University of Alberta archaeologist Raymond Le Blanc surveyed in the Lesser Slave Lake region in the 1980s and 1990s. Le Blanc's work (2004) reveals that the archaeological research uncovered 81 sites (p. v). I met with Ray on campus in the latter part of 2012 about my research. I was pleasantly surprised to find that he had published a book about his research, which he generously provided to me. The focus of his study was archaeology which typically would not include interviews with local Indigenous people. However, Ray mentioned that while the research team was conducting work at Big Point in the 1980s, an elderly Native woman arrived at the site with her adult son and grandchild. They came from Faust, across the lake. She was interested in checking out what they were doing in the area because people had taken items from there in the past. Mr. Le Blanc remembered that they were members of the Courtoreille family and that they were very knowledgeable about the history of the area. Mr. Courtoreille had mentioned to Ray that their family had 30–40 year old photographs of the area that might be of interest to them.

Ray recognized the value of further contact with them; however, there was no follow up contact with them given the scope of conducting pre-historic research. Images of log houses, and other historic structures and landmarks at Big Point were

photographed during the study and included as an appendix in the text (2004). Ray offered to review his field notes that were in storage at the Royal Alberta Museum (see excerpts from his research notes below). He gave me names of archaeologists to contact at the provincial museum for follow-up.

I eventually connected with the archaeologist from the museum. He said that he located Ray's research notes for me to review. He also stated that he talked with the curator from the museum about our family name and suggested that I talk with her when I was available to review the notes. The museum had a recent acquisition of a gun case that was believed to be made by Lissette Courteoreille for the Earl of Southesk. Lisette was believed to have been born in the Lesser Slave Lake area about 1824. He also said that there was a Hudson's Bay post on the east side of the lake as well as on Dog Island. He suggested that I contact an archaeologist from Alberta Culture who is knowledgeable about the fur trade and may be able to advise me about burial sites in the Lesser Slave Lake area. I found out in the autumn of 2012 that the Big Point area is now considered provincial park land**.**

I visited the provincial museum on January 8, 2013. I had been looking forward to reviewing his field notes and was grateful that he gave me permission to access them. Following are sections from his research notes from 1980 and 1981 that were of particular

interest to me about Big Point including burial sites from the 1918–1919 influenza and other historical data about the Indigenous people of the area[27]:

Ray Le Blanc , Field Notes 1980 - Lesser Slave Lake Project

p. 37 – ref to p.117[28] 19 August 1981
"found a cemetery in a grassy rose bush clearing right next to the terrace edge c.a. 200-300 m west of main clearing where buildings are located. Noted 1 cross and 2 or 4 very rotten grave houses. Continued NNW as Big Point turns and picked up the Grouard Trail. Followed it c.a. 500-750 m past the bottom of the bay on the north side of Big Point (see diagram next page)".

p. 42 - reference to "cemetery to the clearing."

p. 45 - "counted 7 graves = remains of 5 grave houses, 1 small cross and 1 rectangular depression."

p. 47 - "A boat was at our landing site. Belonged to a Mr. Dennis Courtourelle, now of Faust. He was with his mother and daughter. He grew up at Big Point (now 46 years old) and said his mother was the last living "old timer" from Big Point. Talked to him for a while and

p. 137 - he proved to be a wealth of information regarding the settlement history of the Point, the function of various buildings and the identity/function of depressions in the clearing.

Concerning the latter, the depression tested by Bob on our first day here was the foundation of 1 of 2 cabin/residences located side by side. These were used by his grand parents' generation many of whom died during the influenza epidemic around the first world war. Many of the graves in the cemetery date to this time. The depressions noted at Stop #13 were the result of digging for clay for use as caulking/chinking in the log houses. When Mr. Courtourelle was a child, people lived at Big Point year round. They fished and kept cattle and horses.

p. 138 - Unfortunately Mr. Courtourelle had to leave to get back to Faust before dark so I couldn't get any more details on history etc. However, he was quite

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[27] Dr. Le Blanc provided his approval to include the excerpts from his field notes for this study.

[28] The page numbers are from Dr. Le Blanc's typed field notes with a second set of numbers that refer to field book pages.

cooperative and very friendly and expressed an interest in talking to us again. He indicated he has photos of the area that are 30-40 years old. It may be quite valuable to get more details of the settlement at Big Point".

I was heartened that photographs of log buildings and structures of the Big Point area were included in the Le Blanc text (2004) with captions of detailed descriptions (pp. 157–163). Although the captions did not identify the Courtoreille family name, as the Indigenous people who lived in the settlement, it was documented evidence of inhabitation in the area.

Excerpt from my Research Journal

November 7, 2012 - Gordie told me that several months ago, he had met with Fred Courtoreille, a distant relative, whose family lived at Big Point. He recently told Fred about my research. Fred said that would take us to Big Point if we want. Road access by vehicle is limited. We can connect with him later to arrange for him to take us there.

Excerpt from my Research Journal

January 28, 2013, Mon evening – Gordie said he just talked to Fred Courtoreille last week who told him that the people there were dying so fast from the flu that they buried them in shallow graves. He does not think that our great-great grandfather Alexis is buried there. He thinks that he might be in Grouard.

In January 2013 I discovered from viewing Ray Le Blanc's research notes, that Dennis Courtoreille was the man who Ray encountered during the archeological survey at Big Point in 1981. I contacted Fred Courtoreille in January and told him about my research. I asked how Dennis was related to him. Dennis, now deceased, was his older brother. I asked if he still has the photos

that his mother had had (based on Ray's notes). He said the photographs got lost when he moved. He also mentioned that he was aware that Big Point is now considered park land (personal communication, January 29, 2013).

Fred's parents were Solomon Courtoreille (b.1911) and Mary Nanooch. His grandfather was Alex Courtoreille. I read him names of the children of Alexis' & Angelique (Keeseequayees) that I had from various genealogical records. He thought the names sounded like the same family as his. I told him I'd bring him a copy of the genealogy chart that we have of the Courtoreille family when we meet. I told him about the photographs in Ray Le Blanc's archaeology text and that I would provide him with a copy that was given to me. I gave him my contact information. He said he would like to meet (personal communication, January 29, 2013).

Excerpt from my Research Journal

January 29, 2013 (cont'd) - I became emotional when I explained to Fred that my research was about reconnecting to our ancestors, to their land and about showing respect for those who are buried in unmarked grave sites in the LSL area. I apologized for getting choked up. He did not seem to be uncomfortable with it. Perhaps some of my tears were from feeling heard and not sensing unwillingness on his part, to meet with us. I was looking forward to talking with him further and hopefully visiting the Big Point area in the future.

In the spring of 2013, my brother and I and a friend met with local Slave Lake resident Charlie Jackson. Charlie is 85 years old and has lived in Slave Lake all of his life. We interviewed him at the

lake, close to the area where our relatives are buried, near the Marten River campground. Charlie told us a story about Big Point that involved my late father, the local nurse in the area, and the Courtoreille family. The event had taken place in the 1950s or early 1960s. Our father, Sam, was a forest ranger in Slave Lake at that time and control burning was done on a regular basis. Charlie knew that Dad was related to the people who lived in Big Point. Fred Courtoreille's father Solomon was known as 'Selamo'. Charlie spoke of a situation where the local nurse, Miss Attrux had the Courtoreille family removed from their home territory at Big Point. Following are excerpts from his story:

> Selamo was still there. Your dad burnt that meadow over there for ten years straight. He'd take me and John Auger…. We had a camp there and we'd burn five hundred acres…. Your dad was a ranger and we'd go there with a helicopter. … The last time I participated, we set our camp, talked to Solomon for a little while. There were kids that big that had never been to school. …During the night we hear a bunch of crying. So your dad and I got up and went over there….We asked them "what's wrong?" He said, "the baby just died", about three o'clock in the morning. So your dad got on the phone just as soon as it was open. And, there were two of them sick besides the dead one and he said "you better send a nurse, there's one sick one and one is dead". Sure enough the helicopter wasn't long. They landed there, and your dad said, "you go with the nurse". So, I went in with the nurse. Oh she was mean. Anyways, I'm interpreting for her. They can't talk English. She says, "ask him why he stays here". He answered in Cree, "I like it here, I just want to live here." He was born there. Oh boy she got mad. She said "you can live here but your kids are going" and away they all went. They took them to Kinuso across the lake. I don't know how long Selamo lived there. (personal communication, May 30, 2013)

Charlie went on to say that after Selamo's family was taken away, they never did go back. He also talked about the grave sites that were at Big Point, many of them a result of the 1918-19 influenza. He said there was a big graveyard along the creek that was all fenced at that time. He thought there were about twenty four people buried there at that time, in the 1950s or early 1960s (personal communication, May 30, 2013).

Since my interview with Charlie, Fred Courtoreille informed me that there were 36 people who died at Big Point in the 1918 influenza epidemic. He said that they were dying so fast that they had to bury them in the garden even though they still had potatoes in the garden. He said that his late mother used to look after those graves. I asked him what he knew about Marten River. He said he knew that people were buried there (personal communication, August 8, 2013).

Fred talked about where his family lived and when he recalled that they left the area. He said that his mother's mother, Madeleine lived in Shaw's Creek near Big Point, and other relatives lived nearby in Narrows Creek. He thought that they moved from the area about 1954-56, about the same time he was in the mission. He said that his grandmother moved probably about 1958-60. His older brother Dennis left to seek employment; others continued fishing and trapping and living on the land. His parents

adopted his sister's daughter, so they left so she could go to school in Faust (personal communication, August 8, 2013).

(ii) Place Names/*Iskwew minîwâtim* (Cree Woman Point)

Charlie told us that the creek that was close to the burial site in the Marten River provincial park was called Squaw Bay Creek. The area along the shoreline where the creek drained into the lake was called, Squaw Bay. He said that the burial site area used to be called Squaw Bay Point. He remembered that they used to pick saskatoon berries there with his mother when he was young. He said there were burial sites there that his mother would visit. Charlie said that he knew that there were Sinclairs buried there (personal communication, May 30, 2013).

When I asked Charlie who named the area, he said "we did, us fishermen". But he said that it had likely been renamed like so many other places in the area. He made reference to other local place names that had been renamed from what the local Indigenous people knew them as. For example, he said that nearby Lily Creek and Lily Lake were named after Lily Hatcher. She married a forestry ranger who used to take her up to the tower. Her sister Jessie also married a forest ranger and she had a lake named after her too. Jessie Lake is south of Slave Lake where Charlie said there was a big fire at one time. At the time of the interview, Charlie could not recall the Indigenous names of those

locations but he knew where they were (personal communication, May 30, 2013).

Our dad, Sam, spoke about this Marten River area when I interviewed him in the mid-1990s for my Master's research (Sinclair, 1999). He referred to this location as one of their favourite hunting grounds. He also made reference to the Native graveyard that was in the area. Dad introduced this story that happened in the hunting season in fall of the early 1930s. He would have been turning five years old in late November 1931. The grandmother, to whom Dad refers in the story, was his father's mother, Madeleine Hamelin, who died in 1936. This excerpt was part of his response to a question that I posed about what he remembered as being important when he was a child:

> I remember some of the important things as a kid in the early1930s, was going into the bush with our family and others generally in the fall when the moose start mating, and moose was plentiful in those days. And they used to hunt in one of the favourite hunting grounds--there was also a Native graveyard there outside the provincial park in the Marten River area, better known, in their terms, they used to call it Squaw Point. But in Cree they'd call it *Iskwew mi nî wâtim;* that means "a woman point." That was one of our favourite hunting areas because they had already made racks there to hang dry meat. And I remember as a little guy, my grandmother was living then, of having six or seven racks of moose meat, probably with five or six animals hanging there. They were important days because our livelihood was moose meat, and dried. And I still remember as a little guy, I would say probably four or five years old when we had so much moose meat on the wagons, we would dry it in bales like, we didn't have room for us to ride. So we were kind of running in the back, crying, naturally, and from Marten River which is generally a one day journey. It

> took us two days because of the slowness of the trip but it always paid off because those big bales of meat was there all winter. And she also shared that, my mother, that is, with the rest of the community who a lot of them were in desperate need of meat like that. (p. 235)

The reference to the location that was called 'Squaw' Point by the local people, such as Charlie would not have been used in a derogatory way at the time. Dad's family only spoke Cree at that time, so they would have used the Cree term that he mentioned, *Iskwew minîwâtim* (*iskwew* is a Cree woman, *minîwâtim*[29] is a point/cape). Charlie's father was an Englishman, so it is more than likely that the English term would have been used.

(iii) Veteran's Land

Our dad joined the army in 1941 at 15 years of age to serve in World War II; he said that he was 18 otherwise he would not have been accepted to enlist. He had no birth records since he was delivered by a mid-wife at home, and there was no available baptismal record for him at the time. Over the years, he told many stories about his army days. The excerpt below is one of the stories I recorded about his return after the war ended about an unfulfilled promise of being granted Veteran's land:

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[29] Alberta Elders' Cree dictionary defines it as "point or cape; at the point advancing in water".

