St. Stephen's College

Searching For Threads of Spiritual Growth Interwoven into Trauma Healing

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND SPIRITUALITY

Fall 2017
Edmonton, Alberta

ABSTRACT

This research examines the life journeys of three Métis women in an attempt to discover whether each individual's healing process from a traumatic experience or experiences brought spiritual transformation, and if so, was that spiritual transformation rooted in a reclaiming of their Métis heritage? Within the broader domain of qualitative research, narrative inquiry was chosen as the most appropriate methodology. Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience, a way to create a new sense of meaning. The narratives focus on tragic life events of the three Métis women, the spiritual distress caused by those tragic life events, and the emerging spiritual awakening and reclaiming of their spiritual heritage as they healed. The women also experienced a profound sense of meaning and purpose. This research showed that spirituality was a vital part of the healing process for these Métis women. This leads to a further conclusion that support of the spiritual needs and basic spirituality of the traumatized people they work with is required by mental health professionals.

Key words: trauma, spiritual distress, soul wounding, spiritual awakening and transformation

DEDICATION

To my husband, Richard Norman Gunther

Thank you for all that you do and all that you are

and

To my son, Daniel Richard Gunther

My boy, my friend, my pride and joy

Love you both forever

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr. Jane Simington, my thesis consultant and so much more: without you, my life would not be what it is today. Thank you for your assistance, advice and guidance throughout this project. I am truly grateful to the universe for your presence in my life.

Dr. Joan Wagner, my thesis supervisor: your knowledge, guidance and support throughout were invaluable. Thank you for helping me to produce a thesis that I am proud of. Thank you for a Soul Prayer.

Richard Gunther, my husband, lifelong partner and best friend: you and I have journeyed together and created a wonderful life that I would not change for anything. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and love. Thank you for reading and rereading the many iterations of my paper. I could not have done this without you. My heart is yours.

Dan Gunther, my son, editor, and technology expert: thank you for reading and helping to edit my thesis and for your help with the technological aspects – installing the software and answering my frantic phone calls. Your knowledge and skills in these areas were much appreciated. I am so very proud of you and so joyful that you are in my life, my dear boy.

My co-researchers Lily and Linda: I am truly humbled by your willingness to share your stories so generously and courageously. Your contributions have truly enriched this work. You will always have my gratitude, respect, and admiration.

Rob Smith of Rob Smith Counselling Services: you are a true friend and mentor. Your generosity in offering free counselling sessions to my co-researchers is truly appreciated, my friend. I thank you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

It's been a long road…

Diane Eve Warren

General Statement

This thesis examines the life journeys of three Métis women in an attempt to discover whether each individual's healing process from a traumatic experience or experiences brought spiritual transformation, and if so, was that spiritual transformation rooted in a reclaiming of their Métis heritage? The women, whose stories are included here, experienced a major trauma from which they have done considerable healing. My story is included as one of the three women.

I became interested in this topic following a tragic life event. My healing began during my involvement in Trauma Recovery therapy training. This spiritually-based training not only helped me heal from that trauma, it changed me as a human being. Toward the end of the three-week training, we were encouraged to answer a series of questions about ourselves and where we were at in our lives. It was while pondering my answers to those questions that I realized how much I had healed and grown spiritually. I had always maintained what I thought was a close relationship with Creator. My mother and my grandfather had taught me to pray, and I often said a quick prayer of gratitude as I went about my day.

Looking back now, I see that my spirituality was a pale and lifeless imitation of the spirituality I awakened to during the training. I now recognize that my journey of healing from trauma was paralleling, and continues to parallel, an ever-evolving spirituality that

has taken me deep into the heart and soul of me, within the context of my heritage. This thesis is an attempt to discover whether spiritual awakening or transformation was also a part of the healing journey for my Métis women co-researchers. If so, in what form did their spiritual transformations manifest?

I have quoted lines from a song written by Diane Eve Warren, an American songwriter, at the beginning and conclusion of each chapter. The song, *Where My Heart Will Take Me*, as performed by English tenor, Russell Watson, has resonated with me throughout this journey, and it felt appropriate and important to include epigraphs of the lyrics throughout the thesis.

Personal Interest

I am a Métis woman born in Grouard, Alberta and raised in Peavine, a Métis community in Northern Alberta. My maternal heritage is of Irish ancestry, and our history begins in Sligo, Ireland. My family clan was the last of the Pagan Kingships in Eire after the arrival of Christianity. My mother's great-great grandfather came to Canada as a young man and married a Métis woman from Manitoba. My maternal great-grandfather settled on Hudson Bay Company scrip land at Big Lake along the Sturgeon River in Central Alberta. In 1914, anticipating that the Edmonton, Dunvegan, and British Columbia Railway would pass through Grouard, he moved and eventually became Grouard's first mayor (Cunningham, 1985). My maternal grandmother was my grandfather's second wife, and she was barely in her twenties when they married. As a result, some of my aunts and uncles were close to my age and were my playmates when I was young.

My father's family is of French heritage. My paternal great-grandfather was a Métis who came west from Quebec to manage the Catholic Church farm in the Grouard area. When I was young, my paternal grandparents owned a cattle ranch in Big Prairie, Alberta.

Although I grew up in a Métis settlement, I did not maintain my Métis culture after I left home until I became involved with the Métis community while working for the City of Grande Prairie. I was hesitant to involve myself with the community thinking I would be expected to know about Aboriginal culture and practices. There was no need for concern. In that community I found the camaraderie, acceptance and connection with others I had been missing.

Macdougall (2006) discussed the role of aboriginal women who married outsider adult male fur traders in the development of Métis culture. According to Macdougall, these women influenced the creation of a Métis socio-cultural identity with their attitudes and beliefs about family and social life. Métis culture is a distinct culture influenced by a dual ancestry. This dual ancestry is reflected in the languages spoken in Métis households.

> For many Métis, the language of their community is English or French, an inheritance from their European ancestors…about 6% spoke *Michif*, an exclusively oral lingua franca developed by the Métis from many languages – among them Chippewa, English, Gaelic and Assiniboine – but dominated by French and Cree. (Normand, 1996, pp. 23-24)

When I was young, we spoke a mix of Cree and English at home, using French words when we did not have a suitable word in the Cree language. We gradually began to speak primarily English as we grew older and learned the English language in school.

My father worked hard. He ran a horse logging company until mechanization brought an end to that way of work. He was also a commercial fisherman, fishing in the lakes of Northern Alberta and selling fish to the fish plant on Lesser Slave Lake. He was an avid hunter and trapper, and provided the household with moose and deer meat, as well as geese, ducks and grouse. These foods were staples in every Métis home in our settlement. Hunting, trapping and fishing remain an important part of the Métis culture although trapping is no longer a common activity.

There were good times and much joy and laughter in the Métis households when I was growing up. Family was important, but so were friends and the people in the community. People often gathered in someone's home for an evening. Visitors were always offered food as well as coffee or tea. There would be laughter and conversation as the storytelling began. Sometimes, someone would bring out a fiddle, and the jigging would start. My father played the fiddle and taught two of my nieces, Tracy and Richelle, to dance the Red River Jig. My father also played the guitar and sang. Music was an important part of our lives.

Spirituality in our Métis world was a meld of Christian faith and Aboriginal spirituality. As a child, I learned about Creator from my maternal grandfather and my mother. My grandfather was deeply spiritual and raised his children to follow the Catholic religion. My parents attended mass every Sunday, and we respected the doctrines of the Church with the sacraments of baptism, first communion and confirmation being celebrated as important occasions in our family. The priest and the nuns were a strong influence in our lives, and we were expected to confess our sins and take communion every Sunday. My uncles and I would get together on Saturday afternoons to talk about what sins

we could confess to having committed. It was difficult to come up with something when we felt we had not done anything sinful during the week.

My grandfather and my mother often talked about *Kitchi-Manitou* or Great Spirit. As a child, I understood this to be the Cree name for Creator. We did not participate in Aboriginal ceremonies; however, my grandfather embodied a sense of peace and serenity in his belief in Creator. He exemplified the seven sacred teachings of humility, honesty, respect, courage, wisdom, truth and love (Bouchard & Martin, 2009, 2016). He was the epitome of spiritual wisdom and people would often seek his advice and guidance. He understood dreams, portents and signs from the spirit world and interpreted them for people in the community. This was the world I grew up in—a mixture of traditional religion, Christianity, and Métis beliefs and faith. This unique Métis spirituality is rooted in our culture.

I married my husband when I was 19 years old, shortly after graduation from college. I moved away from home, and although I maintained close ties with my family, I did not feel a complete sense of belonging or connection to the world I had left behind; nor did I have a strong sense of belonging or connection to the world I lived in with my husband. My sense of belonging and connection to the world I had lived in as a child was now lost to me. My husband and I both worked hard, made good friends and we were happy, especially when our son was born after we had been married for 10 years. I thought it was normal to have a sense of loss and disconnection at times, and I was not consciously aware of anything missing from my life.

Then, my niece, Richelle, died when she was 14 years old. This devastating death caused me to descend into a dark and bleak place from which I could not free myself. The death of a young person can be a very traumatizing experience since there is no opportunity to do any pre-grief work, such as we might do for the death of a parent or grandparent whose death may occur quite naturally at the end of a long and healthy life. When a young person dies, we are not prepared for this unthinkable event and we often experience trauma in addition to grief. Two years after Richelle's death, I was introduced to the work of Dr. Simington. Her work in trauma recovery helped me to survive that traumatic event and begin my healing journey.

Simington (2008) adapted Bridges' Transitions theory (Bridges, 2004) to illustrate the journey through healing to wholeness. Bridges' Transitions theory involves a three-phase process: (a) Ending/Losing/Letting Go, (b) the Neutral Zone, and (c) the New Beginning. Simington's adaptation has four phases: (a) Brokenness, (b) the In-Between phase, (c) New Beginnings, and (d) Wholeness. In the state of "Brokenness," we face the emotional aspects of loss and grief, and we are trying to hold on to our belief systems. In the phase Simington called the "In-Between" phase, we are in a dark place, feeling abandoned at a spiritual level. We turn inward; our beliefs are being challenged. Simington explained that tremendous growth can happen here. In the phase of "New Beginnings," we return to the outer world and begin searching for purpose. It is a time of testing our personal knowing. According to Simington (2008) we can reach "Wholeness" – an ever-expanding consciousness and awareness, expanding possibilities. De Castella and Graetz Simmonds (2013) reported that although some people experience increased existential

despair following trauma, other trauma survivors can experience a deeper sense of spirituality and a more profound sense of meaning and purpose in life.

The early lessons from my grandfather and my mother awakened as I worked with Dr. Simington. I often felt as though I was simply recalling things I had always known rather than experiencing them for the first time. The sessions always began with an opening ceremony featuring one of the elements of earth, air, fire, or water. Although the use of elements in opening ceremonies was new to me, the practice seemed familiar and natural. It seemed as though I was remembering and accessing forgotten knowledge. I had awakened deep memories which had been stored away, unused. I renewed my connection with Mother Earth as we worked outside, walking among the trees. Early on in the training, Simington led us on a guided visualization to reconnect us between Heaven and Earth, "a reconnection between the Source of Life and the Earth Mother" (Simington, 2008, p. 5-13). The first time I participated in this exercise, I felt a flash of recognition and welcome from Creator. It was as though I had been disconnected and lost and was now back where I belonged. I began to know who I am, at the core of my being. I experienced a deep sense of spirituality, a sense of meaning and purpose in my life. Daniel (2012) explained that we can find ourselves at a crossroads when we experience trauma or grief. We can choose how we move forward—we have unlimited choices. For example, we can choose to be bitter and to reject religion or spirituality, or we can choose to focus on why the trauma happened and what we can learn from it.

> When an experience cuts to the core of everything that defines us, we are forced out of our spiritual lethargy, and an opening is created that is highly receptive to growth. If we nurture that opening, if we honor it and work with it, we can discover

> previously unimagined worlds of wisdom, and choose enlightenment over annihilation. (Daniel, 2012, p. 22)

The Trauma Recovery training supported my spiritual growth. I was in a safe, gentle and nurturing environment. Simington recognized the opening Daniel talked about and taught me how to nurture it, to honour it and work with it, and I chose enlightenment.

Research Question

I am aware that a major part of my healing from trauma was a journey into the inner depths of my being, there to find spiritual growth and movement, towards a spirituality that reflects who I am as a Métis woman. I am interested to know if this is also true for other Métis women. My question for this research is:

Do Métis women, who self-describe as having done considerable healing from trauma, also identify their healing process brought about spiritual transformation, and, if so, was that spiritual transformation rooted in a reclaiming of their Métis heritage?

Our stories are described in detail in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Each person's narrative has its own chapter. My story begins in Chapter 4, Lily's story begins in Chapter 5, and Linda's story begins in Chapter 6. The summaries and themes follow in Chapter 7 and implications are found in Chapter 8.

Description of Terms

Healing

The word 'healing' as used throughout this thesis refers to spiritual healing and the state of spiritual mental health. It is synonymous with the richness, joy and peace felt by

one who is in spiritual health. Healing is the process of becoming whole after experiencing a difficult life event. It is finding a way to adapt and compensate for losses. People can heal emotionally and spiritually even though they cannot undo the traumatic event which happened to them (Van Hook, 2016).

Indigenous Peoples of Canada.

Métis are people of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry. The following definition of Métis was established by the Métis National Council, the political organization that represents the Métis Nation: Métis is "a person who self-identifies as Métis, is distinct from other aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry and who is accepted by the Métis Nation" (Gaudry, 2009, para. 2).