> We were not totally treated fair. After I got out of the army, then the discrimination started. We couldn't get jobs, even though there were jobs available in government, but they weren't meant for us-later-and I kept pursuing it. I did get on with the Forestry, finally, but they never dealt with us on our lands properly under the VLA (Veterans Land Act) where others around us who were non-Native got more than a fair share of the benefits of the soldiers which was supposed to go to all. I have felt bad about that, not so much for myself even though I did get beat on land in Slave Lake where I put in for land that was 39 acres that I wanted to have to call my own. They wouldn't sell it to me because they said it was a flood hazard, part of it was under water in 1935 but certainly was dry on high ground. And eventually they sold it to some individual for an industrial area. There's been millions of dollars change hands of that very land that they denied me as a war veteran who just wanted a piece of land to live on. Those kinds of things we don't forget. …. So when you get that kind of treatment, it's pure discrimination. They won't admit it but it's there and we have no resources to fight it so we just take it and they keep on doing it to our people. I hope it will end, someday." (Sinclair, 1999, p. 233)

Dad spoke of discrimination and unfair treatment that local Indigenous people were subjected to and had to accept without recourse, such as his experience about the denial of access to veteran's land. This is just one of many stories illustrating how Indigenous people in the Lesser Slave Lake area have experienced discrimination, and the privileged position that local non-Indigenous people held in the community in matters such as access to land.

b. Cultural Differences

During the interview with Charlie at Lesser Slave Lake, he told us a story about a local woman, Minnie Hockenreiner, who had a big grizzly bear that was tied up for years. The only person who could feed him was

Minnie, the old lady. He did not know why anyone would tie up a wild animal. He said it makes them mean and the bear could have killed them. They caught it when it was small but it was never tamed. He said it got to the point where only the old lady could feed it. She fed it from a big pail and would just throw the food at it. He said they'd watch it from the old number two road which was close by where they lived. He said that the bear would tighten that chain, and eventually, Charlie heard that the bear broke free (personal communication, May 30, 2013).

I was immediately intrigued by this story because of a dream that I had of a huge bear that I thought was a grizzly, chained up in the Slave Lake area. As he was relating the story, it was as though he was speaking of the same bear in my dream. This is the dream that came to me while my late sister was still alive some time before 2005.

My Bear Dream

> *The bear was massive and was tied with a thick collar around its neck attached to a huge chain. It was close by a house in the bush that I did not recognize as anyone's home that I knew. It was not an old log house like the homes of some of the Native people in that area. But intuitively, I sensed that the land "belonged" to my Dad's side of the family. It was an area that looked like the land near Kohkom and Moshom's old house. I came upon the bear and was startled by it. It was terrifying because of its size and further, that it was agitated. I did not know what to do. Then my brother Gordon walked over to me and told me that I had to feed it. It was like it he was given the responsibility to feed it but he was passing it on to me. He had to go somewhere else. He handed me a huge pail of raw fish. I did not object although I was afraid. One by one, I took the fish and threw them to the bear. I was relieved that it calmed it. My fear subsided. But I was puzzled that people would be so cruel as to chain an animal that belonged in the wild.*

That is what I remember about my dream. I made notes about it because it felt like it was significant. At the time, I did not know that historically in many European countries, it was not uncommon that bears were chained and held in captivity for entertainment purposes.

I cannot remember exactly when it was that I realized that I was going to have to be more diligent in feeding our relative the bear. Perhaps it was in a conversation with my sister Lorraine that it became clear. I would often talk with her about my dreams especially the significant ones that were of a spiritual nature. Over the years, I attended many ceremonies with her. In addition we travelled to Slave Lake at least once a year to share offerings with our relatives. Together with Gordon, Valerie and sometimes other family members we would drive north of Slave Lake near where our ancestors lived and died. We prayed and did our offerings together. Other times when I could not travel to Slave Lake, I did food offerings on my own in a sacred fire.

Bear dreams and dreams of a spiritual nature, seemed to become more frequent after I began participating in ceremonies in the 1990s. The bear dreams that I experienced, starting from the first that I remember when I was approximately four years old, were terrifying. In that initial dream, I was the one who was tied up. I was seated in a chair with a rope around my arms and legs, on a covered bridge. I could not escape, but the bear did not harm me. In other dreams, I was being chased or was surrounded by them. After I started to feed them regularly in my life, the

bear dreams subsided. I am grateful that I no longer fear bear encounters in my dreams. I acknowledge and thank them in my prayers. Perhaps the chase served a purpose to get my attention that they needed to be fed. I learned not to fear them but to acknowledge and feed them. I have come to view them as my relatives and spiritual helpers.

A few years after our sister Lorraine's passing in 2005, I attended a traditional ceremony with Gordon and Valerie and others to find out about our clan. We followed the protocol as we were guided. During the ceremony we were informed that our clan is the bear clan. It confirmed what I already believed especially since other members of our family had also spoken about bear dreams. Lorraine had said the same when she was alive, that the bear was our clan. She used to say that the bear in the west direction of a medicine wheel teaches us about introspection.

I am not certain of the meaning of the bear that was confined with a chain in the dream. I am not even certain if there is a connection between my dream and Charlie's story. But intuitively when Charlie started speaking about the bear, I felt that there was a connection. It was a similar intuitive experience that I had when I saw the drum[30] with a footprint and other images on the face of the drum that ultimately led me to do this work. The connection of the bear in the dream and in the story may

[30] The drum maker referred to the drum as his 'teaching' drum that he used in school presentations for students.

become clear in time or it may not; perhaps the meaning is already here and this work is ‘feeding’ our ancestors. I am just grateful (*ninanâskomon*) for the opportunity to engage with this work that feeds my spirit.

CHAPTER VI –FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

This section comprises findings and analyses of the data. Included in this section is data about my maternal and paternal ancestry, primarily the more recent ancestors such as grandparents, great-grandparents and minimally great-great-grandparents. The ancestral data includes descriptive, narrative and analytical data woven together. The remaining analytical sections of research include: Genealogy Analysis, Land and Burial Site Data Analysis and Narrative Analysis from the data included in the previous chapter.

A. Ancestral Data

> "Many Native cultures teach that we carry the memories of our ancestors in our physical being. As such, we are immediately connected to those who have gone before us" (Anderson, 2001, pp. 24-25).

This section addresses a stated purpose of the work to identify and strengthen ancestral connections in the Lesser Slave Lake area, and to 'write/right' some 'wrongs' of what has been written–and in most cases not written—about Indigenous ancestors in the area. It is in a sense 'bringing them out of the shadows' of history in the Lesser Slave Lake region. It provides an overview of our Indigenous ancestors following the maternal and paternal lineages of my parents. As the work evolved, it became obvious to me that my need for reconnection was primarily with the female ancestors, my grandmothers, their mothers and their grandmothers. For

the male lineage, it was critical for me to try and locate the burial sites of our paternal great-grandfathers.

I begin with our mother's ancestors starting with the most recent, followed by paternal ancestors in the same order. This ancestral data section does not provide a complete biography of each individual. It is primarily a compilation of genealogical data from a variety of archival sources. I include names of sponsors on baptismal and marriage records, and informants on death records as a means to locate them in their respective families and communities. In some cases of the more recent ancestors, the data is supplemented with oral knowledge and previously recorded interviews.

a. Maternal Ancestry – My Mother's Family

(i) Julie Chalifoux

Our grandmother Julie, the mother to our mother Edna (Pierce) Sinclair, was born in Kinuso, Alberta on 13 March 1904. She was baptized[31] in Grouard on 10 June 1904 by Father Petour. The name of Julie's father was not recorded on the baptismal records, however, our mother and her siblings knew the identity of their grandfather to be Sid Smith. Recently I received contradictory

[31] Her baptismal sponsors were Augustin Chalifoux and Emilie Giroux.

information from the *Société Historique et Généalogique de Smoky River (*Smoky River Historical and Genealogy Society) which listed Marie married to Joseph Echakabawew. I asked to see a copy of the document from which that information was obtained but was informed that copies of those documents are not made available to the public. Marie never married, and further the name, Echakabawew is not a name that that has ever come up in the family history on the Chalifoux side of the family.

On 29 June 1921, Julie married Donald R. Pierce (b. October 1882). She was 17 at that time; he was 38, almost 22 years her senior. Father Joseph Wagner married them in the presence of Eugene Boisvert and Sophie Giroux at St. Augustine's mission in Peace River, Alberta. Julie passed away on 31 December 1937. The registration of death certificate indicates that she died at the age of 33 in Kinuso, Alberta[32]. She was buried 1 January 1938 at Kinuso[33]. Her racial origin was listed as Indian. The birth place of her father was crossed out. The birth place of her mother was listed as Kinuso[34]. The cause of death was listed as

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[32] Canyon Creek was crossed out as place of death and place of residence and replaced with Kinuso.

[33] Burial records confirm that she is buried in Kinuso at the same cemetery as her mother, Marie.

[34] 1891 Census lists birth place as Lesser Slave Lake, NWT.

heart failure. The document also stated that she had a “mental condition, stayed in bed for 12 years, with accompanying libidity from inertia.” There was no physician’s name listed attending the fatal illness. The place of interment (Name of Cemetery) was St. Felix Catholic Church. Her husband, D. Pierce, was listed as the informant. The signature of the Registrar on the death certificate was Mr. D.S. McLaughlin, dated 1 January 1938.

Our grandmother, Julie, was raised by her mother, Marie Chalifoux. Julie had two half-sisters, Philomen and Catherine. Catherine died in the 1918 influenza outbreak (George Pierce, personal communication, November 28, 2012). Catherine’s daughter Flora was raised by Julie with help from other family members. Julie died an early death at 33 years of age on New Year’s Eve. Mom, the eldest girl in the family, was called Nôcikwêsiw[35] (a small old lady). She was only eleven years old at the time of her mother’s passing. I do not know if our mother had that name because she was the eldest girl in the family, if she had to be ‘older than her years’ because of her mother’s condition or if it was because her behavior was that of someone older than her years.

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[35] It sounds like nōchikwēsō.

Our family had never heard that our grandmother had a “mental condition” as stated on the death certificate. She was bedridden with spinal meningitis for as long as our mother remembers. Mom thought that she became bedridden when their younger brother Norman was born. He died in child birth. If our grandmother had “stayed in bed for 12 years” as stated on the death certificate, that would been in 1925, a year before our mother was born.

Our grandmother gave birth to ten children, seven survived. Mom was the fourth child. She had two older brothers, George and Jimmy. The first born was Marguerite, named after Grandpa’s only sister. She died as a baby up north in Peace River where Julie and Donald were married. Following the loss of Norman, the remaining children she had while bedridden were: Lily, Elsie (who also died as a baby), Donald, Victor and Justine. The youngest, Justine, was only two and a half months old when their mother died. I cannot imagine how hard it would have been being bedridden for that many years, not even being able to sit up and hold her babies. To have five pregnancies and deliveries while bedridden would have required amazing strength.

Mom shared many fond memories of her mother over the years. She said that her mother was small. Even though she was bedridden, that did not stop her creativity. She made flowers out of

tin cans, beaded white leather gloves, moccasins and other nice things. Mom said that she had beautiful house plants, many of them flowering plants. Our grandmother always had help at home, whether it was her mother, other relatives or hired help. She even made homemade pies in bed lying on her side. She could not sit up in bed without crying out in pain. This is what our mother said about her from an interview that I included in my Master's thesis (1999):

> She was really talented. Then after we decided to move to Canyon Creek and Dad was going to build a store up there. He had a log store….But the year we moved to Canyon Creek, she took sick there in our log store. But they were going to build a new one, a bigger one, when she had her health. But then she died New Year's Eve….We had a beautiful life. And when we lived in Canyon Creek there, Dad had cabins. It was pretty hard on us. Dad had 5 cabins there and we all had to live in the cabins. But then he made sure my grandmother and my aunt were with us until we all got married. (p. 229)

Mom said Grandpa did everything he could to get help for her medical condition including making several trips to Edmonton. He even flew with her to Winnipeg to get her the best doctors. Unfortunately, nothing could be done.

Grandpa had a general store for many years in Kinuso, so he was able to provide well for his family. He even had a canopy made on the back of his truck; it was like the first truck and camper in the area. He took our grandmother wherever he could, including annual trips to the Lac St. Anne pilgrimage. Mom remembers that he would back up his truck to their community hall or wherever they

went, so her mother could watch the activities. Mom said her mother loved music. There was always music playing in their home. She had a gramophone with records of Jimmy Rodgers and other music including the Red River jig. She got her niece Flora to teach her oldest children how to jig. She made sure that Grandpa Pierce bought instruments for her three eldest. Uncle George learned to play the fiddle; Uncle Jim played the banjo; Mom played guitar. They all played by ear. Mom said that her mother had a lovely voice. She remembers her mother singing a Cree hymn just before she died.