The term Aboriginal is used to identify the indigenous peoples of Canada. There are three recognized Aboriginal peoples in Canada: the Métis, First Nations, and the Inuit. It is believed that First Nations people are descendants of the original inhabitants of Canada who lived here for many years before explorers arrived from Europe. First Nations people were called "Indians," by the early explorers who thought they had arrived in India. This term is now considered incorrect, and this group of people now prefer to be identified by the nation to which they belong, for example, Cree Nation (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2014).

Racism.

Hoyt (2012) defined racism as the belief that all members of a purported race possess characteristics, abilities or qualities specific to that race, especially to characterize it as

inferior or superior to another race or other races. Racism is a particular form of prejudice defined by preconceived erroneous beliefs about race and members of racial groups.

Gaertner and Dovidio (2005) collaborated on research into 'aversive' racism. They explained that the term originated with Kovel (1970) who distinguished it from dominative racism, or the traditional form of bigotry. Aversive racists do not see themselves as racist; however, they possess unconscious negative feelings and beliefs which can manifest in subtle and indirect ways.

> The consequences of aversive racism...are as significant and pernicious as those of the traditional, overt form…Whereas old-fashioned racists exhibit a direct and overt pattern of discrimination, aversive racists' actions may appear more variable and inconsistent. At times they discriminate (manifesting their negative feelings), and at other times they do not (reflecting their egalitarian beliefs). (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005, pp. 618-620)

Trauma/PTS/PTSD.

The American Psychological Association (2013) provides general information for people searching for help on how to deal with trauma. The following is a simple explanation of trauma which is included with their information on how to access help.

> Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives. (para. 1)

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can develop following a traumatic event. PTSD causes symptoms such as nightmares, flashbacks or thoughts of the event. People can feel very nervous or on edge, startle very easily and have a difficult time concentrating. Physical responses to trauma can include fatigue, heart pain, palpitations and blood pressure changes. Emotional responses may include feelings of guilt, regret, anger, apathy and pervasive sadness.

Spiritual Distress.

Caldeira, Campos Carvalho, and Vieira (2013) suggested that spiritual distress is "a state of suffering related to the impaired ability to experience meaning in life through connectedness with self, others, world or a Superior Being" (p. 82). There can be a sense of disconnection and a feeling that something is missing from one's life. Spiritual distress can be a negative change following a difficult life event.

Spiritual Growth.

Spirituality involves a person's sense of meaning and relationship to the transcendent and the world around them (Van Hook, 2016). Spiritual growth can be positive change experienced after a difficult life event, expanding a person's sense of meaning, connection and relationship to the transcendent and the world around them.

Spirituality.

Spirituality is described and experienced in unique ways by individuals and is affected by social and cultural norms and values. A search for a comprehensive definition

confirmed that spirituality is difficult to define (Speed, 2016; Rousseau, 2014). Senreich (2012) proposed an inclusive definition of spirituality:

> Spirituality refers to a human being's subjective relationship (cognitive, emotional, and intuitive) to what is unknowable about existence and how a person integrates that relationship into a perspective about the universe, the world, others, self, moral values, and one's sense of meaning. (p. 553)

Transformation/Spiritual Transformation.

Spiritual transformation is a change in spirituality following a highly stressful life event. Changes may occur in one's spiritual worldview, goals or priorities, sense of self and relationships. Positive changes are known as spiritual growth and negative changes are known as spiritual decline (Schultz, Altmaier, Ali and Tallman, 2012).

I'm going where my heart will take me.

Diane Eve Warren

Chapter Two: A Study of Trauma and the Healing Process

I've known the wind so cold
And seen the darkest days

Diane Eve Warren

Literature Review

In order to understand and make sense of my experiences, I needed to learn more about trauma. Therefore, I included the impact and effects of trauma, types of trauma, trauma theory and psychological approaches to trauma in my literature review. My review of the literature expanded my knowledge and helped me to understand why I had difficulty working through my niece's death. It also helped me understand and make sense of past experiences that I had not been able to handle previously. As a result of my growth, I developed an interest in spiritual topics, and I expanded my knowledge about Métis history, culture, and spirituality. I learned about the hardships the Métis people endured—some of the effects of which continue to impact the Métis people to this day.

Where Do the Métis Belong?

Métis people likely often experience racism and prejudice from mainstream society in their daily lives at school, work, and at social gatherings. They may also experience the same attitudes from First Nations people. Métis people are a distinct blend of both First Nations and Whites, but they do not belong in either world (Sasges, 2003). Although they do not belong in either world, historically Métis or "half-breeds" were not legally recognized as a distinct people. In July 1885, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald argued in the House of Commons that the legal category of 'half-breed' did not exist. "If [half-breeds] are Indians they go with the tribe; if they are half-breeds they are whites, and they

stand in exactly the same relation to the Hudson's Bay Company and Canada as if they were altogether white" (Niemi-Bohun, 2009, p. 83). The federal government even removed the Métis – or more specifically – the 'half-breed' from the Canadian Census in 1906. It was not until 1982 when the Constitution Act recognized the Métis as one of three Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Dubois & Saunders 2017).

Impact and Effects of Trauma

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V, 2013) criteria for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) include exposure to serious traumatic events, such as death, threatened death, actual or serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence. The individual can be directly or indirectly exposed to any of these traumatic events, or may witness them in person, or learn that a close friend or relative was exposed to such trauma. Other criteria include intrusion symptoms, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity in addition to duration of symptoms, functioning and exclusions. Two specifications, delayed expression and a dissociative subtype of PTSD, are also included.

Terr (1994) divided trauma into two categories: single blow and multiple blow trauma. She identified those who experience a single blow trauma as Type I victims and those who experience repetitive trauma as Type II victims. Rothschild (2000) expanded on the work of Terr, subdividing Terr's Type II trauma victims into Type IIA and Type IIB. Type IIA victims are those individuals with multiple traumas who have stable backgrounds and the resources to help them separate the traumatic events. They are able to address the traumatic events one at a time. Rothschild maintained that Type IIB victims are so

overwhelmed with multiple traumas that they are unable to separate one event from another. “The Type IIB client begins talking about one trauma but quickly finds links to others—often the list goes on and on” (Rothschild, 2000, p. 80). While Type I and Type IIA victims can usually move quickly into working on the trauma, the impact of repetitive trauma has long-lasting effects and Type IIB victims will have a more difficult time working through a major event.

Everyone who experiences symptoms of posttraumatic stress (PTS) will struggle with nervous system responses; however, those who have experienced repetitive traumas, especially of the IIB type, will often have more exaggerated nervous system responses (Rothschild, 2000). Repetitive trauma reconditions the nervous system in a way that makes the trauma victim unable to adapt to normal living (Familoni et al., 2016; Sah & Geracioti, 2013; Jackowski, de Araújo, de Lacerda, de Jesus Mari & Kaufman, 2009). The nervous system responses to trauma include fight, flight or freeze. These responses can be triggered or can occur instantaneously and automatically whenever the person is in a situation that reminds them of the original trauma (Rothschild, 2000). If the trigger is severe, the traumatized person can dissociate. Dissociation is a split with reality, often described as a separation of the mind from the Spirit (Lanius, Brand, Vermetten, Frewen & Spiegel, 2012; Steuwe, Lanius & Frewen, 2012).

As I reviewed the literature on trauma, I flashed back to the early years of my marriage when we lived in Edmonton. I had experienced racism and prejudice. These experiences taught me that I was considered inferior to Caucasians by some people. I learned to expect and to dread thoughtless remarks about “Indians” in social situations and in the work place. I recognized that I had experienced significant responses whenever

someone made a thoughtless remark denigrating Métis people. I would freeze, my heart would pound and I would be unable to fight or flee. I would feel embarrassment and shame. I lived in constant fear of this occurring whenever my husband and I were with a group of people at a social function. I now believe my niece's death was difficult to work through because it opened up all the underlying PTS symptoms caused by the many unhealed repetitive traumas I had experienced (Rothschild, 2000; van der Kolk, 2014).

At the time of my niece's death, I was a Certified Human Resources Professional and a member of the Human Resources Institute of Alberta. I held the position of Human Resources Consultant for a municipality which employed several hundred people, and I worked with two union organizations, non-unionized staff, supervisors, and managers. I was a member of the Corporate Leadership Team (the senior management team), a Trustee for the Grande Prairie Fire Fighters' Supplemental Pension Plan, and a member of the Conference Board of Canada Human Resources Strategic Planning Committee (Western Division). I was a college graduate and had more than 20 years of experience in my field, both in the private and public sectors. Yet, despite being recognized by others as being worthy, I began to question my abilities. I could not articulate my thoughts. I knew what I wanted to say; but the words would not come. I forgot that I was skilled and intelligent. I began to think of myself as incapable, unintelligent, a fraud—one who should not be holding such responsible positions.

I exhibited many of the symptoms and behaviours of trauma outlined by Rothschild (2000), van der Kolk (2014), and van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth (1996). After my niece's death my physical responses included fatigue, heart pain, palpitations and blood pressure changes. I gained weight and had difficulty sleeping. My emotional responses

included guilt, regret, anger, apathy, and pervasive sadness. My behaviours also changed. While I was usually outgoing and helpful, I became withdrawn. My mind felt numb and I had a decreased ability to pay attention, to focus, to remember, or to make decisions. I was disorganized and indifferent, yet I was determined to carry on in usual 'strict' ways, a symptom of deep loss described by Kaiser Stearns (2010).

I now recognize that, during my times of intense sorrow, I experienced spiritual responses to difficult life events. I felt unable to give or receive love. I felt a desire to drop out of family and society. I lost hope and trust. I had feelings of despair and powerlessness, and I was unable to take risks. I demonstrated fear and anxiety. I was filled with feelings of unworthiness and self-doubt (Simington, 1996; Simington, 2008).

I had been timid and fearful for years. We owned a large section of land—160 acres of forest, ideal for long nature walks. Despite this natural and beautiful world literally outside my front door step, I rarely ventured outside our house. I went to work, came home, and stayed inside. My home was the only place where I felt truly safe and accepted. I often visited my extended family, and attended the occasional social function with trusted friends. When my niece died, I could not trust anyone offering traditional counselling. I simply could not take one more risk. I was not emotionally or soulfully capable of putting myself in a vulnerable position.

Integrating Knowledge of Trauma Theory

My love for learning and the brief introduction to Simington's work led me to enroll in Taking Flight International's Trauma Recovery Certification training. I knew deep in my heart that I needed to heal and that I needed more exposure to Simington's work. I knew

the training could help me. I needed this for my healing. However, I told myself that my focus was on learning and achieving certification in trauma recovery. I was there to learn; I was not there for counselling or healing. I was not ready to be honest with myself. I believed that this training would keep me a safe distance from my own unhealed wounds.

Simington (2004) based her wholistic approach for healing trauma on research that depicted how the impact of trauma on the brain affects every aspect of our humanness (Moeller-Bertram, et al., 2014; Burgmer, et al., 2013; Bremner, 2002; Flor, 2002). The magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) discoveries of Lanius et al. (2004) encouraged Simington to incorporate therapeutic strategies into her trauma work to address the needs of the right hemisphere of the brain. Having studied Jungian philosophy, Simington recognized that meeting the needs of the brain's right hemisphere allowed entry, in a therapeutic way, into the area of the brain that interprets the language of symbolism (Lusebrink, 2004; Loumeau-May, 2012), or the language of soul (Jung, 1968; Jung, 1970; Jung, 1984; de Laszlo, 1991).

Simington (2002, 2013) began including activities, such as therapeutic art and visualization, in her therapy and training. She reasoned that participants would, upon examination of the symbolic messages revealed within their creations, move from spiritual disconnection (Perera & Frazier, 2013; Harris, Erbes, & Engdahl, 2008; Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005; Falsetti, Resick & Davis, 2003) to spiritual transformations (Michael & Cooper, 2013; de Castella & Graetz Simmonds, 2013; Engelkemeyer & Marwit, 2008).

During the Trauma Recovery therapy training, I learned about trauma and its effects on human functioning. This appealed to my left brain hemisphere and to my love for

learning. The experiential activities—the guided visualizations and the therapeutic art, and the search for symbolism in them, appealed to my right brain hemisphere and to my soul.

Our training began with an in-depth study of the effects of trauma on the brain and nervous system and the ensuing impact upon the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of human functioning. I learned that all messages from the senses and the soma enter the locus coeruleus in the brain stem. If the locus coeruleus registers the stimulus as a threat, a blast of adrenalin is sent to the body's alarm system, preparing the autonomic nervous system to fight or flee (van der Kolk, 2014; Levine, 1997). The stimulus then moves immediately to the mid brain.

The amygdala and hippocampus are both parts of the limbic system. As we go through life, the amygdala and the hippocampus process our life events and the emotions attached to them (Scaer, 2005). The amygdala registers the emotions and bodily sensations, and once this happens, the hippocampus accesses them. The hippocampus adds cognitive meaning and places the information into the appropriate context (Scaer, 2005). Once the hippocampus has registered the context, the information can be permanently stored in the cortex as explicit memory (Siegel, 2010).

During trauma, this normal processing may not happen. The amygdala records the highly charged emotions and sensations, but if the trauma is severe enough, the hippocampus can become overcharged and shut down (Siegel, 2010). The traumatic event is recorded not as explicit memory but only as implicit memory, in the form of highly charged emotions and sensations (Siegel, 2010; LaChiusa, 2016). These emotions and sensations are encoded as somatic sensations in traumatic memory. They are then encoded

into implicit memory and can be triggered when similar conditions are present (Rothschild, 2000; LaChiusa, 2016).

The amygdala does most of its processing through the brain's right hemisphere, and the hippocampus does most of its processing through the brain's left hemisphere (Rothschild, 2000). When the hippocampus shuts down, it causes the traumatized person to have highly charged emotions that are without the context that created them. There is also interference with the language centre, which is located in the left hemisphere. This impacts the person's ability to communicate the information surrounding the highly charged emotions that are being felt (Rothschild, 2000; Ringel & Brandell, 2012).

While some of the functions of the brain's hemispheres overlap, the left hemisphere is generally more responsible for the mental, analytical, and linear functions. The right hemisphere processes the emotional and soulful functions, including the creative and intuitive functions (Lusebrink, 2004; Siegel, 2010). Under normal conditions, in a healthy state, the two hemispheres function as a whole (van der Kolk, 2006). This means, for example, that a creative thought developed in the right hemisphere is moved across the corpus callosum (a large bundle of nerves separating the two hemispheres) into the left hemisphere where the language centre can formulate an appropriate oral response.

Trauma interferes with the ability to move information back and forth across the hemispheres. This appears to be related to the intermittent shutting down of left hemisphere functioning, causing the corpus callosum to decrease in size as a result of underuse, losing some of its functionality. This change in the corpus callosum interferes with the ability of traumatized people to clearly articulate thoughts. They may have very

creative ideas and very accurate information to share, but their words do not make coherent sense, neither to themselves nor to their listeners (Rothschild, 2000; Ringel & Brandell, 2012). Unable to clearly articulate, traumatized people begin to withdraw from social contacts as a way to decrease humiliation and embarrassment (Simington, 2008).

The knowledge I gained during the Trauma Recovery therapy training on the effects of trauma on the brain and nervous system was invaluable. I learned I was exhibiting symptoms of trauma. I realized that what I was experiencing was normal. This knowledge sparked my journey to recovery. I no longer judged myself for needing to withdraw from social contacts. I no longer felt unintelligent, incapable of articulating clearly and making the simplest decisions. I believe it is important to share this information with trauma victims when they are ready to receive it because it seemed to me as though I no longer exhibited those particular symptoms of trauma as soon as I understood they were normal. I did not have to struggle with my words in an effort to articulate my thoughts—they seemed to come more easily when I relaxed, knowing it was not a lack of intelligence that was inhibiting me, but a normal response to trauma.

The right hemisphere work—the soul work—appealed to me. The exploration of the symbolism contained within my therapeutic art and guided visualizations opened a window through which I could view my soul self. I loved what I saw. I often felt as though I was simply recalling things I had always known. I experienced this sensation for the first time when, early on in the training, we learned that "a first therapy in trauma recovery is to help the person strengthen their own life force, thus re-establishing their connection with the Source of Life. The re-establishment of this connection is known as grounding" (Simington, 2008, p. 5-13). Simington (2008) led us on a guided visualization to reconnect

us between Heaven and Earth, "a reconnection between the Source of Life and the Earth Mother" (p. 5-13). The first time I participated in this exercise, I felt a flash of recognition and welcome from Creator. It was as though I had been disconnected and lost and was now back where I belonged.

> Guided imagery is initiated by the counselor with the permission of the client and leads the client to the holy place and encounter of their choice. Again, one provides the safety and space for the encounter and listens careful(ly) to the report, attending to the wisdom it holds for the client's current situation. (Stone, 2004, p. 10)

During the training we were introduced to the work of Carl Jung. We were encouraged to examine his teachings on symbolic messages as part of our learning to recognize and meet the spiritual needs of those who had been traumatized. Carl Jung stated that the sacred does not easily reveal itself in oral language forms (de Laszlo, 1991). In her interpretation of the works of Jung and de Laszlo, Simington (2004) noted that oral language is connected to left brain activity. Meanings of words change over time and can be misconstrued. The receiver of the message makes note of body language when receiving the message and how the message is received will also depend on the receiver's mood and perception.

> Soul does not recognize such limitations. Its language is much broader, more expansive. The language of soul transcends time and space…Symbolic language carries a deeper truth - truth not altered by mood or circumstance. Symbol is comprehended by the individual receiving the message and carries a meaning often instantly interpreted, and at a very deep level. (Simington, 2004, p. 478)

Simington (2004) taught us that the 'language of the soul,' that is, symbol, sound, light and energy vibrations in energy work, music, drumming, dance, song, laughter, art, beauty, imagery and the elements of water, wind, rock, and fire, as well as the many forms of nature, is readily interpreted by the right brain—much more so than is verbal language.

The experiential activities attracted and engaged my right brain and allowed my soul to grow. My left brain responded to the theoretical lessons which appealed to my love for learning especially as I began to see the value of the knowledge I was gaining. Gaining knowledge of trauma responses helped me to be gentler with myself.

Psychological Approaches to Trauma

Dr. Simington's wholistic approach for healing trauma appealed to my thirst for learning and my need for quiet reflection in a sacred setting. The work nurtured my mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth. Other psychological approaches to trauma, theories, and techniques that have been developed over the years can also be effective paths to recovery from trauma.

Similar to Simington, van der Kolk (2014) found that simply talking about the trauma is not enough. Trauma imprints on the body, mind and soul of the victim and leads to PTS reactions. In order to experience change, the body must be taught that the danger has passed and it is safe to live in the present reality. Van der Kolk (2014) recommended various techniques to bring mindfulness to the body and to the thoughts and emotions of the traumatized. "Practicing mindfulness calms down the sympathetic nervous system so that you are less likely to be thrown into fight or flight" (p. 209). Rothschild (2010) also advocated mindfulness as the first step in safe trauma recovery. She described mindfulness

as awareness of body sensations, states, feelings, images, and thoughts as they move in and out of one's consciousness. She suggests using mindfulness to identify what is helpful to recovery and what is not.

Limbic System Therapy helps to restore the proper balance between the left brain hemisphere (the rational brain) and the right brain hemisphere (the emotional brain) through self-awareness. Trauma victims learn to cope with feeling overwhelmed by sensations and emotions associated with the past by focusing on breathing calmly and deliberately and becoming aware of the physical sensations they are experiencing. Paying focused attention to bodily sensations increases awareness of the ebb and flow of emotions and strengthens the victim's control over them (van der Kolk, 2014).

Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) is a technique which can help a patient to access memories and let go of the past without the necessity to speak about the trauma. The patient thinks about the sounds, thoughts, and feelings experienced during the moment of the trauma while the therapist moves his or her index finger slowly back and forth about twelve inches from the patient's right eye. The patient is instructed to follow the movement of the finger with his or her eyes. This gives the patient rapid access to memories and images from the past, helping to put the traumatic experience into a larger context or perspective (van der Kolk, 2014).

Herman (1992, 1997, 2015) promoted recovery through empowerment and the creation of new connections. The victim is empowered to take charge of his or her own recovery. The therapeutic relationship is unique in that the patient comes for help but must be empowered to do his or her own work. A relationship of mutual trust and respect is

established while the therapist remains neutral. The safety of the client is solidly established before the therapist and the patient work together through the stages of remembering, mourning and reconnecting with ordinary life.

Art therapy is another effective therapeutic technique for many patients. Creative arts can help trauma survivors work their way past trauma experiences to the center of their being. Talking about trauma can be difficult and patients can sometimes better express themselves through physical movements or pictures (Hitchcock Scott & Ross, 2006). Expressive arts therapy uses dance, music or art. It also includes journal writing, poetry, imagery, meditation, and improvisational drama. Rogers (1993) based her person-centered expressive therapy on nine specific humanistic principles:

- All people have an innate ability to be creative.
- The creative process is healing.
- Personal growth and higher states of consciousness are achieved through self-awareness, self-understanding and insight.
- Self-awareness, understanding, and insight are achieved by delving into our emotions.
- Our feelings and emotions are an energy source.
- The expressive arts—including movement, art, writing, sound, music, meditation and imagery—lead us into the unconscious.
- Art modes interrelate in the creative connection.
- A connection exists between our life-force—our inner core, or soul—and the essence of all beings.

- Therefore, as we journey inward to discover our essence or wholeness, we discover our relatedness to the outer world. (pp. 7-8)

Wiechelt and Gryczynski (2012) expressed concerns that there is not an easy or uniform approach to resolving the effects of trauma in Native Americans due to the complex and heterogeneous nature of the trauma experiences. The treatment needs of an individual will depend on his or her experience relative to the following factors:

- experience of traumatic event(s);
- experience of PTSD symptoms;
- experience of other psychiatric symptoms, for example, depression and anxiety;
- substance use behaviours;
- experience of psychological or spiritual distress that is not captured by DSM classifications;
- experience of health-related problems;
- degree to which the individual identifies with the Native culture;
- extent to which the individual engages in traditional practices and behaviors;
- awareness of and identification with cultural and historical trauma;
- economic, political, geographic, and cultural contexts in which the individual lives;
- individual strengths and capacity for resilience;
- connection with family and Native American community; and
- the capacity of the family or the community to support the healing process. (pp. 210-211)

Wiechelt's and Gryczynski's (2012) factors are not limited to First Nations or Native Americans. These factors must also be considered when working with all Indigenous peoples who have been traumatized, including the Métis peoples of Canada.

The Spirituality of the Métis People.

Wilson (2008) acknowledged that spirituality is an important component of healing for Indigenous people. This is true for me, and I believe it is true for many Métis people. My spirituality is an integral part of me, and it is embedded in my Métis culture. The following passages from my literature search are specific to Métis spirituality and emphasize the importance of this aspect of the counselling process for Métis people. These passages also illustrate some of the many different ways Métis people practice their spirituality.

Fiola (2015) noted that Anishinaabe (belonging to the Ojibwe/Saulteaux/Chippewa cultures) spirituality recognizes that Spirit is everywhere. Many Métis people believe in supernatural occurrences, asserting that the Spirit world is around us. Fiola described this belief as "the dramatic and imaginative spirituality that was the Métis religion. As one anonymous poet described it, 'A nervous tic, a flight of birds, a strange, new sound, all had importance and prophecies were built from these signs'" (p. 13).

The Métis artist, Belcourt (2008) said the following about her work:

> My paintings are manifestations of my prayers for everything in life to be in balance and harmony. I include in my paintings flowers and plants that are in various states of the lifecycle so as to relate the impermanence of life in full circle, from birth to death. I include roots in my paintings to indicate that there is more to life in a

> spiritual sense than what is seen on the surface, and to indicate how our ancestry has influence over our identity and our lives. At times I also include shadows or soft lines around the plants to suggest the spirit world around us, encouraging us, and helping us in our daily lives. (p. 150)

In his essay, *Memory Alive*, Leclair (2002) explained that Métis people as a whole do not embrace one specific religion or faith.

> Many Métis elders continue to embrace Christianity and understand it to be integral to their traditional Métis culture. There are also those who reject all religious affiliations, preferring to return to the teachings of their ancestral Aboriginal heritages. There are elders, often residential school survivors, who have learned to cherish aspects of both missionary and traditional beliefs. (p. 161)

Métis people must be able to speak freely about their particular religion, faith, or beliefs during counselling sessions. Spirituality is intertwined with our culture, and it is a huge part of who we are as a Métis people. In her Métis Anishinaabe study, Fiola (2015) attributed the following comment to one of her participants:

> It took me a long time to realize…that other aspect of willingness to include that spirituality in life. See, that's that part we don't always talk about in academia because people think you're nuts. We don't talk about it. (p. 75)

I've been through the fire
And I've been through the rain

Diane Eve Warren

Chapter Three: Methodology and Ethical Considerations

It's been a long road,
Getting from there to here

Diane Eve Warren

Research Methodology and the Research Question

Qualitative Research.

In this thesis, I wanted to examine the life journeys of three Métis women in an attempt to discover whether each individual's healing process from a traumatic experience brought about spiritual transformation, and, if so, was their transformation rooted in their spiritual heritage. This inquiry is not meant to prove a theory in which quantitative methodology would be most appropriate; the purpose was to increase the available knowledge of the Métis women's experiences as they heal from trauma. It is an attempt to understand their experiences from their point of view, using their narratives about those experiences. As Denzin and Lincoln (2017) stated, "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 10). I wanted to know what the healing process meant to these women. I selected qualitative research as the most appropriate choice given the purpose of the research.

Narrative Inquiry.

"Narrative inquiry does not necessarily prove some type of theory but rather helps to create a new sense of meaning" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 42). As Creswell (2013) noted, qualitative research offers a number of approaches that a researcher can use. Within

the broader domain of qualitative research, I chose narrative inquiry because I believed it was the most appropriate methodology for the topic and the people with whom I wanted to work. When considering my methodology, I thought about the Métis people, and I flashed back to the days of my childhood when people would gather around the table in the evenings, telling and sharing stories. Métis people are great story-tellers. It is a natural way of being in our culture. Stories create a life and energy of their own. The listener walks beside the storyteller and shares the experience. "In some cultural groups, narrative ways of thinking and doing have always been the way of communal life" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 63). I believed that, by selecting the narrative approach for my study, I would be more likely to gain co-researchers from my selected population who were willing to join me in this project.

Narrative inquiry allowed me to 'step into the personal world' of my co-researchers and gather the threads of each of our life narratives. By blending the threads of our individual stories, we would weave a collective understanding of the journey Métis women undergo as they heal from trauma.

> Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated…narrative inquiry is stories lived and told. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Narrative inquiry is an evolving methodology (Bruce, Beuthin, Sheilds, Molzhan & Schick-Makaroff, 2016) and is becoming an effective approach in relational research for medical education. "With the turn to narrative inquiry, the shift is to thinking *with* stories instead of *about* stories" (Clandinin, Cave & Berendonk, 2017, p. 89). Tandeter, Hershkovitz, and Kacen (2016) urged scientists to use qualitative methods more often when looking for symptoms and associated features of diseases and syndromes. They concluded that qualitative study was more effective than quantitative research. "With the use of quantitative research methods it took decades to discover things that we found in one simple qualitative study" (Tandeter et al., 2016, p. 176). Stephens and Breheny (2013) endorsed a structured approach to conducting narrative analysis in psychological research. They said that an approach which integrates personal and social stories would be useful for psychologists who wished to understand the influence of social life and identity on a person's experience of everyday issues or for more specific concerns, such as a life threatening illness or a traumatic experience.