In 1987, when my sister Linda obtained our grandmother, Julie's death certificate, she was surprised it indicated that our grandmother had a "mental condition". It was an implication that such a condition was the cause of her staying in bed for 12 years. If the signature on the death certificate is our grandfather's, he would not have agreed that his wife had a mental disorder. Grandpa shared many stories of their past with his family but no one had ever heard him make such a reference. The certificate was signed the day after her passing, and the likelihood is that he signed the form without reading what the Registrar had written. The Registrar, Douglas Sterling McLaughlin, was from the Kinuso area. He worked for the Alberta Department of Highways and was in charge of "building and maintaining roads" in the area (Pioneers of the

Lakeland, 1984, p. 175). With all due respect for his role as registrar, his note of the cause of Julie Pierce's death certainly cannot be considered a valid medical assessment.

Mom said that Grandpa had a really hard time with his wife's death. He could not keep up with the store and raising all the kids. Mom's grandmother Marie and her Aunt Philomen continued to help him raise the family. Neither Philomen, nor her mother Marie spoke English. However, Marie understood English (personal communication, Justine (Pierce) Stenset, 22 February 2013). She spoke Cree mixed with some French. Mom said Grandpa tried to speak Cree but "he murdered the language".

Grandpa was born in Maine in October 1882. He had an American accent so it is understandable that his Cree was different. After his wife died, he likely gave up on his plans to expand the store. He never remarried. After Mom was married and some of the children were grown up, Grandpa moved to the west coast of British Columbia. He lived and worked in Prince Rupert. Our great grandmother Marie continued to help him raise Aunt Justine.

Later, all of the Pierce family members moved to the west coast with the exception of our mother. She married and stayed in the Lesser Slave Lake area. Mom and Dad did live in Prince Rupert for a short period of time so that Dad could work there, but they returned to Slave Lake. Later, after his children had all left home,

Grandpa Pierce moved to Tofino, Vancouver Island and lived on his own for many years. In his final years, he lived with the family of my late Uncle Victor Pierce until his passing in 1970. He was buried in White Rock, BC. He had said that he was born on a coast and wanted to die on a coast.

(ii) Marie Chalifoux

Our great-grandmother Marie's parents were Jean Baptiste "Baptiste" called Maskek Chalifoux and Sophie Piyetabanisimew[36] Laboucan/Leboucon. One of the archival church documents also lists Sophie's name as Piyekekapaw[37]. I discuss more about their Cree names under Marie's parents' names below. Marie was born circa 1863 -1866. She had eight siblings. Two church records, one of which was from McLennan, list Marie as the fourth child between her older sister Sophie (b.1863) and younger sister Catherine (b.1869). The date 1866 is included as either a birth date or baptismal date on one of the documents. The other record has neither birth nor baptismal dates for Marie and her two older brothers. It does, however, have birth dates and baptismal dates for

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[36] My brother provided me with a translation by a local resident in Slave Lake who said that it meant "raw meat eaten with marrow".

[37] *Kapâw*—s/he arrives by boat. Further translation required.

her parents and six siblings. The same document lists the parents of Jean Baptiste as Chalifoux and Josette Cartier.

A different document that was written in French states that Jean Baptiste travelled west with Giroux. Giroux is a common surname in the area. One of the documents indicates that four of Marie's siblings married Giroux men and women. The same record states that Marie "united" with Norbert Mikisiw (*mikisiw*: eagle in Cree) Giroux as well. Marie had three daughters: Catherine who died in the 1918 flu epidemic (Catherine's daughter was Flora), Philomen and Julie. They also had half-sisters: Nellie Smith[38], and Maggie[39].

The statistics vary about Marie's age. Census Canada (1891) lists her age as 14, born in 1877. That cannot be accurate if she was baptized in 1866. The census also lists her birth place as Lesser Slave Lake, North West Territories. Uncle George said his grandmother Marie had said that she had travelled west with her father when she was about four years old (personal interview, 29 November 2012). She said that Marie's father spoke French. Uncle George did not remember hearing about Marie's mother, Sophie or names of her siblings. But he said they had several relatives in the

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[38] Likely Sid Smith's daughter.
[39] Mother of our late aunt, Edith (Meaver) Sinclair.

area when they were growing up. Uncle George said his grandmother had mentioned that Marie was born about the same time as Father Falher, who was born in 1863[40]. Therefore, if Marie was also born in 1863, she would have been 90 when she died. She died on 20 March 1953 and is buried in Kinuso. Burial records from the Alberta Genealogy Society inaccurately list her age at 76 when she died.

Our family has four photographs of my great grandmother Marie Chalifoux. One of the photographs was obtained as recent as 2012 from our aunt Lily Swanson[41] from Prince Rupert. In all the photos, Marie is with children. One is with her relatives and her grown daughter, Philomen. Marie is holding my uncle, Victor's hand, when he was a child. He was probably about three or four years old at the time. I do not know if his mother Julie had already passed away at that time. There is another photo that we have had in our family for as long as I can remember. Marie is holding my brother, Gordon's hand. He looks to be about three years old. He was born in 1947 so that would have been approximately 1950, three years before she passed away. It amazes me that she had

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[40] Father Constant Falher was born March 30, 1863 (Mission Oblates-Grandin Province Book of Memory)

[41] Aunt Justine Stenset has the original photograph.

the stamina to not only raise her own children, and her daughter's children, but that she still had time for her great-grandchildren. Another photograph from about the same time is with my brother and our cousin Shirley. She's holding them in her arms. In another photo estimated to have been taken circa 1943, she is standing in front of Grandpa's cabins in Canyon Creek. She's next to her daughter, Philomen; two of her granddaughters are in the front centre. Justine who was the baby when her mother passed away looks to be about six years old.

My sister Linda recently suggested to me that our great-grandmother Marie had to be brave living on her own. Uncle George told Linda that there were a lot of deaths from the 1918 flu epidemic in the area. He said that the Dogrib Indians (Atimospikayak literally 'dog ribs') used to travel down to Lesser Slave Lake to steal Cree women since they lost so many of their own women. He said that she had to keep a rifle handy to protect herself and her three daughters. They would have lived in the bush at that time, so they would not have had neighbours nearby to provide a sense of security.

(iii) Jean Baptiste and Sophie (Laboucan) Chalifoux

A recent genealogy chart obtained from the Smoky River Historical and Genealogy Society indicates that our grandmother Marie's father, Jean Baptiste Chalifoux, was born at Riviere Desjarlais (St. Albert) in 1827. He married Sophie Piyetukekapaw

(Pyietahaesemow[42]) in Grouard in June 1864. Sophie's Cree name was also listed as Piyetabanisimow in a different church document. Sophie was born in 1839, but the document from Donnelly does not indicate where she is from. The same chart lists Jean Baptiste Chalifoux's parents as Jean Baptiste Chalifoux and Josette Cartier. It also states that the latter, Jean Baptiste, came from St.Hyacinthe, Quebec, and that he worked for the Hudson's Bay Company. A previous document obtained from McLennan, written mostly in French, indicates that Jean Baptiste Chalifoux was a French Canadian from St. Hyacinthe. St. Hyacinthe is slightly northwest of Montreal. That would have been a long migration west to Lesser Slave Lake in the early 1800s.

Jean Baptiste, was also called *Maskek* (*maskek*: muskeg, swamp). One of the church documents lists Jean Baptiste and Sophie's baptism and marriage on the same day in June 1864 at St. Bernard parish in Grouard[43]. Father Remas married them in the presence of William Cardis and Angele Chalifoux. He was 37 and she was 25. Several of their children were also baptized in June 1864. Their children were listed as follows:

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[42] The church data indicated multiple spellings for Sophie's Cree name.

[43] Other documents include these names beside Grouard - *Assawanisipiy* = Desjarlais River.

1. Jean Chrétien called *Ayimisis*[44] (Benjamin) was baptized June 1864, the same day as his parents. He married[45] Nancy *Papastesis* on 26 December 1894 in Grouard. He died 7 April 1919.
2. Joanny (Johnny) called *Maskek* was born in June 1864. He married Marguerite *Kinwaskasanes* Giroux (*Mikisiw*) on 15 April 1883.
    a. Sophie was born in October 1863, also baptized in June 1864. She married Julien Courtoreille (*Wapaw*[46]) on *18* May 1879. She died in 1894.
    b. Marie was born or baptized in 1866. She was united with Julien Courtoreille *Wapaw* her brother in law [47]. Then she was united to Norbert *Mikisiw* Giroux.
    c. Catherine was born April 1869, baptized 8 June 1870, and married to Alec Giroux on 8 February 81886.
    d. Felix was born 29 May 1873, baptized 1 June 1873. His second marriage was to Marie Isabelle Giroux on 23 December 1894 in Grouard. He died and was buried in Joussard 5 November 1918.
    e. Lucie was born 1 January 1877and baptized 3 January 1877.Married Magloire (Mitchel) Giroux in Grouard on 26 March 1896. Magloire is the son of Genevieve Chalifoux and Magloire Giroux. She died 11 August 1947 and was buried 13 August 1947 in Kinuso.
    f. Pierre was born 23 June 1880 and was baptized 28 June 1880.
    g. Elzéar or Elzeard was born or baptized on 19 April 1883.

The church records and the census data are inconsistent.

The 1891 Census of Canada lists Jean Baptiste Chalifoux's age as 60 (b.1831), and his residence as Lesser Slave Lake, Northwest Territories, Canada. It lists his wife Sophie as 50 (which would

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[44] Quick tempered.
[45] Gordon has marriage certificate.
[46] It is a narrows; it is a bay. (Wolvengrey Cree dictionary)
[47] Marie's sister Sophie died in 1894.

make 1841 her birth year), Herman Chalifoux as 32 (b. 1859), Marie Chalifoux as 14 (b. 1877), and Lucy Chalifoux as 21 (b. 1870). In the church records, there is no mention of Herman and in the other documents Lucy is younger than Marie. The census data does not appear to be accurate. It does not correspond with the church records which are relatively consistent in this case. However, even the church records differ with each other. One of the documents has his age as 75 and that he died in 1913 but the baptismal record indicates he was born in 1827. Since the archival church records are at times summaries of primary source data, I would refer to the baptismal certificate in this case, and accept that Jean Baptiste Chalifoux was 86 when he died.

His Cree name, Maskek*,* is intriguing to me. It translates as "muskeg". Perhaps it is related to *maskekowiyiniw* (Swampy Cree person or Muskego) from the east. Or his name may have had something to do with medicinal healing. *Maskihkîy* translates as "a healing potion or a medicine gift that has spirit power benefits" (Alberta Cree Dictionary). One of the documents written in French and Cree states that Jean Baptiste was of *Kitotcigan*[48] (Cree word for musical instrument, often guitar) *la musicienne, (*female

[48] The late Ned Gladue explained to my brother Gordon that it was like the music spirit that goes with different families.

musician*).* It seems musicians were present in the Chalifoux family generations back, which continues today.

The Chalifoux family had land in their names at Swan River. An Indian Affairs document (1909) that lists "Indian Families taking land on Swan River"[49] include Marie's parents and siblings among others. Marie is listed as #68, with four members in her family, Lot #11, 640 acres. In 1909 the amount of land listed collectively for her parents and siblings was 4640 acres. It would be interesting for future comparison to trace how much of this land is currently in their names.

b. Paternal Ancestry – My Father's Family

(i) Agathe (COURTOREILLE)[50] Sinclair

Our grandmother Agathe's parents were Isabelle (Aubichon/Obichon) Cardinal and Michel Courtoreille. Agathe was born May 1894 at Big Point, Lesser Slave Lake. Big Point is located on the north side of the lake just west of the Narrows on the lake (see map, Appendix B). There was a trail on the north side of the lake that connected Sawridge (Slave Lake) on the east end of the

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[49] Indian Affairs. (RG 10, Volume 7777, File 27131-5), Public Archives.
[50] Also Courteoreilles, Courte Oreilles, *Courtes Oreilles* ('short ears' in French).

lake and Grouard on the west end of the lake, evidenced by an undated historical map[51] that I viewed during this research.

Agathe was baptized by Fr. Dupé in Grouard on 25 September 1894. The sponsor listed on her birth certificate is Joseph *Nabesis (nâpesis* in Cree is 'little boy'). She was baptized at four months old. Her mother, Isabelle, died in 1898 before Treaty 8 was signed. Agathe was four years old at the time. Her father, Michel, took scrip in 1899. His address on the scrip record was Big Point, Lesser Slave Lake. One of the church records indicates that Agathe had 14 children, 12 of whom survived. However, our late uncle August, the eldest son of James and Agathe, was not included on that list, so she had 15 children in total.

On 10 October 1912 at eighteen years of age, Agathe married James Sinclair. He died 12 November 1918 in the influenza epidemic the same day as Michel, her father. Four days later, on 16 November 1918 her ten-month old baby Noel died. Two days after that, on 18 November 1919, her father-in-law Donald also died from the flu. The records of the burial locations vary as discussed in Chapter VI.C, Land and Burial Site Data Analysis.

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[51] Map not included in the appendices.