My interest in the narratives of my co-researchers centered on their descriptions of their healing from trauma, with a specific focus on identifying the spiritual transformation that had been a part of their healing, and to determine if that transformation was rooted in their heritage. As Gockel (2013) pointed out, narrative inquiry is ideal for this type of research:

> A religious or spiritual crisis demands a transformation of meaning as the world and one's role within it are reinterpreted through a new framework of understanding. Because narrative research centres on exploring the process by which meaning is constructed, it is ideally suited for exploring how people create and transform

meaning through spiritual and religious frameworks, practices and experiences. (p. 193)

The Research Question.

Do Métis women, who self-describe as having done considerable healing from trauma, also identify their healing process brought about spiritual transformation, and, if so, was that spiritual transformation rooted in a reclaiming of their Métis heritage?

"People turn to religion and spirituality, in particular, when their established sense of order and meaning is disrupted by life crises such as serious illness, grievous injury or loss, profound suffering or death" (Gockel, 2013, p. 193). If my experience is typical, Gockel's statement is accurate. I suffered a grievous loss when my niece died. My healing journey transformed my spirituality. This awakened spirituality changed me in profound ways. I wanted to share my experience with the world, and I wanted to know if other Métis women had similar experiences.

My interest is from a Métis point of view. When I first became involved with the Métis community through my work with the City of Grande Prairie, I was welcomed with open arms as a Métis woman. I initially worried I would not fit in because I thought I knew very little about Métis culture. I did not fully embrace my Métis heritage until I discovered this welcoming and inclusive community. I decided to seek Métis women as co-researchers in order to explore common experiences that I might share with my Métis sisters. Perhaps we could use this information to help our Métis brothers and sisters or this information could help mental health professionals who work with Métis women to advance their knowledge of any aspects of the healing process that may be unique to Métis women.

Gathering the Threads of Spiritual Growth through the Narratives

Honouring the Storytellers.

In my research, I came across an interview with Maria Campbell, who 'translated and put on paper' the *Stories of the Road Allowance People*, narratives of the Michif Elders who originally told her their stories. I was touched by the honesty and humility of her words.

> The story will be able to do its work only if I can attach myself to the life already there, which is the old tellers. To their rhythms, their breath. I have to honour those who came before. I must honour the teller who gave it to me if I am to have my own power. (Gingell, 2004, p. 192)

There must be honour and respect for the story and for the storytellers (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). I, too, needed to honour and respect those who shared their stories with me. They courageously entrusted me with their personal stories, and I received them with the utmost gratitude, respect and care. I came to this project and to my co-researchers with a good heart, as recommended by Wilson (2008):

> The source of a research project is the heart/mind of the researcher, and "checking your heart" is a critical element in the research process. The researcher insures that there are no negative or selfish motives for doing the research, because that could bring suffering upon everyone in the community. A 'good heart' guarantees a good motive, and good motives benefit everyone involved. (p. 60)

Building relationships and trust with my co-researchers was vital to my research. Once the mutual trust and respect was established, the narratives were told without fear or reservation. It was essential that their stories be heard and represented accurately. Hearing the voices of the narrators in their own words resulted in a more authentic approach, and I used their own words whenever it was appropriate throughout the reporting of their narratives. I heard their voices as I read those passages. I allowed their voices to give life to their stories.

Co-Researcher Criteria.

My co-researchers are two Métis women, both 65 years of age. I decided to seek Métis women who were between the ages of 55 and 70 because I agree with Atchley (2008) who stated that "continuing to develop spiritually is important to most people as they age" (Atchley, 2008, p. 14). Atchley's (1999) theory of continuous adult development interprets how people with goals and developmental direction adapt. According to this continuity theory, aging heightens a person's awareness of his or her spiritual needs, and cumulative life experiences provide a base of psychological and social skills from which the person can choose to develop spiritually (Seltzer & Atchley, 1971; Atchley, 1999 as cited by Noronha, 2015).

I decided to seek Métis women as my co-researchers because the spiritual transformation that resulted from my trauma healing had reconnected me to my Métis roots and the Aboriginal spirituality I had been exposed to as a child. I wanted to know if other Métis women had similar experiences. It was also important that the Métis women co-researchers would self-describe as having done considerable healing from their trauma so that our experiences would come from comparable perspectives. Women who had recently

experienced trauma would not have been able to share stories of healing, nor would they have the retrospective perspective required to describe any spiritual transformation resulting from their healing.

While I am fluent in Cree, I selected co-researchers who were able to conduct their interview(s) in English. They had to be able to read English so they could read and clearly understand the Letter of Informed Consent (Appendix A). English language was also required to review the transcripts of their interviews and the summaries of their stories so that they could give final approval to the accuracy of their stories.

Recruitment Efforts.

Following approval of the ethics review, I began my recruitment efforts. I contacted people from the town of High Prairie and the city of Grande Prairie who might know Métis women who met my criteria. I gave them a brief summary about the project and asked if they would be interested in helping with the recruitment. I sent a Letter of Introduction (Appendix B) to those who agreed to help and included an information page to be distributed to potential participants. The information page outlined my project and gave my contact information. I asked my connections to pass my request on to Métis women whom they felt would meet my criteria. I asked them to tell the Métis women to contact me directly, within two weeks, if they were interested.

I did not directly approach potential participants because I wanted a random sampling of women. I also agree with Wilson (2008) who said that Métis women may consent when asked directly to participate whether or not they wish to do so. I believed using my connections as intermediaries would give potential co-researchers an opportunity to refuse without compromising their inclination to be polite and accommodating.

Selecting my Co-Researchers.

I hoped to have a minimum of 10 women express interest. I planned to select two women, in a random draw, for the co-researcher positions. I also planned to select two alternate co-researchers. These alternate co-researchers would replace anyone who chose to opt out during the process. The deadline passed without results. I reconnected with my recruiters and asked if anyone had expressed any interest.

While I was in the process of reconnecting with my recruiters, a woman who lived near High Prairie contacted me. She explained that she had stopped by the High Prairie Victims' Services office to bring the Program Coordinator up to date on her current situation. This Program Coordinator had been one of the people I contacted for help in recruiting my co-researchers. She initially thought she would be able to identify potential candidates for my project. Upon further reflection, she felt that she would be unable to assist because her clients were dealing with very recent trauma and likely would not meet my criteria. However, Lily, a former client, stopped by to talk about her healing journey and the spiritual growth she had experienced since she last accessed the Victims' Services program. The Program Coordinator remembered my project and urged her to contact me. This propitious meeting led to Lily's contacting me to express her interest in sharing her story. With no other immediate prospects, I decided to forego the random draw and arranged to meet with Lily. Meanwhile, another woman, Linda, expressed an interest and said that she knew of one other woman who was also willing to participate. Linda lived near Grande Prairie. I accepted her offer to participate and elected to hold the third person in reserve should either Lily or Linda decide to withdraw.

Collecting the Narratives.

I used semi-structured interviews to gather the threads of the life stories of my co-researchers. I used a series of Interview Questions (Appendix C) as talking points for my interviews. When I began my first interview with Lily, she suggested that she tell me her life story and then we could fill in the blanks if she missed anything. I agreed to this approach, and she began to tell me her story. I sat and listened without interruption, occasionally checking the recording to ensure we were still recording the narrative. I made occasional notes so that I could clarify certain points if I needed to, and I also noted my reactions to her narrative. When we reviewed my talking points, we agreed that she had covered everything in her initial story. This first interview with Lily was 90 minutes in length.

Linda began her story with her childhood in Fort Chipewyan and moved chronologically through the years, with occasional regressive movement to provide more details. In Linda's case, as well, I listened without interruption, occasionally checking to make sure we were still recording the narrative. I took field notes for clarification and to make note of my own reactions. She covered most of the talking points in her answer to my first question and added more information as we reviewed each talking point. She included many stories about other people she had encountered throughout her life—people who were important to her growth. Her love, respect, and gratitude for these people was evident as she talked about them. Linda's initial interview also lasted 90 minutes.

One of my co-researchers was not comfortable with a video recording so I decided to forego the video recording and recorded both interviews in audio. I recorded the

interviews using the Audacity software with a microphone attached to my computer. The software program produced good, clear, sharp sound, and external noises did not interfere with the quality. I saved the recordings as MP3 files in my computer, and transcribing from those MP3 files was a simple process. I was able to complete each transcription within a two-week period. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and summarized the narratives for the thesis.

Validation and Data Analysis

Validity of a Narrative Approach.

Validity, in narrative inquiry, is not a straightforward and uncomplicated process. When an individual is relating a story from the past, we do not know for certain how much is fact, how much fiction, or skewed memory. How do we separate fact from fiction, or do we even try? Will the stories change over time or at the time of review? In narrative inquiry, it can be difficult to distinguish fact from fiction and this becomes increasingly more so as the writing progresses. There is no easy answer to this conundrum, however, it is important to be aware of it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I understand and acknowledge the conundrum that Clandinin and Connelly referred to. There are certainly times when my memory contradicts the memories of others who were with me in the past, and I am not certain whose memories are correct. I am also aware that we do not have clear, total recall of our past. I began to access more and more memories as I worked on this project. At first it seemed my memories focussed on my experiences with racism. I knew these experiences were not the sum total of my life—most of my life was filled with positive experiences. For example, as I reviewed literature on

Métis culture, I began to recall the music my Dad played, the songs he sang, and the dances he taught my nieces. I began to remember other, more positive, aspects of my life.

The experiences that hurt me were sharper, clearer memories. Ivcevic et al. (2008) found that across cultures, long-lasting positive memories were often about personal achievements whereas negative memories frequently represented social themes. This was true for me. I recalled my achievements and my negative social experiences easily while other, more neutral memories were not as easily retrievable.

Wakefulness and Reflexivity.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted the importance of maintaining wakefulness as we write our texts. They defined wakefulness as awareness; that we needed to be aware of the contexts for our work without stifling inquiry. Wakefulness allows us to proceed with a "constant, alert awareness of risks, of narcissism, of solipsism, and of simplistic plots, scenarios, and unidimensional characters" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 182).

Gilgun (2011) reiterated the importance of reflexivity in research. She believed that all researchers must be reflexive if the research is to be credible, and she identified three general areas in which the researcher needs to be reflexive. There must be accounting for the personal and professional meanings the topic has for the researcher, the perspectives and experiences of co-researchers, and the audiences to whom the research findings will be directed. This accounting enhances the quality of the process and outcome. "Our own experiences and perspectives influence every aspect of the research we do. Creating awareness is an open and honest approach to doing and reporting research" (Gilgun, 2011, p. 28). I tried to maintain wakefulness and reflexivity in my research. I kept field notes and jotted down my experiences, thoughts, emotions and reactions as I completed the

interviews. Reflecting on these notes helped me to maintain awareness of my personal biases, preconceived notions and personal reactions to the information I received from my co-researchers.

Transcription and Review.

I ensured accuracy by transcribing the interviews myself. In one of my former positions, Judicial Clerk for the Attorney General of Alberta, I was often required to provide accurate transcripts from taped recordings of court proceedings to prosecuting and defence attorneys. I have the experience and the skills to produce accurate transcripts of the interviews I conducted.

Once transcribed, the interviews were a rich source of information. Sousa (2014), citing Stiles (1993), stated that "engagement with the material involves a profound immersion with the participants and the raw material collected which facilitates and promotes qualitative research" (p. 214). I listened to the audio recordings as I read each transcript twice more to ensure accuracy of the transcriptions. I often reversed and replayed portions of the recordings to listen more carefully to a phrase or word that was not entirely clear. I used the internet to check the correct spellings of the places that were mentioned or to confirm information about a specific topic. Once I was satisfied that the transcripts were accurate, I reread them in order to fully familiarize myself with the stories, and I summarized the stories into the narratives that would be included in the thesis. I reviewed the transcript and the summary of the interview with each of my co-researchers to ensure that they were comfortable with the accuracy of their narratives. As part of the review process, the transcript and summary of their narratives were emailed to each of them for review prior to scheduling another meeting. I met with Linda to review the

summary of her narrative, and she made a few minor corrections. Lily sent me an email stating that the summary was accurate, and she was comfortable with it. She did not find anything that needed to be changed. Both Lily and Linda also reviewed my conclusions and agreed with my analyses.

My relationship with the co-researchers was one of mutual trust, honesty and respect. I hoped this would ensure that they felt safe and free to speak up if they found a discrepancy between the transcripts and the intended meaning. Linda did not hesitate to point out the areas where she disagreed with my summary of her story, so I feel confident that her story is told as she intended. Lily has shared her story in the past and plans to publish her memoirs. She knows her story and how it should be told. I am confident that I have portrayed her story accurately and to our mutual satisfaction.

I looked for themes among the three (including my own experiences) as I grouped units of meaning together. I copied the original transcripts into new documents and created new folders for these new documents. I used these new documents to highlight the units of meanings, keeping the original transcripts intact. (I was thus able to refer back to the original transcripts whenever I needed to confirm the accuracy of my conclusions.) These units of meanings were further grouped into common themes which were then compiled into a smaller number of major themes. Those themes were further explored and summarized as findings for my thesis. I reviewed my findings and results with my co-researchers to ensure, once more, that there were no misunderstandings or errors in the transcription and conclusions of their stories. Both co-researchers approved my conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Information for Potential Co-Researchers.