I drew on a compilation of records to determine the following information about James and Agathe's four children:

- Marie – born 10 March 1913 in Grouard; died 18 September1927 at 14 years of age, (Donnelly records indicate 24 August 1927as date of death in Slave Lake)
- August - born 1914, and died 29 August 1985 in Slave Lake
- Clara – born 17 December 1915 and baptized 25 December 1915 at 8 days old, in Slave Lake
- Joseph Noel -born 14 January 1918; baptized 3 February 1918, and died 16 November 1918 (Donnelly records indicate he died 17 December 1918 in Slave Lake).

In 1923, Agathe had a son, Daniel, with Johnny L'Hirondelle. Nine years after the death of her first husband, James, Agathe married his younger brother, Alfred Sinclair on 17 April 1927. They had three children together by the time they married. Some of the church records have "Jos" (Joseph) as the first name for the males in the family. Alfred and Agathe's children were all born in Sawridge (Slave Lake), with the exception of the three youngest:

- Mary Jane - born 4 March 1921, baptized 15 May 1921.
- Jos. Walter - born 16 February 1925, baptized 18 February 1925 (known as Walter).
- Sam John Jermire (Jeremiah) - born 22 November 1926.
- Jos. Henry -born 5 August 1928, baptized 13 August 1928 (known as Henry).
- Jos. Edward - born 23 June 1930, baptized 10 July 1930 (known as Joe).
- May Mary - born 1 May 1932, baptized 8 May 1932.
- Francoise Priscilla - born June 1934, baptized 12 June 1934 (known as Francis).
- Frank - born 25 July 1936, baptized 8 August 1936 (no date of death).
- Evelyn Cecile - born 15 August 1937, baptized 31 August 1937.
- Clifford Anthony - born 20 November 1939, baptized 27 November 1939.

The records of our father's birth date varied. Some of the church records had no birth date. The latest record I received listed 22 November 1926 as his birth date, which is the date he considered accurate. He had two different birth certificates with a birth date of 22 December 1926. One listed his name as John Jermire Sinclair (dated 1960) and the more recent certificate has John Jeremiah Courtreillie (dated 1995). It is peculiar that one of his birth certificates is in our grandmother's maiden name rather than the Sinclair name. She had already married James Sinclair prior to that so her surname would have been Sinclair. Our grandmother Agathe died at 70 years old on 7 September 1964. She is buried in the Slave Lake cemetery.

To review archival data on its own without considering the human element is a one dimensional action. Such information is only partial, bringing to mind the never ending flow of negative statistics publicized about Indigenous people in Canada. Do most Canadians even think about the people behind the statistics? In many cases, that is how we are perceived; as statistics, and generally not viewed in a positive light. I believe that our stories, our narratives help to bring life to the statistics. I realized that to a certain extent, I was doing a similar thing. I was reviewing the data, names, numbers, from a multitude of documents trying to piece together my ancestral lineage, with no life, and no heart. I was

frustrated that I did not have enough data to piece together our family history, our story. However, when I started to closely examine the dates and the ages of our ancestors, the numbers fell into place as information attached to persons. In other words, the human aspect took precedence and became a necessary element to actually understanding and even examining the numbers.

It was early in 2013 that I made the realization that my *kohkom* Agathe had lost her mother when she was only four years old. Around the mid-to late 1980s, when my brother was already doing family genealogy, I was informed that our great-grandmother Isabelle Cardinal had died in 1898 before the signing of Treaty 8. I never thought about what that experience might have been like for our *kohkom* Agathe. I did not know at the time that Kohkom was born in 1894 and that she basically grew up without a mother. I cried when I thought of how hard it must have been for her both as a child and growing into adulthood without a mother. I realized and felt the pain of a really hard life. I felt compassion for her as I reflected upon her life. Our mother and Kohkom both lost their mothers at early ages. Perhaps that was why they were so close. Mom always spoke very highly of Kohkom. She had a lot of respect for her.

I also understood more clearly why *kohkom* Agathe had been so close to her older sister Julienne, who lived in the Kinuso/

Swan River area. Julienne was probably was like a mother to her even though she was only nine years older. She was a mid-wife who delivered many babies in the Kinuso area including my mom and several of Mom's siblings. We would see our *kohkom's* sister Julienne every year at the Lac St. Anne pilgrimage. She seemed so gentle and loving even though we never spoke directly. I always wanted to communicate with her but I did not have the words in Cree to speak. I only knew the commands in Cree that our *kohkom* spoke to us as children. I had never heard Julienne speak English so all I was able to do was to give her a kiss and smile at her. I still feel the pain of the disconnection between our grandparents' generation and ourselves because of the disconnection with our ancestral language.

Kohkom Agathe was very hard working, whether she was cooking inside or working outside. My sister Linda remembers her tanning moose hides out behind the house near their garden in Old Town. She would be scraping the hide or soaking it and wringing it out by hand. She also dried moose meat (*kahkewak*) out in the back, a process that took a few days to complete. Then some of the dry meat was pounded in a cloth bag or a pillow case to make what we called *eweyikanak.* When we were young, we would go berry picking with her and their team of horses and wagon. The young ones rode with her on the wagon; the older grandchildren had to

walk. I remember it being tiring. It was rough terrain whether walking or riding in the squeaky wagon. We were not allowed to eat the berries. Our job was to pick them. That was the same rule we had to follow when we picked berries with our parents. We learned about discipline being around Kohkom at a young age. I thought of her as strict. There was always the threat of Kohkom's willow even though I do not recall seeing anyone on the receiving end of it.

Sometimes when my parents had to go out of town, usually to Edmonton, she would stay at our place to look after us. Whenever we were told that Kohkom would be the one to watch us we would cry, hoping that our parents would change their minds and get someone more lenient to care for us. I give her credit for the Cree that I know. If not for the time she had spent with us as children, and speaking only Cree to us, we may not have learned at least some of our ancestral language. Somehow we knew what we had to do. She would only use an occasional English word if she had to. Sometimes just before putting us to bed, she would rub Noxzema cream on our faces and hands. Once in a while we would get a peppermint candy treat that she had tucked away inside a little pouch in her long dress. I do remember that she was gentle with my younger brothers, Rodney and Rocky.

The day I was remembering and writing about our *kohkom*, I took a break to talk with my sister Linda about what I was writing.

She told me that she and our aunt Sharon, our late Uncle Danny's wife, had also been talking about Kohkom and Uncle Danny the previous night. Uncle Danny had passed away from cancer in 1999. Sharon was remembering him telling her that he had been born in jail in Fort Saskatchewan. He had not been ashamed of it--he had stated it as a fact. This was new information to me, a fact I had not known. I remembered many years ago my dad had said that Kohkom had been "pinched" because of making home brew at one time. I did not have any idea that she had to serve time in jail because of it. But she obviously had been sentenced to jail and during that time (1923), Uncle Danny had been born. The prohibition laws abolishing alcohol sales in Alberta were in affect from 1916–1924 (Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission[52]).

It angers me when I think about her being arrested and sentenced to jail, especially given the dire economic situation that she was in. She was trying to make a living for her family without a husband, parents or even a father in law. Her supporters and providers were no longer present in her life. Uncle Danny had said that she did laundry for people in the Lesser Slave Lake area to try to make a living. Making and selling home brew was a reasonable

[52] Retrieved August 18, 2013 from http://www.aglc.gov.ab.ca/liquor/liquorhistoryandfacts.asp

means to provide income for the family. That was during the time of prohibition in Alberta. Kohkom was not a drinker herself. She was a devout Catholic so it must have been hard for her to resort to home brew as a means of income for family support. There was no form of social assistance to rely on at that time. Nevertheless, it seems the justice system was efficient and relentless in charging, convicting and jailing a woman who was the sole provider of three children, and who was expecting another child.

When I examined the burial records of my paternal great-grandfathers, Donald Sinclair and Michel Courtoreille, and Agathe's first husband James Sinclair, I thought about the huge impact that the flu epidemic must have had on the community and in particular on our grandmother. It must have been terribly painful for her to lose her husband and her father on the same day. They had been married for only six short years. James died at the young age of 28. Then five days later, she lost her ten-month old baby to the flu, followed by her father-in-law the day after that. The responsibility of being left to raise three children on her own must have been very difficult to face. She was only 24 years of age herself and she had no parents to lean on. We always thought of our *kohkom* as the matriarch in our family, a tower of strength in so many ways. This work has made clear to me that she did not become strong having an easy life. I am remembering the words of Eber Hampton at a

research gathering in 2012: “If God wanted us to have it easy, he wouldn’t have made us Indian.”

(ii) Alfred Sinclair

Our grandfather, Alfred, was the third child of Donald Sinclair and the fourth child of Madeleine Hamelin. He was born 5 April 1902 at Athabasca Landing. He was baptized on 25 May 1902 at Athabasca Landing, by Father Cunningham. His sponsors were Alfred Josseneuve[53] and Marie Louise House. He was eight years Agathe’s junior. He and Agathe were married for 37 years before she passed away in 1964. He died on 1 December 1978 at the age of 76.

Our *moshom* was a very hard worker. He was known to be a good hunter and a good trapper. Dad spoke about his father’s trapping skills in an interview I recorded in 1996:

> My dad always had done good trapping, that I can remember, where we used to have two clothes closets full of fur. My mother would save all this fur for the winter and they would sell it in the spring. I remember I was “nosy” as a little guy. They were counting the money and I think it was around eleven hundred dollars. Those days, that was lots of money. And there was no banks in Slave Lake, but my mom was the bank…I think that carried us well over a year for groceries

[53] May be misspelled but that is what is recorded on Alfred’s baptismal certificate obtained from the St. Albert parish in 1990.

> and other things we needed, clothes….you could buy a lot of clothes for a hundred dollars. (Sinclair, 1999, p. 236)

Dad said that their family never went hungry. When he was young, Dad told us that our grandparents often provided food for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families especially during the 'hungry thirties':

> I know our family was never hungry because the animals were always there and our father was a good hunter, provider. Others had real tough times. I remember white families almost starving. They used to come and get moose meat off my dad which they didn't pay for or nothing. But some of them gave flour to my father, and some sugar. (Sinclair, 1999, p. 237)

They had been taught as young children to help and share with others. Dad also spoke of his father getting sent to jail because of hunting without a permit which was not needed in earlier times of their lives:

> I remember when my dad got "pinched" for having moose meat. They found a cow (moose) hide and head in our old barn and there was a few others searched. There was three of them that got charged. I'd say that was probably around 1937 or '38. And they each got a month's jail. And I often thought that was the rudest thing they ever done to Native people, to put them in jail just trying to get food for their families. (Sinclair, 1999, p. 237)

It must have been difficult for my father, who was such a good provider, to know that his own father had to go to jail because of being caught with moose meat without a license, knowing that all their lives they relied on moose meat for their survival. Laws that criminalized Indigenous people for just trying to survive off the food

that nourished their families for generations, from my perspective, is inhumane.

(iii) Michel Courtoreille

Our great grandfather, Michel (also Michelis, Michael, Micheal) was born in Lac La Nonne on 21 September 1858. The 1899 scrip records[54] indicate that he was born in Lac la Nun, Alberta but moved "in infancy into Lesser Slave Lake and Peace River where he has been ever since" (Appendix D.). A significant point to note is that the scrip record indicates that he was born in Alberta but Alberta did not became a province until 1905. In 1899 it was known as N.W.T., the Northwest Territories. The implication of this formal entry into scrip records raises questions that could impact family claims to Indian status. It is also significant to note that the "X signatures" of Michel Courtoreille, Donald Sinclair, and Alexis Courtoreille are all identical.

On 3 February 1881, Michel and Isabelle (Aubichon) Cardinal were married by Father Joseph Dupuis at Grouard. The witnesses were Pierre Kiseyinis[55] (small old man) and Christine

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[54] The scrip document Gordon Sinclair obtained indicates the record was from the public Library and Archives of Canada, RG-15, vol. 1342, Cook – Cyr.

[55] Also spelled *Kiseyimis* on the marriage record obtained from the Diocese of Grouard-McLennan, May 17, 1990.

Courtoreille who were married at the same time. Michel and Isabelle had nine children, five of whom survived. Scrip records for Michel (1899) show their five children as: Julienne, Colin, Harriet, Agatha and Henry. The four deceased children were listed as: Isidore, Eliza, Joseph and one, unnamed, who died in infancy.

There was some variance in the data for Michel and Isabelle's children based on church data, scrip records and census data. The 1901 Census, two years after Isabelle died, shows Michel with five children. Although there are a significant number of typographical errors in their names in the census data, the information does correspond with the children listed in the scrip records. The scrip records (1899) indicate Michel's birth in May 1860. His baptismal record[56] shows his date of birth as circa September 1858; date of baptism at four months – 21 January 1859. The name of the officiating priest was not given, nor the godparents' names. The name of Michel's father is listed as Michel Courte-Oreille, and his mother is listed as Kirvekap. Gail Morin's (2000) records of Fort Edmonton baptisms, burials and marriages from 1858-1890 indicates the same dates listed above but differs in that Michel's mother is listed as Kiwekat, additional information that

[56] Obtained December 7, 2012 from the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton

Michel's Godfather is Michel Normand and Father A. Lacombe was the priest (p. 26). Other archival documents indicate that Michel's parents are Alexis Courtoreille and Okiwekap (with variations in spelling).