One of the guiding principles of St. Stephen's College's (2016) *Ethical Conduct for Research* is to "protect the dignity and preserve the wellbeing of human research participants" (para. 1). Ensuring people were well informed throughout the process was essential to ensuring the dignity and preservation of the wellbeing of my co-researchers. Information about my research was provided to my contacts. It included my background, my role as a student of St. Stephen's College, and the research I proposed to do. I provided my contact information for participants who had any questions or concerns. It was clearly stated that there would be no monetary compensation for my co-researchers. This work would be voluntary.

My co-researchers had the information they needed to make an informed decision on whether or not to proceed. I outlined the scope of the research project and their roles and responsibilities. We discussed tentative timelines for interview(s) and follow-up meetings were scheduled at their convenience. We also talked about anonymity and confidentiality.

Working with Lily and Linda.

I met with Lily and Linda, separately, to review the Letter of Informed Consent. In both cases, although they are literate, educated women, I read each paragraph of the Letter of Consent out loud to confirm that we both understood and agreed with the meaning before we signed the document. I also provided further information at these initial meetings on their rights, roles, and responsibilities. I assured them that they could opt out without any personal adverse consequences at any time during the process and, if they did

so, any data they had provided would be destroyed. I gave them the contact information of my thesis supervisor in case they had any questions or concerns about the process which they might be reluctant to discuss with me.

Interviews were conducted at a mutually-agreed upon time and place and were audio-recorded. The audio tapes, transcriptions, and co-researcher data are securely stored in a password-protected folder in a computer to which I have sole access. Transcripts and working papers are stored in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed immediately following acceptance of the thesis. Co-researchers will be informed once the data has been destroyed.

I also discussed the possibility that remembering and recounting traumatic events could cause or aggravate psychological trauma with each of my co-researchers. I ensured good closure to each interview and made sure each co-researcher was grounded and feeling emotionally safe before each departure. In addition, I made an arrangement with a counsellor in Grande Prairie who agreed to provide two free counselling sessions for each co-researcher, if required. I provided his contact information in writing to my co-researchers and informed them verbally about these services at the beginning and end of each interview.

I demonstrated openness and transparency with my co-researchers. I built and maintained a strong relationship of mutual trust and respect with each individual. I am humbled and honoured by their willingness to share their stories with me. I am in awe of their strength, courage and wisdom, and I am grateful and pleased to include their narratives in this work.

Anonymity and Confidentiality.

I thought anonymity might be an issue with the methodology. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) maintained that anonymity is troubling for narrative inquiry researchers. Co-researchers may agree to anonymity at the beginning of the research and then decide later on in the process that they wish to be identified. Alternatively, they may ask to be identified prior to the beginning of the project and then begin to feel vulnerable as the research progresses and they sense that the content may be potentially harmful (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

There are good reasons for identifying co-researchers, especially those of Métis heritage. In a report on the *Ethics of Research Involving Indigenous Peoples*, Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffrey (2004) addressed the issue of anonymity and confidentiality:

> In the Indigenous context, knowledge is a gift and the researcher is indebted to give credit to the source which means that participants ought to be named if they consent to it and receive recognition in any reporting or publications. (p. 34)

Wilson (2008) supported this view. Knowledge is relational and must be shared with everyone. There needs to be mutual respect and the understanding that the researcher does not own the information—it belongs to those who share it. This requires that co-researchers be identified if they wish. I agree with this point of view. My story is my story. If I share it, I want people to know it is mine. I believe that a story loses its power if there is no knowledge of the storyteller.

Given the above, I struggled with the need for anonymity. I considered allowing my co-researchers to include their names in my thesis if they wished to do

so. However, given the topic and the possibility that trauma-related incidents could possibly identify others, I reconsidered offering this option and required my co-researchers to maintain their anonymity. I used pseudonyms in my thesis. In addition, any information that might lead to their identification, for example, place of birth or current location, was carefully reviewed to ensure anonymity was maintained. I discussed confidentiality during the initial interviews and restated the need for confidentiality at every meeting. I clearly stated that I would maintain confidentiality during the interview and writing process and that the final document would not include anything that could identify my co-researchers.

"Knowledge is a gift." The words of Ermine et al. (2004) resonated with me. This was how I felt about the stories my co-researchers told to me. They were gifts to me and to future readers of this thesis. I had a rare moment during the process of writing when I felt like quitting. It was a time when I realized I still had a great deal of work ahead of me, and the deadline was looming. I persevered because the thesis was no longer mine alone. Lily and Linda had both gifted me with their stories with the expectation that I would pass them on with honour and respect. I had a responsibility to make sure their stories were heard. I needed to complete my part of the bargain.

It's been a long time,
But my time is finally near.

Diane Eve Warren

Chapter Four: My Story

I've got strength of the soul
And no one's gonna bend or break me

Diane Eve Warren

I am a Métis woman, aged 64. I grew up in a large, extended family in a Métis community in Northern Alberta. As a child, I spent much of my time at my maternal grandparents' home, playing with my aunts and uncles, some of whom were close to my age. We children were loved and indulged, and we spent many summer days playing outside. In the evenings, we would try to join the adults gathered around the kitchen table. There was often someone from the community seeking my grandfather's advice, and the conversations were guaranteed to be interesting. He was a wise and spiritual man who was often called upon to explain the meanings of dreams, unusual events, and signs that appeared to be significant. People trusted him, listened to his interpretations, and heeded his advice.

When I was a baby, not yet a year old, I became ill, and everyone worried that I would not survive. One night, my aunt Lily got up out of bed and began to get dressed. My grandfather, who had been sitting in the dark living room, praying for me, saw her preparing to leave and asked her what she was doing. Lily replied that she was going to her sister (my mother) because she thought 'Baby' had died. When he asked her why she thought that, she explained that she had a dream about a baby angel flying away. My grandfather told her, "Go back to bed, my girl. The baby is going to be fine. You will see her in the morning." The next morning, Lily hurried over to see my mother and saw that I

was, indeed, fine. My fever had broken at the same time that Lily had woken up from her dream. My grandfather had interpreted Lily's dream correctly.

People in the community believed in ghosts, or spirits, and the evening discussions often centred on these topics. Most were afraid and communicated their fear, speaking of malevolent spirits. As young children, we were expected to leave the adults to the conversations which were not meant for our ears. As children will, we found ways to listen in, and we heard and understood just enough to also become fearful of ghosts and spirits. I grew up afraid of ghosts and of being alone in the dark. I was even afraid of the northern lights, the Aurora Borealis, because we believed they were the spirits of our ancestors. My uncle would tell us younger children terrifying tales of what would happen if we whistled to them and got their attention.

My mother taught me to appreciate nature and to be grateful for all that we are given by Creator. One of my earliest memories is picking berries with her. As we picked berries, she told me to thank Creator for their abundance. She also opened my eyes and mind to the magic and wonder in the world. She told me about angels and fairies. She told me I would be able to see the fairies' jewels when the sun shone on the snow, and, of course, I did. My mother and my grandfather helped me to see the Creator as a kind, generous and loving being who was all-knowing and all-seeing. My mom taught me to pray when I was afraid or if I woke up from a bad dream. I spent many nights praying in an attempt to keep my fears under control.

When I was young, we were not immune to the effects of alcohol in my immediate family. My Dad's family were heavy drinkers, and he was no exception. He and Mom

would fight whenever he came home from work, having spent his earnings on alcohol. He would be remorseful after he sobered up and around the time I was 9 years old, he stopped binge drinking. Alcohol consumption was limited to Christmas and New Year's Eve parties, and the fights between my parents ended. Although Dad stopped drinking, others in the community did not and we would often have inebriated visitors. We children were expected to be courteous to them; however, my Mom did not object if we found ways to avoid them altogether instead. I saw the adverse effects of alcohol when I was young and, as a result, I refused to drink with my friends as we got older. I did not drink while in high school or college.

Dad was often away working at logging camps while Mom stayed home with us. She worked hard, canning fruit, berries and moose meat for the winter, making sure we always had enough to eat. When Dad was drinking, money was scarce, and she struggled to make ends meet. I remember once, when I was young, she prepared our dinner and then did not sit down to eat with us. I believe now that there was probably not enough food, and she went without so that her children could eat.

Significant events were important to Mom, and although we were often without adequate funds throughout the year, she always made sure we had gifts from Santa for Christmas, cake for our birthdays, and candy from the Easter bunny on Easter Sunday mornings. Others in our community were not as fortunate. I remember one Easter morning finding Easter eggs and wondering why the other children in our community could not find any.

We are a large family. I am the eldest, and I have 12 living siblings—8 sisters and 4 brothers. Two boys, born immediately after me, had died as babies. My youngest brother is only 19 years old. He was fostered by Mom when he was a baby, and she adopted him when he was going to be taken by his extended family. Mom had fostered many children in her later years, and it was always difficult for her to give them up when the time came. She refused to take one more loss.

Despite my fears, I had a wonderful childhood, and my memories are good ones. I knew my parents and my grandparents loved me. When I was in the first grade, my older aunts and uncles would gather around and listen to me read from my school books. They always exclaimed over how smart I was. I basically had two homes—I felt equally at home whether I was at my parents' home or at my grandparents' home. In the summers, we would join Dad at a logging camp or we would spend a month with our cousins who lived beside a lake. Mom and Dad both worked hard and tried their best to give us everything we wanted or needed.

I attended school in the Métis settlement until I completed the eighth grade. I started the ninth grade at a Catholic school in High Prairie. My parents tried various ways of getting me to school. As I was the only student attending school outside our community, we did not have a school bus. For the first year, Dad drove me, every morning, to a farmer's home near High Prairie, and I would wait there for the school bus, along with his three daughters. In high school, I stayed for one school year with my paternal grandparents and caught the school bus from their home. For the next two years, I lived in the town and walked to school, boarding with my aunt and uncle for one year and with my Dad's aunt for my final year.

It was during this time that I first encountered racism. I learned that I was considered inferior and unintelligent by some people. This was a shock to me because I had excelled in elementary school in our Métis community, and my family was proud of my achievements. Despite not being welcomed into mainstream society, I persevered and completed high school and college. I was the first person from our Métis community to complete high school. This was a significant event in the community.

I met my husband in college, and we were married a few months after graduation. During the early years of our marriage, we lived and worked in Edmonton, Alberta. As a young wife, I found living in a predominantly White community emotionally and soulfully challenging. It seemed people did not like me simply because I was Métis. I encountered racism from co-workers and even occasionally from management, as well as from community contacts during social functions. My husband is Caucasian, and people were often not aware that I was of indigenous ancestry. I was shocked, bewildered and hurt when someone made a disparaging remark about 'Indians.' My identity was interwoven with the term 'Indian' and when people used the word 'Indian' to disparage anyone who was of First Nations or Métis heritage, I felt deeply hurt. I would think about my parents. They were good people, hardworking, honest, respectful, and humble. I could not understand why they would be considered with such scorn just because of their ancestry. I was often angry on their behalf because they did not deserve the disrespect which was indirectly aimed at them.

I adapted. I was not alone in this situation. My husband and I worked hard, made solid friends, had good careers, and created a loving home. I turned to him for comfort and support whenever I encountered racism, and we tried to avoid situations where racial

discrimination was likely to occur. We spent a great deal of time with my extended family. My husband and my Dad had become close, and we went home almost every weekend. They would go hunting or fishing together. Despite this, I did not fit in as easily as I had in the Métis community of my childhood. The world I lived in seemed very different from the world my siblings lived in. I often felt alienated in both worlds.

In college, I had graduated at the top of my class with a diploma in Secretarial Science. I excelled in the office positions I held, and I was often promoted. I enjoyed working, and I was proud of my accomplishments. I produced high quality work quickly and easily, frequently outdoing my co-workers. This knowledge helped me to cope with their unwelcome comments. Also, my faith was strong. I believe that, in Creator's eyes, we are all equal, and those who implied I was inferior, were wrong. Nevertheless, I missed the sense of belonging and connection to others in the workplace, and although I would not have been able to express it at the time, I now know that I felt Spirit was missing from my workplace (Adams, Bezner, Drabbs, Zambarano & Steinhardt, 2000; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008).

Having a sense of belonging and feeling connected to others are spiritual needs and when these needs are not met, we experience spiritual distress (Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen & Stollenwerk, 1985; Benner Carson & Stoll, 2008). Osterman Fieser and Rogers-Seidl (1991) defined spiritual distress as "a disruption in one's relationship with God, or that person's concept of a higher power, which gives identity, values, and meaning to life" (p. 83). I realize now that I was experiencing spiritual distress (Falsetti, Resick & Davis, 2003; Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005; Perera & Frazier, 2013). During this period of my life, I experienced physical illnesses, such as regular bouts of kidney infections, and

ulcers. In a study on mindfulness, spirituality and health-related symptoms, Carmody, Reed, Kristeller, and Merriam (2008) found that improvements in spirituality appeared to be associated with improvements in psychological and medical symptoms. I wonder now if those illnesses were symptoms of my spiritual distress.

Bartel's definition of spiritual distress included a situation in which conflict exists between an individual's core beliefs and their personal experience as cause for spiritual distress (as cited in Skalla & Ferrell, 2015). Even though I did not describe my pain in spiritual terms in those early days of my marriage, I now acknowledge that each encounter of racism caused me to experience deep soul wounding. Each experience created a conflict between my core beliefs and my personal experience, and with each experience, I began to realize that I did not fit easily into the world I was building with my husband, nor did I fit into the world I had left behind in my Métis community. I had one foot in each world; however, I did not feel stable or comfortable in either world. Jones (1989) identified five fundamental rhythms or themes within the overall perspective from which we see and understand our world. My worldview, according to Jones' Theological Worlds Inventory, is World One. The essential rhythm of this worldview is separation and reunion. People in World One feel alienated. "One's state is that of an alien – a streetwalker of the Spirit. One simply does not belong – that's it. And yet, deeply within, one senses beyond sensing that one was 'made' to belong, somewhere, to something" (p. 47).