(iv) Isabelle (Aubichon Cardinal) Courtoreille

The records of our great-grandmother, Isabelle, are not consistent. Her birth records have not been located as yet. She was born circa 1857 (some records indicate she was born in 1862) in Lac La Biche. As previously noted, Isabelle married Michel Courtoreille in 1881. Her parents were John (Jean) Aubichon (Obishon, Wabichon) Cardinal and Cecile Beaudoin (Labonne, Laboine). Cecile was born in 1838 in Lac La Biche or 1839 in Whitefish Lake. Oblate records indicate that Cecile and John were married on 2 May 1854 in Lac La Biche. If she was born in 1838, she would have been 16 when she married. He may have been 28 if he was born in 1826.

Information from Oblate records indicates John Aubichon's parents are Joseph Cardinal II and a Cree woman. Joseph Cardinal II was the first in their family who moved west as listed in the First Families West. Joseph Cardinal I remained in the east. According to Oblate records, Joseph Cardinal II (b.1756) married first wife Louise Frobisher (b.1772). Their seventh child, Anne-Nancy, is the

mother to Cecile Labonne/Beaudoin. Isabelle's father, John Aubichon married the daughter of his half-sister.

There is some discrepancy about John Aubichon's parents. The Oblate records indicate that John's parents were Joseph Cardinal II and a Cree woman (Crise). There is no record of their marriage.; Other records indicate that his parents are Jacques Cardinal and Marguerite Desjarlais. For example, records obtained from the St. Albert database at the Musée Héritage Museum (March 2013) indicate that John (Aubichon) Cardinal, born circa 1826, married Marie Anne/Marguerite Desjarlais, born 1804. John's father is listed as Jacko/Jacques Cardinal, also known as Mustatip. Gail Morin's work (1999) of the 1900 Scrip records[57] housed at the Library and Archives of Canada ("LAC", formerly National Archives of Canada), indicates that John "Obichon" Cardinal's parents were Simon Cardinal (other records indicate that Simon was also called Jacques) and Marguerite Robinson or Desjarlais (p. 195).

A different set of archival records obtained by Gordon, list John (Jean) 'Wabichon, Aubichon, Obichon' Cardinal, eldest son of Jacques 'Mustatip' alias Simon Cardinal and Marguerite Desjarlais. They married on 4 November 1844. The document also states that

[57] The author's note indicates that the actual scrip records were from 1886 -1902, and 1906.

the Desjarlais family probably originated from the Red River band #65 in Manitoba, then they moved to Moose Lake, Alberta. It also indicates that the Desjarlais family was large and they spread from Lac La Biche to St. Albert, Wabasca, Fort Vermilion, Fort Chipewyan, Athabasca and Slave Lake.

Morin's (1999) records indicate that Isabelle was born in Lac La Biche in 1862, and that she died in Lesser Slave Lake in 1899 (p. 195). The birth dates of the children listed on the scrip records differ[58] with the church records listed below. The church records, likely from McLennan list John Aubichon and Cecile's twelve children below:

- Adam born 10 February 1856 Lac La Biche
- Isabelle born 1857 LLB
- Clement born 1859 LLB
- Lucinien born 1861 LLB
- Casimir born 1865 LLB
- Sophie born 1864
- Benjamin born 1871
- Jules born 1875
- Julie born 1878 (died young girl)
- Henri born 1881 Grouard
- Adelaide born 1884
- Jacques born 1885

[58] For example, an on-line source (not a primary record) indicates that Adam was born in 1854 and was baptized at 2 years of age. The 1900 scrip records indicate that Adam was born in March 1858; whereas church records indicate that he was born in February 1856.

We have copies of baptismal certificates for Casimir, Clement and Adam; however, we have not had any success obtaining Isabelle's birth or baptismal records.

(v) Donald and Madeleine (Hamelin) Sinclair

Our paternal great-grandfather, Donald (Daniel) Sinclair (St. Claire, Saint Clair, Sinclaire, and Sinclare) was born in October 1867 in Lac La Biche. His parents were John Sinclair (Jean St. Clair) and Flora Hope. Donald married Madeleine on 21 October 1885. Madeleine's parents are listed as Jean-Baptiste Hamelin and Suzanne Sawan from Lac La Biche. Father Joseph Dupuis married them at Lesser Slave Lake, Northwest Territories in the presence of Joseph Noskiye and Moise Gladu. The marriage certificate registered at Grouard, Alberta, states that he was 20 and she was 25. Other documents indicate Donald's birth year as 1866 and Madeleine's as 1856, which would make her ten years his senior.

The names of their children and baptismal dates, obtained from Grouard church records and Donnelly records, are listed as follows:

- Samuel - married Rosalie Richard 27 August 1904
- James - b.25 December 1890, married Agathe 10 October1912
- Emile - 1-01-1886, b 7-2-1886
- Alfred - b. 05 April 1902, married Agathe 16 April 1927
- Marie Rose - married Albert McGillis 3 March 1916
- Joseph b. 20-8-1893
- Betsy b. 20-2-1898

On 18 November 1918, Donald died from influenza at the age of 51. The informant was Emile Sinclair. Our *moshom* Alfred buried his dad Donald, his brother James, and James' father-in-law Michel Courtoreille within days of each other.

Donald's wife, Madeleine (also Magdeleine and Madeline), had a Cree name in parenthesis, *Iskwesis* (girl in Cree) next to her name English name on one of the church records. Some documents indicate that she was born in 1860 in Lac La Biche; however, her baptismal records indicate that she was two years old when she was baptized on 18 April 1858. The burial records indicate she was 80 when she died in 1936 which would confirm her birth year as 1856. On the baptismal record, her parents are listed as Jean Baptiste Hamelin and Suzanne (Newotcitciwisk also Naywootahetohaywisk) Sawan from Fort Chipewyan. Fr. Albert Lacombe baptized her, her brother Jean-Baptiste, and her sister Marie at the same time. Their godmothers are listed as Archange Hammelin, Marie Nepissing and Julie Campion, but they did not sign.

Madeleine had a daughter Harriet (also Henriette) with William Calder before she married Donald. One source indicates that they were married circa 1874: "William Calder, Metis b-1850 N.W.T., married about 1874 N.W.T., Madeleine Metis b-1856 N.W.T., living Edmonton 1901." (Garneau 2013). She would have

been 18 at the time. I was unable to locate their marriage records. It is not clear why she would have been listed as Métis at the time. In 1879, she was registered under #11 in Sawridge Band with her father Jean Baptiste Hamelin. Another document indicates that in 1881 she transferred to #72 Michel's Band and was shown as the wife of William Calder.

Data obtained from scrip records, dated 21 June 1899, indicates that she was born at the east end of Lesser Slave Lake in 1857. Although the same document lists both her parents as “Half-Breeds” her response to the question about if she received any annuity as an Indian or if she participated in grants to Indians, was: “My father took treaty money for me at St. Albert, Alta, but I'm living at Lesser Slave Lake and never received it”. (National Archives, 2012). On 6 July 1899, she was allotted scrip. On 23 July 1936 Madeleine died at 80 years and was buried in Kinuso, Alberta.

B. Genealogy Analysis

As previously noted, the sources for the data collected over a period of 26 years by my eldest brother and his wife were not recorded. It was not considered necessary at the time. Had they known that these documents would still be in use twenty five years later, perhaps they would have noted the sources. However, those documents served their purpose to obtain Indian status for our family in 1990. None of us in the family anticipated that my brother and his family would lose their status a

few years later and further that he would still be working to regain it for over twenty years.

I did not anticipate how time consuming and complicated engaging with genealogical data would be. I thought it was important to note the source of the data so that it would assist in comparing records, especially when there was conflicting evidence. The sources for most of the documents that I referred to as ‘church records’ were difficult to trace and in some situations were impossible for me to locate.

The complexity of conducting genealogical research was further complicated by the limited access of such data. Many of the documents which my brother obtained were Oblates’ records from numerous locations in Alberta. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to obtain access to such data than it was when my brother first started researching our family genealogy in 1987. I was very appreciative that he had gathered the majority of the archival research when he did. Access to Oblates’ records were not as restricted then as they are today.

One of the main sources in the Lesser Slave Lake area to access such records for our genealogy is no longer accessible to the public. Instead, I was referred to a historical society in a neighbouring community that has archival data including some Oblate records for the northern communities. It is located five hours northwest of Edmonton and is open to the public one day per week for ten months of the year; in the summer months, it is extended to week days. They no longer provide photocopies

of the primary data; instead the data is typed for the requestor from their records.

Not having access to copies of the original documents makes the data even more unreliable. The likelihood for mistakes to be made increases each time the data is rewritten or typed. Assumptions about words that may be difficult to decipher or that are in written in Cree for example can easily be misunderstood or even considered irrelevant data and therefore, omitted. For example, a document that I recently obtained about our great-grandmother Isabel Cardinal indicates "Wabickon" in parentheses, which would not have meaning for me if I did not already know that her maiden name was Aubichon Cardinal. Assumptions may be made that the word is a Cree name. Another example is our great-great-grandmother whose Cree name is written multiple ways. The latest record that I received from the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton lists her name as Kirvekap. The letters ‘r’ and ‘v’ are not in the Cree alphabet. There is a note on the document that says the information is as it appears in their duplicate registers in their archives. The document is stamped and signed by their archivist.

It would be more useful for the descendants of the individuals being researched to have access to photocopies of the original documents so that we can make sense of them. Having a basic understanding of the Cree language and/or access to Cree speakers increases the likelihood for accuracy in translating and interpreting the genealogy records. A

document that is signed and stamped may be considered to be an official document; however, it does not mean that the data is accurate. Since the general public cannot have access to the original documents, we have to rely on the accuracy of the person/priest who originally recorded the data and the subsequent interpretations. The level of expertise and experience of the archivist or person reviewing and transferring the data becomes even more critical with the current restrictions.

Conducting genealogy research for Aboriginal people is more complex than what it may be for many Canadians who can access their records through genealogy databases such as Ancestry.ca or other written records. Most of our ancestors were not literate in the English language. The knowledge transfer of oral traditions is fragmented and in many cases broken with the loss of Indigenous language use in many families and communities today. It results in increased dependency on data such as the Oblate records, which are becoming more restricted. There is also significant variation in the data from various sources which makes it even more difficult to determine the accuracy of the data, especially since the primary sources in most cases are restricted. This is not to single out the Oblates as the only source that denies access to such data which further distances Indigenous people from their ancestral history. Government departments both federally and provincially withhold important data from Indigenous people, which is to be complicit in the oppression of Indigenous people in this country. Restricting access to information for

Indigenous people supports the status quo and serves to strengthen the imbalance of power between church, state and the Indigenous people. Perhaps more importantly, it maintains such restricted access that it ensures ongoing invisibility of Indigenous peoples, their histories and their very presence.

C. Land and Burial Site Data Analysis

a. Land Research Analysis

This is a summary of some of the archival documents that augment family history about the lands in the Lesser Slave Lake area on which our ancestors lived. The focus is primarily on the lands of my grandfather Alfred Sinclair and great-grandfathers, Michel Courtoreille and Donald Sinclair. Other evidentiary documents are discussed here to provide an understanding of land issues that Indigenous people were subjected to in Alberta's early history. Sources as diverse as letters from J.D. McLean, the Dominion Lands Surveyor for the area; a 1920 Homestead Inspector's report, Homestead Lands applications and Township General Register pages form evidence, including statutory declarations by our ancestors and other people who lived in the area, that attest to my ancestors living on those lands and erecting buildings on them.

Yet, when I did a historical land title search of seven pieces of land (quarter or half sections) on which our direct ancestors lived from 1898 – 1930, information that was supported by family history and historical

documents, the results indicated that the land is Crown land. When I enquired about whether or not that search included examining historical registers dating back to scrip records, I was told that the land is and always was Crown land. From what I can ascertain thus far, most of the Métis/non status people in the area had lost title to their lands. Local resident, Charlie Jackson, attributed this loss of land to back taxes; he further stated that the people were not even given tax notices (personal communication, 30 May 2013).

Even some ancestors who formally filed for lands under the Homestead Act lost their lands. My grandfather, Alfred Sinclair, had a quarter-section under the Homestead Lands Act and is shown on the Copy of Township General Ledger page with the date 30 September 1930. But there was no evidence that he patented the quarter section within five years as required at the time and indeed, when I did a historical title search on that quarter section, the result was that it was and had always been Crown land[59]. Alfred was not listed as ever having title to that quarter section. Would the Indigenous people in the area such as my grandfather Alfred, who could not read or write English, have known that

[59] The land that Alfred Sinclair is registered as having as a Homestead Grant in 1930, but does not appear to have been patented by him was given environmental protection under Special Places 2000, on 31 March 2001.

they would have to apply for a patent within a five year period in addition to other conditions, before they could be granted title?

One of the archival documents pertaining to Eric Cardinal, a more distant ancestor, sheds some light on the homestead process:

> The Reverend Father Petour of Sawridge, Alberta, has made application for consideration of the claims of a half-breed….who according to the Reverend Father, is entitled to a free grant of land by reason of residence prior to the treaty of 1899…. Eric Cardinal made homestead entry on the 10th June 1913…. Cancellation proceedings were instituted by the Department on the 25th June 1919 for failure to make application for patent within five years of date of entry…" (from 20 Nov 1920 Department of the Interior letter (Dominion Lands Branch)

With reference to the same person, a 20 November 1920 letter to W.S. Glidden, Assistant Controller, Land Patents branch in Ottawa, speaks of Eric Cardinal being "entitled to a free grant of land by reason of residence prior to the signing of treaty in 1899," Department of the Interior letter (Dominion Lands Branch). There was no evidence that Father Petour's appeal on behalf of Eric Cardinal met with any success.

In reviewing data from scrip records for John Aubichon Cardinal's[60] genealogy, I noted the reference to land in Lesser Slave Lake. The data from Morin's (1999) work, indicates that John did not have homestead land; however, he claimed, "a piece of land at Lesser Slave Lake" (p. 195).

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[60] Our great-grandmother, Isabelle Courtoreille's father.

Morin's work indicates that money scrip was approved for him and his son, Henry (p. 195). I did not pursue any further research to determine what happened to the land that he claimed in Lesser Slave Lake, since my focus was on the genealogy connection. Later, however, my brother Gordon indicated that the land, which he was denied upon returning home after the second World War, was that of our ancestor, John Cardinal.

With respect to the loss of land to taxes, it is unlikely that the Indigenous people who had land were even aware that they had to pay taxes on it until it was too late. Taxation of land would have been a foreign concept since their way of life was to live off the land as their ancestors had done. I question whether or not there are records that indicate that Indigenous people, in this case our ancestors, were even notified about taxes having to be paid by certain deadlines. Even if they had known, it is unlikely at that period of time that they would have had access to cash. So for Indigenous people, the likelihood of successfully retaining land was next to nothing.

b. Burial Site Data Analysis

This section provides an analysis of the data that I obtained from five different sources about the burial sites for my paternal ancestors who died in the 1918-19 influenza epidemic. The records for my great grandfathers Michel Courtoreille and Donald Sinclair, and James Sinclair varied as noted in the summaries below:

- The first list that I obtained from my brother as main source of this data included 90 names of individuals deceased between the dates 14 September 1909 to 29 September 1920. It included Name of the Deceased, Sex, Place, Date and Informant's name.
- The second list of Sawridge Cemetery (obtained from the Alberta Genealogy Society) named 96 people interred in the cemetery including 6 additional names. Only the names of the deceased and the dates were included. This list appears to have been retyped since there were changes in the spelling of names and the addition of 6 names with four dates 1920s, 1948, 1955 and 1962. A contact person for this list was provided with a note indicating that a complete list was necessary because a commemorative plaque was planned.
- The third source of data was obtained from the Alberta Genealogy Society (AGS) database which included: Subject's Name, Birth/Death Dates, Age, Cemetery and Location. Donald, James and Michel are all listed under the same cemetery, which did not correspond with the other sources included in this analysis. The data was inaccurate and inconsistent in some entries; for example, the date for Donald's death in the one of the entries indicated 6 March 1919, whereas another entry indicated 18 November 1918, the latter of which was accurate.

- The data from the Registration of Death forms obtained from Province of Alberta – Vital Statistics had the most comprehensive data. The location of the cemeteries corresponded with the first and second lists noted above.
- The final data that I obtained from St. Peter Celestin Catholic church in Slave Lake indicated burial locations that differed from all of the above sources. The local priest provided me with interesting data over the telephone from the late Father Petour's records. I took notes and requested the information in writing. Later, I received forms that included names, dates of death, and death and burial locations but the detail of the oral data was not included.

I created charts so that I could compare the data from the different sources. I was anticipating that I might locate data from more than one source that would be considered 'official' and consistent with other sources to validate the data. Those were not the results that I found. There were several inconsistencies among all of the documents that I reviewed for this section. I also was seeking evidence of 'hard data' that might support the oral knowledge of the community about the location of the ancestral burial sites. The burial site analysis was very time consuming and somewhat disappointing. However, I realized that I was placing more weight on the 'hard' data than on the oral knowledge of the community. My observation of the hard data was that it contained

significant inconsistencies and inaccuracies and therefore, on its own, was not reliable data.

Many times over the years, I had heard that some of our ancestors who died from the 1918 ‘flu’ were buried at the site in the Marten River area. Our late father and our late sister had been vocal about that knowledge. My brother Gordon recently spoke to me about Dad taking him to the burial site in the 1950s when he was about eleven or twelve years old. Gordon remembered that the area was fenced at the time. He said that he had also gone there with Dad’s younger brother, Uncle Henry, who also knew that Sinclair family members were buried there in the park. Gordon had also gone to the same area with the late Ned Gladue who told him many stories about our ancestors who lived in the area and that he knew some of them were buried there (personal communication, May 25, 2013). In conducting the data analysis for this research, I found that the written data was not more reliable than the oral knowledge. In fact, I have more trust in the oral knowledge of family and other local Indigenous people in the area, that our ancestors are buried in the Marten River provincial park. The family members and other community members who shared that knowledge are credible and reliable sources of oral history.

One of the unanticipated findings that I gleaned from the burial site data analysis was the significant impact of the influenza epidemic in the area. A review of the list of people that died in the Sawridge area from the first list noted above, indicates that there were 29 deaths in the area in

less than a two-month period from 21 October to 16 December 1918. The majority, 25 deaths including 4 of our immediate relatives, occurred in November. It would be a reasonable assumption that those people or at least the majority of them, died from the flu, and further that those who contracted the deadly disease in Sawridge would not have survived as there were no doctors or hospitals in the community at that time to provide medical treatment. People were dying so quickly, including the healthy people, some as fast as within 24hours (Edmonton Journal, 18 October 2012). Further, the traditional 'medicine' people would not have had experience in dealing with this new deadly disease.

I did a comparison of the number of deaths in this single location (Sawridge) with the number of deaths attributed to the Spanish flu and its complications in Edmonton. Historical data obtained from the Edmonton Journal (18 October 2012) indicated that there were 600 deaths of Edmontonians attributed to the flu epidemic during October 1918 and May 1919. During the last two weeks of October there were 2,263 patients who were treated for the deadly influenza; twelve died by 26 October. The vast majority were treated in their homes. The population of Edmonton at that time was estimated to be 57,000 (Edmonton Journal, 2012) The overall number of deaths (600) would be approximately 1.05% of the Edmonton population over a seven month period.

In the local history text of the Lesser Slave Lake area, *Pioneers of the Lakeland* (1984), Sister Mary Felt briefly discussed the tragic flu

epidemic: "Nineteen-eighteen was to be a year of tragedy. From October to December the ‘flu’ epidemic took the lives of 27 parishioners. The community was small; the number of deaths was very high” (p. 96). The population of Slave Lake (Sawridge) in 1913 was about 200 (Wetherell & Kmet, 2000, p. 155). Based on available data, 27 - 29 deaths of a population of 200 is 13.5 - 14.5% over a two month period, which would have been devastating for the community. The contagious nature of the deadly disease would not be conducive to community gatherings to support and grieve collectively.

What happens to a community of people who experience that magnitude of loss in such a short period of time? It leads me to wonder what my late grandmother Agathe did with her emotions, her grief and her fears after losing four of her loved ones in a period of six days. I cannot imagine the pain that she had to endure especially considering she had several children to look after on her own. Then there would be added worry about whether or not she or other family members would contract the disease, given the deadly nature of it. Surviving that amount of pain that my grandmother and others in the community had to endure is personally unfathomable.

D. Narrative Analysis

a. Place Names

Changing the place names that were used by the Indigenous people of the area is part of the process of dislocating Indigenous people

from their land. It speaks to the perceived insignificance of Indigenous people in the area, of their marginalization in the community. It is indicative of a power imbalance in the community between the Indigenous people and the dominant culture. It is unlikely that the local Indigenous people in the area were even consulted about changing the place names back then. Is it even a consideration today? It is difficult to know if there are any such consultations by various government departments with the Indigenous people in the area without our immediate and extended family in the area being represented by or included in any formal governance structure such as having First Nations Band status.

b. Land Disconnection: Big Point

The interviews with Charlie, Fred and our father Sam that are included in the narrative section are evidence of the dislocation of Indigenous people to the land in the Lesser Slave Lake area. Both the Big Point site and the Marten River site in the Lesser Slave Lake area where our ancestors lived and are buried, are deemed park land. The Marten River site is located in the Lesser Slave Lake provincial park which became park land in approximately1966. Fred indicated that the Big Point area was changed to park status in 2000, during fishing season, while he and his brother were away fishing. He said that when they returned, it was already changed to a park (personal communication, August 7, 2013).

Charlie's story about the local nurse having the power to influence the relocation of a family to another community also demonstrates the imbalance of power in the area. Similarly, my father's story about the land not being granted to him after World War II reveals the deep levels of discrimination and injustice perpetuated as a matter of standard practice by officials of authority against Indigenous people of that area and time. Local non-Indigenous people enjoyed the benefits, support and privileges of the dominant culture, as the 'white', literate and educated who maintained the power within the community.

The narratives at Big Point including the experience of not seeing evidence of the names of the Coutoreille family in the archaeology text reminded me of archival photographs that I observed as a graduate research assistant for the CURA project previously mentioned in this study. Priests, government officials and other non-Aboriginal people in the photographs were named but the Indigenous people, more frequently than not, were never identified. Historical records of the dominant culture in Canada are replete with anonymous images of Indigenous people. It speaks to the invisibility of our people, regardless of intentions. While it is true that language barriers could have been a factor in many situations, I suggest that such invisibility is indicative of the insignificance of Indigenous people in Canada's history. Unfortunately, such insignificance remains evident today.

This is not to suggest that the archaeological work that was done in the Big Point area was disrespectful of the Indigenous people of that area. The confines of academic disciplines, such as the field of archaeology, dictate relevant data and what gets recorded. Institutional boundaries can create a fragmented view of a situation and can inadvertently dehumanize the people who are affected and marginalize them even further. Moreover the land in the Big Point area would have been considered crown land by the state, and as such there would be no requirements to consult with the Indigenous people who lived there about activities, including research, that happens in the area. Not having title to land is congruent with not having a voice, and in some ways, with powerlessness. At that time and place, challenges on the basis of Aboriginal entitlement were not a part of the political consciousness of our people. Survival was the primary motivation for all action.

Dream Analysis

This just came to me after I finished my smudge and prayer and offering that I have been preparing daily lately as I work with our ancestors. It just occurred to me in the final stages of my work in doing the analysis, when I reflected about my bear dream, when my brother handed me the pail of fish, it was like he was passing the baton to me. He already did a lot of research and took it as far as he could but it was time to pass on the responsibility. It was not something that I wanted because it was frightening and I did not know what to do. The bear was gigantic. Maybe the bear represents Indigenous people bound by the chains of oppression. The oppressors fear that which is perceived as wild, restrictions are enforced to ensure that they are contained, and perhaps even tamed. The chains that bind us, limit us, restrict us, take away our freedom, and make us angry. Throwing fish to us one at a time, is like the colonizers doling out piece meal resources, to appease us, temporarily. But the chain is strong.

And even when the chains of oppression are broken, in some cases, those held in captivity for long periods of time, still consider themselves bound. What the 'bear' needs is not to be feared or thrown piece meal food of what others choose to feed them; it needs its territory to live free from captivity, the way it was meant to live. It knows how to feed itself in the 'wilderness'; that's its domain. As in reality, when the bear's environment is disturbed and their sustenance is disrupted, they migrate into towns and places where people inhabit, because they need to survive. But they end up getting caught, tranquilized and relocated or they get killed.

Similarly, the bear in the dream, can also be like our family, bound by the limitations of the Indian status labels assigned to us, feared by those who do not understand us, or care to know us, or even worse mistakenly think they know what we need. Or, what if the bear is me in relation to this work? There is something about facing fears, needing courage, and breaking free—the emancipatory nature of Indigenous research.

Lately I have been feeling like it is time for me to pass on the 'baton'—I wonder if any of the next generation are having any 'scarey' bear dreams.

CHAPTER VII - RECONNECTION: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

> *"Miskâsowin is a Nêhiýaw* term that means going to the centre of yourself to find your own belonging (Cardinal and Hildebrandt, 2000:79)" (as cited in Kovach, 2009, p. 179).