After a few years in Edmonton, we moved to Grande Prairie and eventually built our home on land we bought near Grovedale, a hamlet south of Grande Prairie. We created a good life. I worked in the forest industry, my husband worked for the federal government, and we forged friendships with people who became lifelong friends.

We had been married for about 20 years and our son was 10 years old when I decided to consciously leave the Catholic Church. I had not been an active member for a number of years. I did not attend mass except for the occasional Christmas Eve or Easter. I did not agree with many Church policies and practices and several personal events over the years and others that I learned about from news media, such as the residential school experiences, caused me to look critically at the Church. Once I began to question the priests' authority and wisdom, it was a small step towards questioning the organization itself and another small step towards deciding that I would no longer follow the religion.

Leaving the Catholic religion was the right decision for me. I did not feel lost; in fact, I felt free. I still prayed to Creator daily, and everything seemed normal. I was often still fearful, afraid of the dark and of being alone. I struggled with bad dreams, and sometimes prayer did not help. My fears and bad dreams had been a part of my life for as long as I could remember, and I did not realize they were not normal. From time to time I felt that I was not living my life's purpose and that I needed to find a positive sense of meaning and purpose in life. I did not realize that I was not being true to myself or to my Métis roots. Although I thought I was happy and content, my life lacked the richness, joy and peace I needed for spiritual health (Fryback & Reinert, 1999; Osterman Fieser & Rogers-Seidl, 1991).

Frankl (1959, 1962, 1984, 1992, 2006) noted that many are searching for the meaning of life, a meaningful life, or a sense of connection. While on the outside, we may appear well adjusted and successful, this does not necessarily mean that our lives have meaning and purpose (Bolman & Deal, 2001; Frankl, 1978). Other authors have noted that some who search may find meaning and purpose through practices such as meditation,

listening to music, or praying. They describe the spiritual journey as a journey of self-development, an on-going process of self-discovery, a path that a person walks which leads and guides his or her life (Cassar & Shinebourne, 2012).

Ecklund and Long (2011) asked a group of scientists how they understood spirituality and its relation to religion and science. They found that scientists describe a parallel between their work, their pursuit of scientific knowledge and a spiritual journey, the pursuit of transcendence, of connectedness, of understanding of oneself and the world. They described the spiritual journey as a quest for meaning just as the work of a scientist is a quest for understanding reality—there is always more to learn and know. For others, ordinary life events, such as listening to music or gardening, can be charged with spiritual meaning (Bolman & Deal, 2001; Unruh & Hutchinson, 2011). Gardening can be especially conducive to spiritual experiences. There is a sense of peace, connection and a feeling of being close to nature. The garden can be viewed as a spiritual place and gardening as a spiritual activity (Unruh & Hutchinson, 2011).

My fundamental beliefs about spirituality changed when my father was diagnosed with cancer. While trying to come to terms with his suffering, I discovered a book, *Embraced by the Light*, in which the author described her near-death experience, and her journey to Heaven where she received the information she shared in the book upon her return to Earth. The message that held the most meaning for me was that we are all spiritual beings, and we come to Earth to learn and to grow. We choose the experiences that will facilitate the learning we want to do (Eadie, 1992). Eadie's messages resonated as truth, seeming to remind me of something I had always known. With Edie's messages in mind, I went to the shopping mall in Grande Prairie. I looked into the face of every person

I encountered, and it seemed to me that I could see the Spirit shining through each person's eyes. This was an affirming and awe-inspiring moment for me, and I embraced humanity.

This information from Eadie (1992) came to me when I needed it the most. It helped me to understand that Dad had chosen this manner of death, and the pain and suffering he was experiencing was for his own growth. Since I was able to accept his choice, I was there for him in a different way—to support him instead of suffering with him. I was full of love, respect, and admiration for this amazing Spiritual Being who had the courage to choose a hard path in his life.

When I left the Catholic Church, there were some things I brought with me, such as my faith in Jesus and Mary. When Dad became sick, I thought of the words I used to pray to Mary: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us now and at the hour of our death." I began to pray every day, asking Mary to be there for my Dad, at the 'hour of his death.' Just before he died, my Dad said to my Mom, "Do you see her, Flora? It's the Virgin Mary." Words cannot describe the immense gratitude and happiness I felt when I heard this story. My Dad was in good hands.

My Dad's death helped me to understand that people are on different paths and have chosen their paths for their own reasons. Knowing this brought peace and comfort into my own life and helped me view my life in different ways. It assisted me, in many ways, to feel a deeper sense of connection with the universe, the Creator, and humanity. I looked at people with a new reverence. They all had their own paths, their own reasons for doing what they were doing; their own learning and growing to do. I looked at my son. He, too,

was on his path. He was so much more than my son. I was there to love him and to support him; his path was his own. It was a humbling, joyful and wondrous insight.

In November, 2006, my niece, Richelle, died at the age of 14 years. This was a huge and devastating blow. It catapulted me backwards and took me to a darker and lonelier place than I had ever experienced. I struggled to come to terms with her death. How could this have happened? I ached with loss and with the unbearable pain of seeing her mother's heartache.

From time to time, I would sense Richelle with me, and I shared those moments with her mother, my younger sister. Feeling connected with Richelle's spirit brought both of us some comfort, but those moments of comfort were unsustainable for Richelle was physically gone, and there was no way of bringing her back. I could not hug her nor see her anymore.

The moments when I felt connected to Richelle, while comforting, also brought with them an added stressor, for while my sister understood and believed in them, my husband could not comprehend my behaviour. He worried about me and wanted me to return to what he considered to be normal. I was unable to defend myself, my experiences and beliefs. The worldview held by my husband was guided by logic and reason, and in my time of distress, that worldview offered no comfort, no answers that resonated with my soul's knowing. Once again, I felt torn between two worldviews and two belief systems. The world of my grandfather blended the sacred and the secular in mysterious and wondrous ways, and I found myself increasingly longing for that world. I felt deeply within my heart that this worldview would have the answers I sought. Richelle's sister,

who was 3 years old, told of seeing her sister leaving through the ceiling with the angels. I remembered my aunt's dream about a baby angel flying away and realized that angel had left without me. This is what my grandfather had known. The angels Taylor saw took Richelle with them. I marvelled at my grandfather's wisdom and wished I could have learned more from him.

I came through that very difficult period with the help of my mentor and counsellor, Dr. Jane Simington, PhD. I was introduced to her work when I attended her two-hour session, *Touched by Spirit*. She talked about religion and spirituality, explaining the differences between the two concepts. She emphasized that all people are, by nature, spiritual, and that people can be very spiritual without belonging to any traditional religion or being involved in specific religious practices (Osterman Fieser & Rogers-Seidl, 1991). During my first encounter with her, I felt that Dr. Simington was speaking directly to me. I recall she stated that we do not need clergy to intercede on our behalf and that I found myself thinking, "Of course we don't! I haven't used them for a long time." All we had to do was simply talk directly to Creator whenever we felt like it; thank Creator on a daily basis for the gifts we receive, and to do this in our own way. We do not need a formal prayer designed by someone else. Her words took me immediately back to the long ago teachings of my mother and my grandfather. They, too, had emphasized the need to be in constant communication with Creator, to frequently offer a quick 'thank you, Creator, for this…' while walking or working. They taught me that prayers of gratitude were the best prayers and the most important prayers I needed to say.

As I pondered Dr. Simington's words and reflected on how they paralleled the earlier teachings from my mother and my grandfather, I realized that this was truth. I had known

this at a deep level, and I had done exactly this for most of my life. During that presentation, Dr. Simington emphasized that as we grow spiritually, we may experience moments of transcendence when 'weird' things may happen. We need to pay attention to these unique experiences, as we may be receiving messages from the Spirit World (Bakker, 2013; Fiola, 2015). This was similar to the instructions I had received from my grandfather, and this recurring message reinforced the teachings that he had tried to instill in me.

It felt wonderfully transforming to have my own beliefs affirmed by this sophisticated and educated woman. A woman who lived in both worlds: the world of logic and academia and the same world in which I longed to live…the world of mystery and Spirit. This message also freed me from the traditional views of God learned from the Catholic priests and nuns, which were restricted to those that are personified as male.

> The client and counselor's co-creation of more multiple and fluid images of God which embrace the feminine as well as the masculine, the nurturer as well as the warrior, the natural world in all its dimensions as well as the human, can liberate, enrich, sustain and transform the client's relationships with self and God. (Stone, 2004, p. 1)

Perhaps I had been wrong. Perhaps in the world of mystery and Spirit, there are people who, like my grandfather on his Earth walk, maintain a foot in both realities—the reality of the sacred and the reality of the secular. Are there people who blend the discoveries of modern science with the mysterious wonders and magic of the sacred world? Is this a way to help those who have experienced significant pain? I needed to know if that

was a possibility. I wanted to learn more from this woman who sparked a desire within me to be one of those who could blend the sacred and the secular ways of being in the world so as to help heal my people...the Métis.

I enrolled in Simington's Trauma Recovery Certification program and it opened a whole new world for me. I learned about and participated in opening and closing ceremonies that were so profound and so inspiring, they often reduced me to tears of joy. We used the elements of earth, fire, water, and air in our ceremonies and my soul sang. I now know that I identified with the elements because my maternal heritage is of Irish ancestry, and the elements are very much a part of Celtic spirituality. We created art in collage forms that had profound messages for me. I created my safe place, in my mind and in art form, during the training and recognized it when I went to Ireland a few years later. I learned about spirit guides and power animals, the healing and grounding power of rocks. Spirit guides, power animals, and the elements are also rooted in Aboriginal spirituality, and my Indigenous roots responded as I reconnected with my spirit guides and power animals. I reconnected with 'all my relations' in the natural world.

I began to spend a great deal of time outside, walking around our quarter section, rediscovering the natural world which had been a key part of my childhood. I opened myself to everything. The world was full of energy, mystery and meaning, and I wanted to experience it all. I wanted to know it all. There were incredible, numinous moments during my walks when it seemed as though I was connected to everything on Earth and the universe. I experienced truly profound and magical moments. On one of my walks, I noticed a little bird that I had not seen before, and I sent a quick request to my spirit guide to help me to get a better look at it. The bird flew to a nearby branch and stayed there for a

long while, singing and preening while I stood and studied it. It was an amazing and powerful moment. I was rediscovering and remembering the world I had left behind. I was being given glimpses into the spiritual world and glimpses into the universe.

I was also learning many, important things. One day, at work, our administrative assistant accused me of 'snapping at her'. I was surprised and tried to explain that had not been my intention, however, she would not listen. I finally apologized in order to keep the peace and to get her out of my office. As soon as I did that, I became angry with myself. I felt I had committed a self-betrayal. I left work and drove home. I went for a long walk around our quarter section, but I could not find the peace I was seeking. Instead, I berated myself all the way around the quarter. That evening, a skunk came into our garage and helped itself to our dog's food. I had never seen a skunk before so I sat and watched it—from a safe distance. I wondered what Andrews (2007) would have to say about the skunk.

> The skunk…is a very powerful totem with mystical and magical associations. Just look at how people respond to it. They show great respect for it and what it can do. This is part of what skunk teaches. It teaches how to give respect, expect respect, and demand respect…If skunk has shown up, it can be to help you with this particular aspect. It can teach you how to be more self-assured and how to assert yourself. (Andrews, 2007, pp. 312-313)

This was a powerful message and an important lesson. There were many times in the past when I did not assert myself, when I did not demand the respect that I had earned. These days, I simply think about the skunk, and I do not behave in ways that allow others

to demean or bully me. There are many lessons for us from nature. We only have to be open to them and be willing to learn.

My journey towards healing was a journey of heightened spirituality, a journey to find meaning in my difficult life experiences and a journey of claiming the purpose for the rest of my life. The magic I had known and embraced as a child was returning. I was becoming increasingly aware of who I am, that I matter and that I am an important part of the universe. In the remembering, I had ever-increasing moments of feeling fully alive as joy and wonder filled my heart and soul.

I also had moments of doubt. On one of my walks, reflecting on all that I was learning from the trauma recovery training, I began to question myself. I had been feeling powerful and joyful because of the things I had experienced, the things I could see and do. 'Who am I to think I am so powerful? I am not powerful. I am small and insignificant." At that moment, I heard the call of a *Wheeskachan* (Whiskey Jack or Grey Jay). I looked toward the sound and saw the bird perched on a branch near a huge brown owl. The owl and I stared at each other for a few moments. It seemed to be asking me why I was being so silly, and then it lifted its great wings and flew off. My euphoria and joy immediately returned. I decided the encounter with the *Wheeskachan* and the owl was a sign that I truly am on my path, I truly am powerful, and can accomplish anything I want. I continued on my walk in a much different frame of mind.

I am retired from work now, and I am completing my Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality degree from St. Stephen's College. I use my skills in human resources and the trauma recovery therapy training and psychotherapy training at the graduate level to

counsel and coach managers of a large organization. If I do not know how to proceed in a situation, I ask for Spirit guidance, and it is there for me. I feel connected to all in the universe. I am no longer alone or afraid.

My innate knowledge and memories of who I am and who I was before society 'got to me' helped me to survive the trauma of losing my niece. It did more than that. It brought me to a place of ever-increasing wholeness, a place of power, strength, and fearlessness. I lived most of my adult life in a fog, in fear, and trepidation. It was only in my own home, with my husband and son or with my extended family where I was able to completely relax. My niece's death was the catalyst that led me to my life today, a life in which I embrace the wild, magical, and wonderful world I live in. Moorjani (2012) and Chopra (2008) encourage us to embrace life with joy and laughter and to live fearlessly. This is what I now aspire to do.

And I will see my dream come alive at last.
I will touch the sky

Diane Eve Warren

Chapter Five: Lily's Story

It's been a long night
Trying to find my way

Diane Eve Warren

I interviewed Lily in her home near High Prairie, Alberta. At the time of the interview she was 64 years of age although she looked much younger. Lily lives in a big open-style house with many big windows facing the four directions. The house is surrounded by trees. Lily emanates positive energy, warmth, and welcome, and I liked her immediately. We sat down and chatted while I set up the computer and the audio recording program. We discovered that her family had bought the house from one of my cousins with whom I had recently re-connected through Facebook. That connection contributed to our easy and relaxed interaction with each other.

We reviewed the Letter of Consent. I wanted to be certain that every aspect of the letter was covered and that we both understood and agreed with the intent of each paragraph. With Lily's agreement, I read each paragraph out loud and asked if she had any questions or issues with it before we moved to the next paragraph. She had no issues with any of it, and we signed the letter.

We talked about anonymity and confidentiality. Lily stated that anonymity was not necessary, and it would be fine with her if her identity was revealed. She had shared her story in the past, including in an interview with a journalist from CBC Radio, and she intended to write her memoirs in the future. I explained that for the purposes of the thesis and the requirements of the Ethics Review Committee, we would have to maintain her

anonymity, and she accepted that. I explained that I would use a pseudonym in place of her real name. This is Lily's story.

Lily was born in Northern Alberta and grew up in a place called Narrows, located across the lake from Faust and Joussard on the Lesser Slave Lake. Her family moved often, travelling back and forth from Narrows to Faust and around the Lesser Slave Lake in one town or another. As a child, Lily did not have a permanent home. She was shunted from place to place—from her parents' home to her siblings' homes, and she never had a stable home.

Lily had known violence and brutal assaults all her life. She experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, and abandonment from her childhood to adulthood. Her story is about survival. It is a story about strength, courage, and determination.

Lily experienced a physical assault before she was born. Her mother was tied to a tree and beaten to unconsciousness while she was pregnant in an attempt to get her to miscarry. "*I was beaten by a man before I even drew my first breath of air,"* she says. When she was born, her mother was not allowed to take care of her. She was left in a bedroom without any care, nurturing or food for three days. *"I had no contact, no human contact, when she put me in there, for three days. She wasn't allowed to change my diaper or feed me or touch me or anything."* When her husband was out of the house, her birth mother ran, with Lily, to her brother's house. She begged her brother to take the baby otherwise Lily was not going to survive. After three days of neglect, it seemed that Lily would die. She was barely breathing when her adoptive parents rushed her to the hospital. Her new mother was told that there was nothing to be done; the baby was not going to

survive. Lily survived thanks to her new mother's determination. Lily's mother dipped flour-sack cloth into milk which she would squirt into the baby's mouth in little drops, and eventually, she nursed Lily back to health.

Lily was unaware of the circumstances of her birth and believed her parents and siblings were her biological family. She was in her teens before she learned she had been adopted. She grew up feeling unloved and unwanted and often wondered why she was not treated the same as her siblings. "*I would wonder why I would get the hand-me-downs. I never got things at Christmas, no birthday celebrations, or anything and I didn't…I was the one who always had to take care of the small kids, do the cooking and cleaning…I had to be like a little soldier. Every morning before school I had to wash the floors…the wooden floors on my hands and knees before I went to school and that was when she (mother) was sober. If they were drinking, then I would have to do the laundry, the cooking, the cleaning, and the babysitting. Everything had to be done, and I was about 12 years old."*

One of her older sisters had not wanted her to join the family. She resented Lily and attempted to kill her several times. When the family was living in Narrows and Lily was alone on the dock with her, her sister pushed her off and held her under water. Fortunately people saw something was happening and ran towards them. Lily's sister then pulled her up, pretending she had rescued her. Her sister also attempted to strangle her and to smother her at different times. Fortunately for Lily, another sister watched out for her and would come to her rescue. She had her champions in the family—one sister who watched out for her and one brother who would often take the beatings intended for her.

When Lily was six years old, the sister who resented her was living in Slave Lake and took her in for a while. Lily was tasked with looking after her niece, a 9-month-old baby, while her sister and her husband worked outside on their logging truck. Lily had started school in Slave Lake and had new scribblers, pencils and crayons that she was proud to own. The baby wanted Lily's new things and would not stop crying. *"So I went out to tell my sister that the baby wouldn't stop crying and my sister said, 'I can't hear you so come up here and tell me.' So I climbed up on to the truck, the big truck, and stood by her and I said, 'Donna won't stop crying.' She asked, 'Why?' I said, 'She wants my papers and pencils and crayons, and I don't want to give them to her. She'll wreck them.' Then she grabbed me by the hair and she said, 'You give her those papers, and you let her have them!' and she threw me off the truck. I landed on my back on a 45-gallon drum. At that time, I just rolled off the barrel and went back inside the house. My back was really, really sore. I went back inside and gave her all my papers and pencils and everything she wanted. I just threw them in her crib and just let her do what she wanted with them…the baby, that is. When my sister came in, she saw that I had been crying all that time because my back was sore, and I was sad. I was hurt because I had to give up all my papers and pencils. She came inside and said, 'I can't keep you anymore. You're going back to Mom and Dad.'"*

Lily moved back in with her parents and attempted to go to school the following day. She had severe back pain and blurry vision. Her teacher sent her home, and when she got home, her mother sent her out to haul in the wood her father was chopping, indifferent to Lily's explanation about her back pain. Lily bent over to pick up the blocks of wood and could not straighten up. Her father helped her back into the house, and she was told to lie

down. It was not until her uncle arrived and saw the pain Lily was in that she was taken to the hospital. That was the last time Lily saw her family for three years. When her sister threw her off the logging truck and she landed on the 45-gallon drum, she had broken her back. She was hospitalized for three years, dealing first with the broken back and then with tuberculosis which had set in on her spine.

At the age of 10, Lily was released from the hospital and rejoined the family. At this time, her parents were using alcohol. When her parents and older siblings were drinking, she and her younger siblings would be afraid, fearing they would be beaten or abandoned. The family moved back and forth from Faust to the Narrows. In Narrows, they lived off the land, hunting, fishing, and picking berries. When her parents were sober, times were good. They did not go hungry. Lily's father hunted and fished while her mom baked, cooked, made dry meat, and smoked fish. At times, though, her parents would take the berries, dry meat, and fish and sell it in Faust, using the money for alcohol. They would leave the children at Narrows and would return periodically for more produce to sell. At 12 years of age, Lily was often left alone to look after the younger ones with her 14-year-old brother. They took care of the younger children for days and weeks at a time while their parents were off drinking and partying. Her brother hunted to feed the family while they waited for their parents to return.

Lily's memories of her early years are not happy ones. She felt unloved and unwanted and remembers her mother telling her she was a burden to the family. *"I never knew what that word meant. 'You are a burden to this family."* It was only later on in life that she found out what the word meant. *"So I never felt like I belonged in that family. I never felt like I belonged anywhere. I was always at search. You know I was always feeling*

lonely and sad and just not knowing where to go and what to do. I was always looking, looking but I didn't know what I was looking for."

Lily was neglected as a child. Her mother did not notice if she was hurt or in pain. When they were living in Widewater, her mother sent her into a shed to retrieve something. She stepped on a broken wine bottle which resulted in a deep cut in her ankle. Her mother did not pay any attention to the cut even though Lily was in a great deal of pain. She sent Lily to school, and one of the teachers noticed her pain and looked at her leg. The teacher realized she had blood poisoning and took her to the hospital where she got the help she needed.

Although there were some good times when Lily was growing up, she did not remember those times until well after she began her healing journey. All she could remember were the bad times when her parents and older siblings were drinking and fighting, beating each other up. Whenever that was happening, she tried to keep the younger ones safe and out of the way. Unfortunately, she could not keep herself safe, and when she was 11 years old, she was sexually assaulted by her oldest brother. There had been a party at the house, and Lily had hidden the children under a bed. When she thought it was safe to do so, they came out, and she put them to bed. Her brother found her in the bedroom and raped her, threatening to kill her if she told anyone. She never told, and the assaults continued until she left home at 16 years of age. *"I used to be so scared to stay home alone with the kids—to babysit the kids—especially if he was going to be there because I knew what would happen."*

When Lily found out she was adopted, she rebelled. She began drinking, and became involved with a young man from the community. At the age of 15, she gave birth to a baby girl. *"That baby was born in High Prairie on May 22, 1967, and I was living with my oldest sister back then. When I had her, the nurse, I don't know if she was a nurse or a nun because of the way she was dressed. I couldn't tell the difference. She came to me one morning after the baby was born, and she said, 'Are you married?' I said, 'No.' She said, 'Are you living with the baby's father?' I said, 'No.' She said, 'Are you living with your parents?' I said, 'No' because I was living with my sister. I grew up being told, all my life, 'Never, ever, ever, talk back to the White man. Never question the White man because they speak God's word.' Mom always said that because she grew up in the residential schools. So, I never, ever talked back to the White man. I never questioned them because according to my Mom and how I grew up, everything they said was right. It was real. It was truth. When this lady asked me if I was living with my parents and I said no, she said, 'Well you've committed an awful sin. You cannot have this child.' She took my baby out of my arms and she walked away. I never questioned her; I never fought for my baby because I didn't think I had any rights to. I let her walk away with that baby and that was in 1967. I never knew where my baby went, never knew where she grew up. I gave her a name, and that was it. I knew what day she was born, and I always remembered her birthday. Always."*

Lily lost her first baby as a result of the 60's Scoop, a practice carried out in Canada in which aboriginal children were taken from birth families and placed in non-aboriginal homes. Thousands of children were literally scooped from their homes and communities often without the knowledge and consent of their families. Although the practice continued

until the mid-1980's, the majority of children were taken in the decade of the 1960s; hence the practice was given the name the '60's Scoop' (Sinclair, 2007; Fournier & Crey, 1997).

After her baby's birth, Lily returned to her drinking and partying lifestyle because it was the only thing she knew how to do. She had quit school when she became pregnant and did not return afterwards. When she was 16, her father kicked her out of the house, telling her that she was now old enough to look after herself. She hitchhiked to the Yukon with a friend and lived there for two years. She continued to drink heavily but she also learned to support herself with various jobs such as housekeeping, waitressing, working as a nanny, and cleaning houses. After two years in the Yukon, she returned to her family in Alberta and became pregnant with her second child. Fearing this baby would also be taken away from her, she walked out of the hospital with her immediately after giving birth.

When Lily was 19 years old, she lived with a young man; an alcoholic who was physically abusive. She was pregnant and almost at full term when he beat her so badly, she went into labour. She managed to get herself to the hospital where she was immediately given drugs to ease her pain. *"I was in so much pain when I got there. I was all bruised, had a black eye, and I was bleeding because of the beating that I had gotten from the baby's dad. I went into the hospital, and as soon as they saw me, they started giving me needles. I don't know if it was morphine or what kind of drug it was, but it kept on knocking me out. I'd wake up, and they'd give me another needle. I'd go back under and be unconscious. I never heard a baby crying. I didn't even feel that I had given birth. The next morning I felt my belly area, and there was nothing there so I figured I probably gave birth to my baby. I asked the nurse, 'Could I carry my baby? Can I see my baby?' 'We're so sorry,' she said, 'but your baby didn't make it.' I had no reason to question that.*

Again, it was the White man who said that. They gave me a piece of paper to sign, and I was still groggy and drugged up, and I just signed it. I asked if I could leave, they said I could leave if I wanted to, and I left. That was on November 10, 1971."

What Lily did not know was that she was, once again, a victim of the 60's Scoop. She had been told her baby had died when, in fact, it had been stolen from her and put into a non-aboriginal home for adoption. She did not find this out until her daughter, who had been searching for her for 13 years, found her 31 years after her birth.

Lily's loss was not acknowledged by her family. It was as if the pregnancy had not happened. *"November 10, 1971, I gave birth to that child and I went through life not ever talking about her, not ever questioning. You know, nobody ever asked me about her in the family either because it was like…I should never have gotten pregnant to begin with. I was young, and I already had two kids. I shouldn't have had another one. Nobody ever talked about it. I never talked about it. I just left it alone. And that was…I was 19 years old."*

Lily met her first husband shortly after that. He was from the Driftpile Reserve and they met at a drinking party. They continued to drink and party together. One night, while they were partying at his aunt's home, he became impatient with her and beat her. She sustained a broken nose, a broken jaw, and various cuts and bruises. The next morning, she resolved to leave him and told him as much. He kept her a prisoner for several days and would not allow anyone to see her. She was finally able to get away and stayed away for two months. She did not know at the time that she was pregnant with her fourth child. When she discovered her pregnancy, she went back to live with her parents. Her husband found her there and asked her to return to him, promising he would not harm her again. She

believed him and did return with him to the Reserve. He managed to keep his promise for 10 years and worked and supported the family to the best of his abilities. They had three children together.

When their youngest child was in school, Lily told her husband that she wanted to go to school. *"I told him, 'I want to do something with my life. I don't want to live like this on the Reserve, getting a handout all the time and not being my own person. I want to do something for myself.' So, I went to school."* She enrolled in Athabasca University and the University of Alberta, taking courses via satellite. Her husband was not happy with her attempts to improve herself, and he began to drink more heavily and started beating her again. *"It was like he was afraid I was doing something good and he didn't want me to do good."* She continued taking the university courses part-time from 1984 through to 1987.