It was timely that I came upon this *Nehiyaw* (Cree) term, *miskâsowin*[61] as I was working on the analysis and conclusion of this study. This work in many ways has been an inner journey particularly with the use of narrative. Although I was not consciously thinking about 'belonging' in this exploration of reconnecting with *âniskôtapânak* (my ancestors), and their ancestral home land, the issue of belonging began surfacing especially in the latter stages of the study. It was likely always there; I just did not see it or even want to acknowledge it.

I looked to the Cree language to enhance my understanding of 'connection' as it relates to our ancestors. I drew on John Crier's expertise and knowledge of *Nehiyawewin* (the Cree language), in exploring the Cree term for 'my ancestors'. He said that, "it is like a single length of braided sweet grass that has many twists. We are one of those twists to make that continuous braid, many relatives before us and hopefully many after us (personal communication, July 10, 2013). John's explanation of Cree words go beyond what is in a Cree dictionary, for example. His

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[61] This term does not appear in the Wolvengrey Dictionary, the Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary.

explanations deepen my understanding of the Cree language and Cree ways of knowing. The interpretations he provides create a deeper resonance within me that help to bring life and spirit, to the words.

I indicated at the outset that this work would draw on an Indigenous research framework, which for our family, is Cree. In the discussion about going to the centre of yourself to find your belonging, Kovach (2009) describes it as, “a personal knowing, it is *Nêhiýaw Kiskêýihtamowin”* (p. 179). *Nêhiýaw Kiskêýihtamowin* (Cree knowledge) is the tribal epistemology on which Kovach based her research framework (p. 183). Similarly, I engaged with a Cree research framework for this study based on my understanding of Cree ways of knowing and being. I concur with Kovach’s experience about the gift of Indigenous research frameworks, “it allows our story to be a part of the research. Research stories teach us much, they give us much. They tell us who we are as researchers, as people” (p. 183).

This is not to say that I did not think that I had a fairly good understanding of who I am in relation to my Cree identity at the outset of this study. I thought this work was more about the need to honour our Indigenous ancestors by ‘bringing them to the light’, and exploring the reconnection with them and their land; it was about their story. I did not think this work was so much about identity even though it was suggested to me by respected Indigenous scholars on more than one occasion in discussions about my research. It was difficult enough for me to express

my own pain in this work about the invisibility of Indigenous people, particularly in my home territory, and especially of my own invisibility. I was more than reluctant to examine another layer, where more pain may reside. It was safer to discuss the legacy of pain that Indigenous people have had to carry for generations that stem from our ancestral experiences of oppression and subjugation, than it was to examine it on a personal level.

As I reflect upon my resistance to examining the concept of belonging in relation to identity, it was obvious in an excerpt from my research journal included here:

> Excerpt from my Research Journal
>
> July 24, 2013 - It occurred to me today that the reason that I did not feel the need to explore in greater detail, other distant ancestors, was because I had a need to deepen the connection to those ancestors who were closer to me, in particular, my grandmothers.

This work is not so much about identity as it is about a sense of belonging, of fitting in, of the need to feel connected; to be included. It is about making a closer connection in a more intimate way to the ancestors we knew, or those who we longed to know-- those we heard stories about and wished we had a connection with, like my grandmother Julie who I had always longed to know.

This work for me is where the head and the heart meet. It's one thing to talk about the need to do that in our work, it's another to practise it. It takes courage to be honest and open, to share one's vulnerabilities. It was a path I did not want to explore on this academic journey. I lacked the

courage. For me it's safer to not disclose my 'real' opinions, and especially my 'real' feelings. But I believe there is a price that one pays in not having a voice, not risking 'speaking out', 'talking back'; it is like being invisible, silenced, not by choice so much as acceptance of what is imposed on us. But in the end, that still is about choice, or perhaps is more about not having the tools or the resources to resist. That is one of the significant 'tools' that education provides; it equips you with the opportunity to resist.

It was not long after in a discussion with my supervisor about my work that I suggested that this study was not so much about the relationship with land and identity as it was about belonging. She encouraged me to explore the relationship between the concepts of identity and belonging. In keeping with my deeply embedded resistance, I expressed that this work was not a journey in search of identity; it was to explore and honour the ancestral connection, the connection with ancestral land, and connecting with our own histories. I was not sure where the threads of belonging would lead in relation to identity. However, I trusted her guidance, thankfully. As I explored the concepts of identity and belonging, and the relationship between them, I was reminded about an incident that I had experienced a few years ago at a workshop entitled, 'Women as Sinew in Communities', when the issue of 'belonging' surfaced for me:

> *It was the final of four workshops of a research project that brought together Indigenous women primarily from northern and central Alberta, and Indigenous graduate students and staff connected with this research initiative. The meetings were held in*

Edmonton over a couple of years. Each gathering was a wonderful uplifting experience. There was a lot that we had in common, especially with the Cree women from northern and rural communities. Overall, we had developed a bond among the participants based on shared experiences, common issues of concern, desires to make a difference in our communities, and many other commonalities.

As the final session drew to a close, we were asked to organize ourselves in smaller groups to identify priority areas that potentially could be addressed collectively as future projects. It was suggested that we gather together with other members of our communities. So, where was my community? Obviously it would be with my sister who was seated next to me at the table. Most of the people around the tables were already seated with others from their home communities. There was at least one other table of women, like us, who were in a similar situation trying to locate where they fit. We were invited to join with that other group who were primarily urban based women, mostly students, like myself, but from other provinces. Their gesture was appreciated; however that did not seem like a natural fit either. So we stayed together to complete the task, as a separate urban group, even though it seemed we were missing some important elements. Our group did not have the connection that comes with being with others from the same land, the same territory, and sometimes the same ancestral blood. We would not have had the shared history, or experiences, or stories that people can have who are indigenous to the same land.

That simple exercise was uncomfortable and frustrating for me. It was as though we were being asked to locate ourselves based on community 'membership'. Boundaries or parameters such as those that were introduced at the workshop for practical reasons such as expediency, for me, raised issues of exclusion, of not fitting in, of not belonging. That was the first of the four workshops that I left feeling disconnected from others. After the previous workshops had ended, I was uplifted from the shared experiences and the feeling of building 'community' spirit, even though that was not a stated goal of the workshops. I felt like my 'community' had expanded, albeit temporarily,

and then was left feeling like somewhat of an ‘outsider’. Although I knew in my rational mind that I could stay in contact with the women with whom I felt a bond, there was still an inner tension of feeling disconnected. Experiencing such inner tensions creates opportunities to make sense of the areas where our wounds lie, in order to move in the direction of healing those wounds.

How will this work useful for others?

This work may be useful for Indigenous people such as those who are ‘landless, bandless Indians’, those who have gained or regained First Nation status as a result of Amendments to the Indian Act, those who are considered non-Status First Nations, perhaps more so among the urban Aboriginal populations in Canada who have been disconnected from their ancestral land and language. It may resonate with those who have been adopted, disconnected from their Indigeneity, their Indigenous families and communities; and perhaps some Métis who do not have a collective land base and are struggling with their identity or perhaps young Aboriginal people who have that sense of ‘wanting to belong’. It may create some comfort in knowing they are not alone.

It may inspire some to explore their own ancestry in their own way, using whatever means that are available to them. It may help to strengthen some peoples’ appreciation of the Indigenous knowledge within their own families and communities and perhaps inspire them to record the stories and knowledge of the elderly in their community, if that

is an option. And in the absence of access to traditional knowledge within their communities, that they will make the connection with traditional knowledge of others outside their communities. It may help to validate their inner guidance and intuitive knowledge. It may contribute to strengthening their faith and trust in their helpers and guides on the other side.

It is impossible to know how this work will be useful to others. I can only hope that it will be helpful to some, especially the younger generations in my family who may find something useful in these pages that will help them feel connected, to feel like they belong; to know more about their own ancestral history and to strengthen their Cree identities.

In the spring of 2013 while working with the data about my grandmother, Agathe, I remembered that she always used to say, *ayiman* (it is hard) *sôskwàc*[62] (right now, immediately) in Cree. She would say it on the rare occasion that she sat down. I thought she was saying “I’m tired” although I am sure she was tired because of the magnitude of the work she did over her life time. I did not know the actual meaning of the term until many years later when I attended Cree courses in university. I now have a deepened understanding of some of the challenges and pain she must have had to endure. There are many things unsaid about what a

[62] It sounded like ‘sōskwatch'.

difficult life she had, how hard her life was based on what I have determined from this study. I feel the same about my grandmother Julie and my great grandmother Marie. Their lives were all very difficult.

If I had known what *ayiman* meant in Cree, it would not have had the same impact that it did when I remembered Kohkom's words in this study. I am reminded of Alanis Obamsawin's words and those of Emma LaRocque (2010) in discussing the 400 year old pain that we carry of our ancestors from generations past. I concur with Obamsawin (and others) in the recognition of the need for Indigenous peoples' words to be heard, for our stories to be told. I did not fully appreciate the significance of the need to examine the "bad stuff, and what has happened to us and why", and further that, "we cannot do this without going through the past" (as cited in LaRocque, p. 32). In this study, I have come to realize that avoiding the pain of what our ancestors endured, did not take it away; it simply buried it. It resurfaced for me in this work and I anticipate that it may continue to resurface because we carry our ancestors' pain, as well as our own. However, some of that ancestral pain may be released through this work, not only on a personal level, but on an ancestral level.

I just had the realization that when our dad was sent home from school because he could not speak English, it not only impacted him, but it had an impact on our *kohkom* as well. What comes to mind is that it may have created a feeling of inadequacy that her family did not measure up to mainstream standards; that Cree people were not accepted as they were.

Feelings of inadequacy can serve to motivate to improve and develop skills; however, it also could be detrimental in creating internalized shame, inferiority, self- judgment and even judgment of others, among other consequences. I have carried those feelings of inferiority for many years of my life, well into adulthood. I still struggle with the feeling that I do not measure up. It likely was a motivator for me to pursue graduate studies at the doctoral level. It has surfaced in other areas of my life as well; it is likely something that I will continue to work on in my personal healing. One of the many gifts of this work was to engage with research that has the most meaning for me: that of ancestral reconnection. It was in writing the narratives that allowed me to connect to my heart, where ultimately lies the connection, especially with my grandmothers.

Hai Hai (Thank you)

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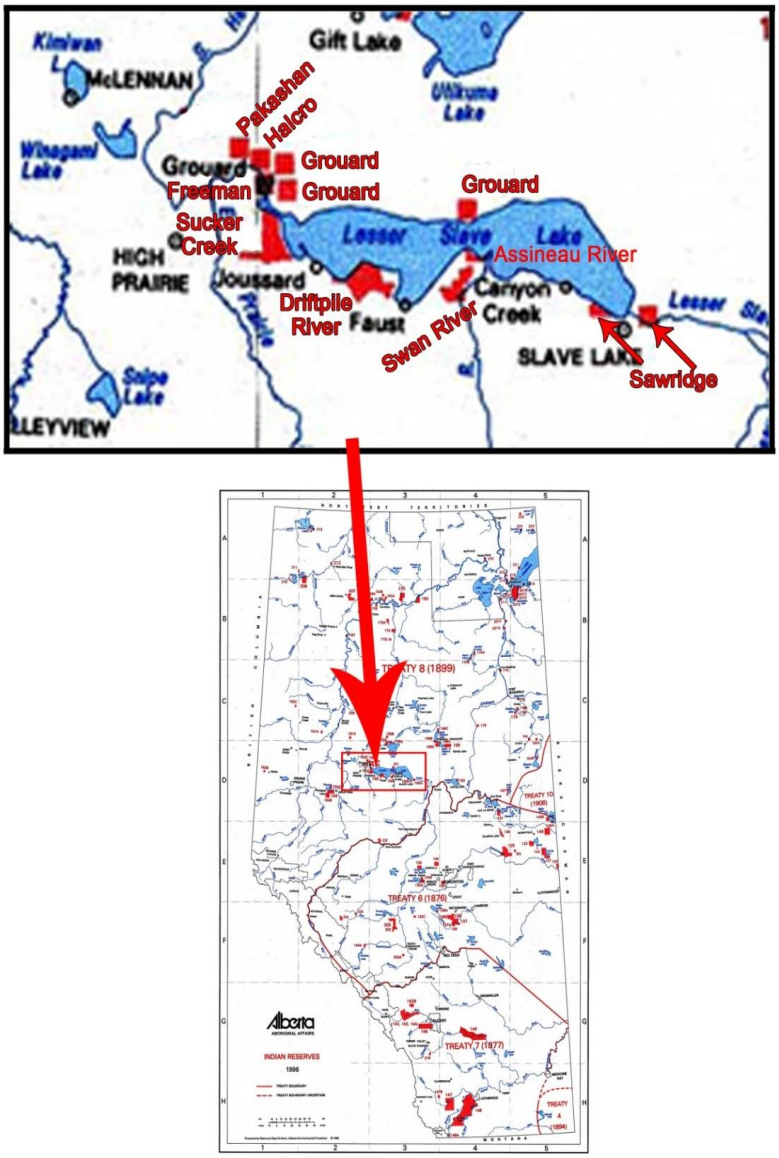
APPENDIX A: MAPS—LESSER SLAVE LAKE

Reserves in the Lesser Slave Lake Area

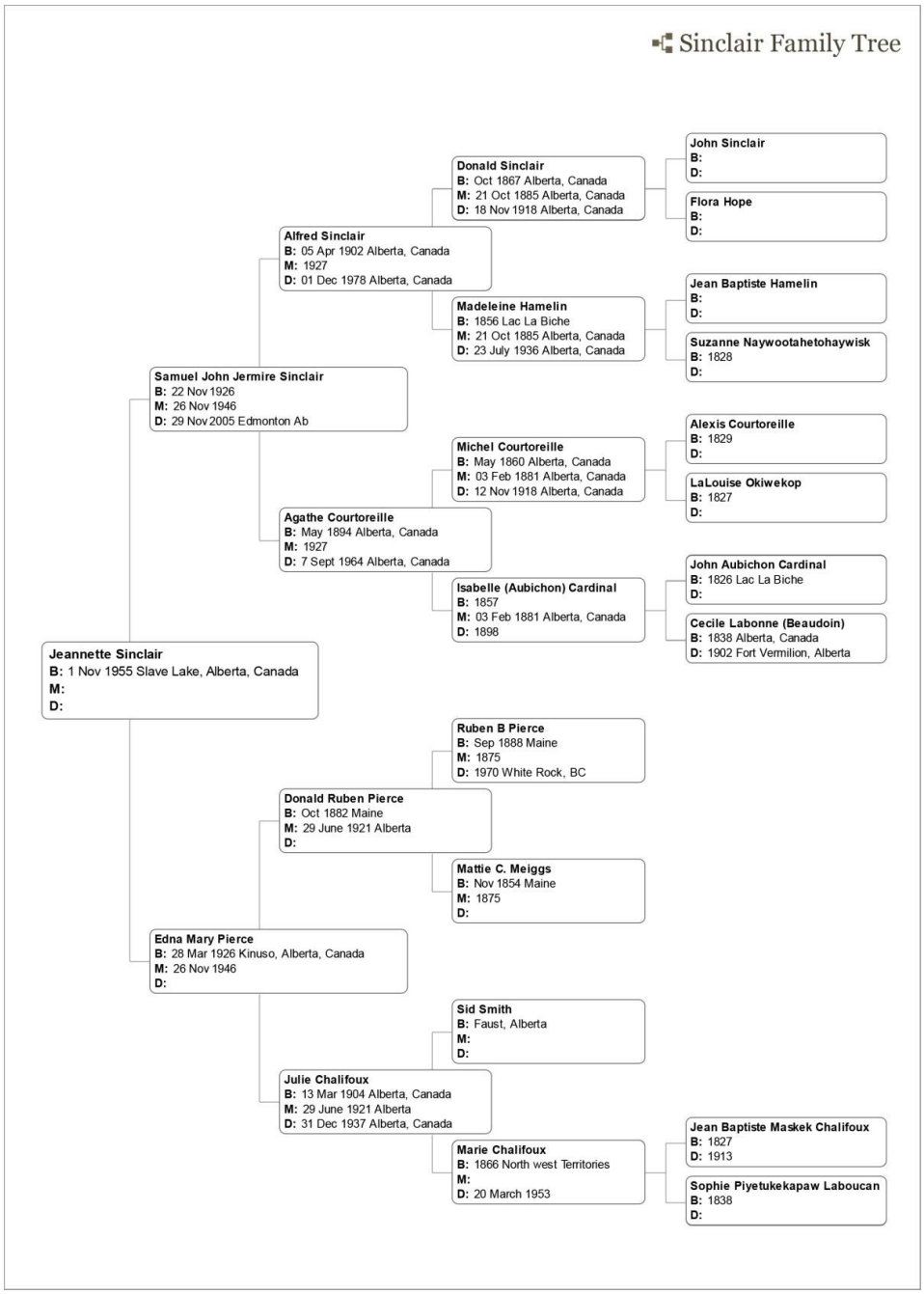


Based on Library Alberta Aboriginal Affairs (1996) Indian Reserves map produced by Resource Data Division, Alberta Environmental Protection. Retrieved August 1, 2013 from http://web.archive.org/web/20120119082354/http://www.aboriginal.alberta.ca/542.cfm

APPENDIX B: MAPS—PROVINCIAL PARKS

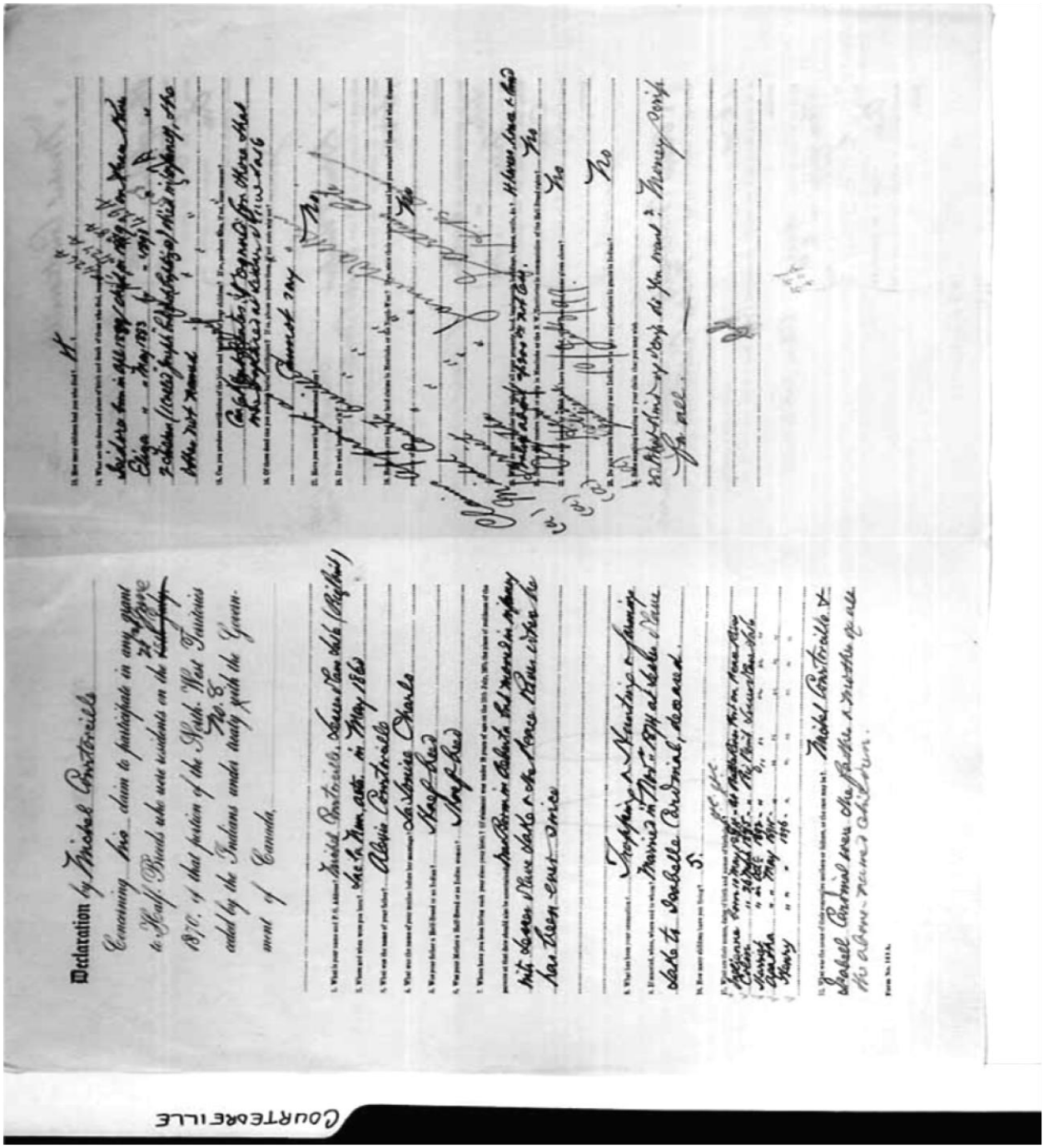
Adapted from Government of Alberta. (2009) Excerpt of Map: Alberta Sustainable Resource Development. (2009). Lesser Slave Lake 830. Produced by Resource Information Management Branch, Corporate Services Division. Base Map Data Provided by Spatial Data Warehouse Ltd. 2009 Government of Alberta.

APPENDIX C: SINCLAIR GENEALOGY CHART

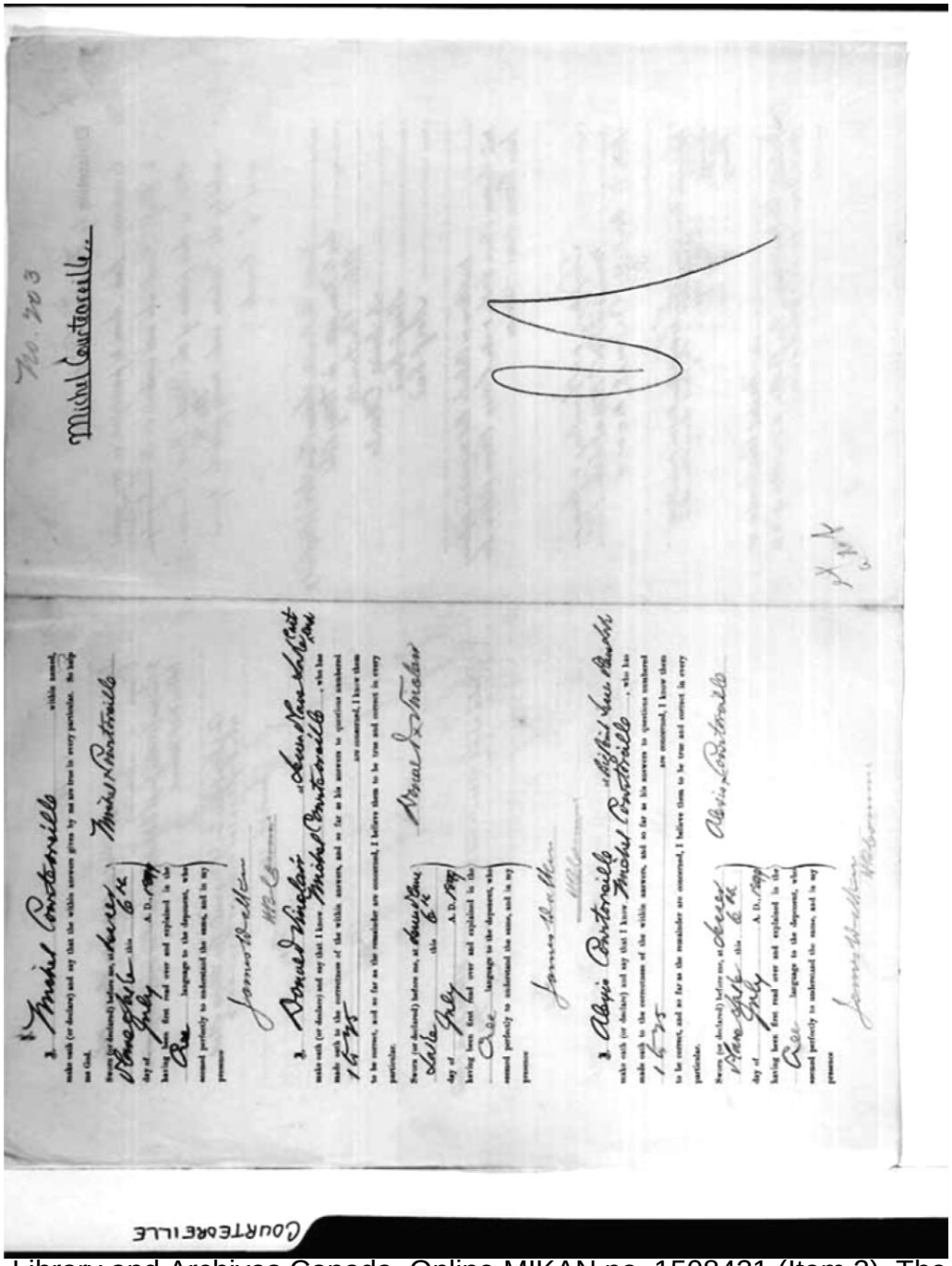


Excerpt from family genealogy charts compiled by Gordon Sinclair and Jeannette Sinclair using www.ancestry.ca (personal communication).

APPENDIX D: SCRIP RECORD-MICHEL COURTOREILLE, ITEM 1



Library and Archives Canada. Online MIKAN no. 1508431 (item 1) The scrip affidavit obtained for Gordon Sinclair indicates the 1899 record was from Public Archives of Canada, RG-15, vol. 1342, Cook – Cyr.



Library and Archives Canada. Online MIKAN no. 1508431 (Item 2). The scrip affidavit obtained for Gordon Sinclair indicates the 1899 record was from Public Archives of Canada, RG-15, vol. 1342, Cook – Cyr.