In 1987, she felt sick and went to a doctor in Slave Lake who referred her to a hospital in Edmonton. She was diagnosed with cancer and upon hearing that she would have about six months to one year to live, she went into a depression for a few days. Then, she started thinking about her children. They were still young and would not have a mother if she died. She decided she needed to live for them. In addition, the sister, who had tried to kill her when she was a child, was at her bedside every day, urging her to eat and trying to force-feed her. *"She was annoying me because I didn't want her there."*

So one day, she sat up and asked to see her doctor. The doctor asked what she needed to talk about. *"I said, 'Well, you told me that I was going to die, and I'm not going to accept that. I refuse to die,' He said, 'What do you mean?' 'Well, I'm just telling you that I'm refusing to die.' 'But, but, Lily, you don't know how serious this is. You've only*

got six months—a year if you're lucky.' 'BS,' I said, 'I don't have time to die. I have children. I want to see them grow up. I want to see graduations. I want to see weddings, and I want grandchildren.' He said, 'What do you want me to do?' and I said, 'You do whatever you have to do to get me better because I refuse to die. And you can start by getting this woman out of my room,' I said, 'because she's annoying me.' So, they got rid of my sister, told her not to come back while I was there. They prepped me for surgery right away."

The doctor had initially recommended surgery which she had refused, thinking that she did not want to continue to live the life she was living. After her recovery from surgery, her mother and one of her sisters were at the hospital to pick her up. Lily was very happy to see her mother. She had felt unloved, unwanted, and unworthy of anyone's attention for all of her life. Her mother coming to pick her up was a significant event—proof that her mother cared—and a heartwarming memory, even today.

When Lily went home, she found out that her children were scattered, living with various friends and relatives while her husband was living in her house with her best friend. The rejection and abandonment she felt, and the realization that her husband and best friend must have been together before she got sick, sent her into a deep despair, and she wished she had died. She did not know how to cope, how to deal with the rejection and sense of abandonment, and the hurt from being left for someone else. She forgot her good intentions regarding her children, and she went on a drinking spree which lasted for two years. During this period, her children were alone, abandoned, and neglected just as she had been as a child. She found out later that two of her daughters had been sexually abused by the same brother who had raped her.

While she was on this drinking spree, she divorced her first husband and met the man who was to become her second husband. He was also abusive. When Lily decided to sober up and get away from him, he tried to kill her by driving her truck into a fallen tree. The trunk of the tree went through the window and stopped inches from her face. When he saw she was unhurt, he reached over and punched her in the face. She managed to get out of the truck and ran down the road to a gas station. She made several attempts to leave and was living in Edmonton when he found her and tried to talk his way back into her life again. Lily decided the only way she could get away from him was to die, so she attempted suicide. She took pills, washed them down with alcohol, and locked herself in a bedroom. She woke up in a hospital to find him sitting beside her bed. She eventually did get away from him and divorced him.

At this point in her life, Lily wondered, "where do I go from here?" She was 41 years old, and it was time to do something about the sadness, pain, guilt, and shame that she had been carrying for all of her life. She remembers the moment she made that decision. She was on a Greyhound bus on route to Edmonton. When she got to St. Albert, she looked to the east and remembered there was a Poundmaker's Lodge and the Nechi Institute in that direction. In that moment, she decided she would go there. She joined the Nechi Institute program and trained to become a counsellor. *"I didn't want to take that training to become a counsellor, I wanted to take that training to get some healing."*

When Lily went to Nechi, she thought she needed to work through the trauma of the sexual abuse she had endured as a child. She did not realize that everything else she had lived through—the physical and emotional abuse from her family and her husbands, the sense of abandonment from her birth mother, the loss of her babies—all were traumas and

all contributed to her need for healing. She began her Nechi training and worked on her own personal healing.

She went to her first sweat at the invitation of a friend, a Caucasian man. *"I couldn't believe it, you know. Here is a White man inviting an Indian to go to a sweat, and I never knew what a sweat was. I never knew what a pow-wow was. I never knew anything because my parents growing up in the residential schools, we never practiced any of that stuff."* A sweat is an Aboriginal ceremonial spiritual practice which is performed in a heated, dome-shaped lodge. It uses heat and steam to cleanse toxins from the mind, body, and spirit (Naseba Marsh, Coholic, Cote-Meek & Najavits, 2015).

After completing the four-year program, Lily worked as a drug and alcohol counsellor. However, she continued to experience physical illnesses, such as kidney stones, bladder infections, and kidney infections, which she attributed to the need for further emotional healing. She saw a psychiatrist who referred her for group therapy, a 12-week program, at the Grey Nuns Hospital. During therapy, she realized that she resented her birth mother for having given her up. She had felt unwanted and believed she was considered to be undeserving to live with her birth mother's family. She talked about her feelings with her father, and it was then that he told her how she came to live with them. *"He took one whole year to legally adopt me, to tell me the story about how I came into their care and how my mother didn't have a choice but to give me away because she did that to save my life. So that all kind of fell into place before my dad passed away, and that's the greatest gift that he could have given me, setting things straight for me."*

While doing the Nechi training, Lily continued with the sweats. At a sweat at a Cree First Nations community situated in Central Alberta in Treaty No. 6 territory, she was invited to dance with Sun Dancers. She went to her first fast and first Sun Dance and while doing that, remembered that she wanted to heal from her traumas so that she could give back to her children, to make up for the times they were hungry, thirsty, lonely, sick, and scared, and she wasn't there for them. She honoured her children in her thoughts as she danced and also when she became a pipe carrier.

That was in 1999, and Lily has been dancing now for 18 years. *"I have to say the sweat lodge and the Sun Dance are what saved my life because that is what helped me get through, helped me to understand why I thought the way I thought. Why I did things the way I did things. Why things happened the way they happened. I came to understand myself and my people, my family. The way I understand things today is a lot different from the way they were back in the day when I first started being a young adult. I didn't know anything about spirituality. I knew about the Catholic Church, I knew about the Anglican Church, but I never knew anything about Native Spirituality. I got first-hand teachings. I turned to the Blackfoot people because I couldn't find anybody in the Cree Nation who would give me guidance and teach me our Cree ways. So I went south, and I approached the Blackfoot people and asked them to give me guidance. They allowed me to Sun Dance on their land, to join in with their Sun Dances. So I am quite fortunate for that. I always say I must give those people a big thank you for accepting me into their family and adopting me into the Blackfoot nation."*

Lily's family has come together since she started Sun Dancing, and she beams as she speaks of them. She has six daughters, 30 grandchildren, five great grandchildren, and her

family is complete. The second daughter that she lost in the 60's Scoop found her when she was in her second year of Sun Dancing. *"We hadn't been looking for her. I was looking for the first daughter—the oldest one that was taken from me in High Prairie. We were all looking for her, and this young lady was looking for us for 13 years, and we didn't even know. When I would be in a sweat lodge, I used to pray to her little spirit to take care of us, to come and take care of her sisters. I always felt someone beside me in the sweat lodge, but I didn't know that it wasn't her, or maybe it was her spirit coming to me… we all have a spirit—everything has a spirit that lives on Mother Earth."* Lily attributes her family's coming together to her spirituality.

"Now, today, in this house, I hold women's healing retreats twice a year. We do therapy, sweats, drumming, crafts, sharing circles, and pipe ceremonies. Last November I had 16 women when I had advertised for eight—so 16 women from B.C., Ontario and even one from the Czech Republic came. I help anyone who wants to work on their own healing and growing in any way that I can. The sweat lodge is in the back yard, just over on the other side of the bush there. We smudge regularly, and my kids participate in this cleansing ceremony."

> Smudging is the name given to the sacred smoke bowl blessing, a powerful Native North American cleansing technique…Smudging summons the spirits of sacred plants, asking them to drive away negativity and put you back into a state of balance. It is the psychic equivalent of washing your hands before eating and is used as an essential preliminary to almost all Native North American ceremonies. (Alexander, 2005, p. 16)

"Now my daughter who owns this house—she's been coming to the sweat regularly for almost a year now. My grandchildren and my daughters—those who come into the sweat—have gotten their spirit names, their Indian names. I have the right to give Indian spirit names. I have the right to conduct traditional wedding ceremonies. We've had three wedding ceremonies here with teepees, drumming, singing, and the pipe. People from Europe come here for retreats, for their weddings, and they've also paid my way to go to Europe to teach about the Sun Dance, holding sweats, and women's circles. Lately I've been going every year. Every season I hold a healing sweat for women in (one of the Reserves). I go around the world telling my story about being a Sun Dancer, being a cancer survivor, and how my 'scooped' daughters came back into my life."

"So, it's been amazing. This has been an amazing life for me, and I love it, and I wouldn't do it any other way. I don't think I would change anything if I had a chance to change anything. I don't think so because it would not have turned out the way it turned out. I really believe that I've come to find myself. I am not lonely anymore. I am not in search of something or someone anymore because I believe that I have found what I was looking for and that's me, in here." Lily placed a hand on her heart as she said this.

"One of the things that really helped me heal the most is forgiveness—learning to forgive the people who had harmed me and learning to forgive myself for the harm I had caused my children and anybody else. So the forgiveness is a major, major part of healing." Lily forgave her brother just before he died. *"I gave him an eagle feather and a blade of sweet grass and I said, 'I want you to know that I forgive you for what you've done to me in my life. You ruined my life as I was growing up.' He started crying, and he said 'I am so sorry.' 'It's okay.' I said, 'I forgive you.' Then he said, "Everything is going*

to be okay. I am ready to go now.' That night, he passed; but I didn't go there to make things right for him; I went there to release myself. It was for my own personal healing, and if it helped him cross over, that's good. I needed to let that go. I always knew that I was going to confront him somewhere, somehow. I just didn't know when and how. As for my sister, I forgave her a long time ago, and I don't hold any resentments towards anybody—any of my family, or anyone for that matter. I always think that's so much energy to carry—resentments and anger and shame and guilt. It takes a lot of energy to carry that, and I don't have that kind of energy. So, let it go."

Lily told her story without hesitation. She was open and honest as she recounted the events of her life story. I noticed that when she talked about her early years and the traumas that she had experienced, she spoke without showing any emotion, and her demeanor appeared almost frozen. It was as if she was telling the story while tamping down her emotions, and it seemed to me that it was the only way she could do it, despite all of the healing she claimed to have done. She became more animated and lively, and her lovely face shone as she talked about her healing journey and everything she is doing now.

I listened to Lily's story with openness, respect and interest. I paid careful attention and listened to the narrative while demonstrating my interest in everything she had to say. I made sure I did not react with anger, sympathy, or shock at some of the things that had happened to her. I stayed calm and open to hearing everything without bias or judgement.

I left Lily's house, and during the three-hour drive home, I developed a severe ear ache which lasted for several days. I assumed I caught some sort of virus, and it was only later that I wondered if my ear ache was a physical reaction to the horrific stories I heard

from Lily. I had been taught, during the trauma recovery therapy training, how to shield myself from negative energies and the distress of others, however, in my desire to pay careful attention and to really hear Lily's story, I neglected to ensure I was properly shielded. I wonder if the ear ache occurred as a result of what I heard.

While I was transcribing the audio recording, I found myself so angry at the callousness of the woman who took her first baby, my body became rigid and I was shaking. I wanted to see her severely punished for what she had done. I wanted her to be hurt as badly as she had hurt Lily, or at the very least, to understand what she had done to Lily. How could a woman be so heartless as to take a child away from a mother? I had not felt such anger toward anyone before, and it surprised and shocked me. I do not regret the anger; it is a strong and very honest emotion. Lily talked about forgiveness, and I decided if she can forgive, then I resolve to try to do so as well.

I am humbled and in awe of this strong and amazing woman and all that she has accomplished in her life. Her path was not an easy one. She had a very difficult beginning, and she survived with her spirit intact. I am honoured to have met her, and I am deeply grateful to be able to share her story. I am proud to call her my friend.

Been through the darkness
Now I finally have my day

Diane Eve Warren

Chapter Six: Linda's Story

I've got strength of the soul
And no one's gonna bend or break me

Diane Eve Warren

Linda is a 65 year old Métis woman living in Northern Alberta. She was born in Fort Smith, a small town in the South Slave Region of the Northwest Territories. She grew up in Fort Chipewyan (Fort Chip), a hamlet in Northern Alberta within the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. Her father, of French heritage, was originally from the Lac La Biche area, and her mother came from the Mikisew First Nation. Linda is a tall and beautiful woman with a warm and gregarious personality. She is well known, loved and respected in the community.

I interviewed Linda on a Saturday afternoon in her office in Grande Prairie. She manages the local branch of a Provincial organization and has worked for them for 37 years. It is demanding work, and Linda works long hours, including evenings and weekends. She worked on a PowerPoint presentation while I set up the audio recording equipment.

Linda's office reflects her warm personality. She has managed to perfectly blend the comforts of home with the demands of an office. There are displays of gifts that had been given to her, photographs of her family, art work featuring spirit animals, figurines, collectables, and plaques with positive messages. Birch bark baskets and beadwork, created by Métis craftspeople, as well as items used in Aboriginal ceremonies, such as eagle feathers and sweetgrass are also on display in her office.

She welcomed me into her space and offered me a variety of teas to choose from, and we chatted while I set up the recording equipment. I immediately felt welcome and comfortable. She initially thought she could continue to work on her PowerPoint presentation while she answered my questions. However, when I began the interview, she put her PowerPoint work aside and gave me her complete attention for the 90 minutes I spent with her.

We talked about the Letter of Consent. I had forgotten to bring the printed copies with me, so I pulled up the document on my computer and read it to her. As with Lily, I made sure we both agreed on the intent of each paragraph before moving on to the next. Linda did not have any concerns with the Letter of Consent, and we agreed we would sign it at our next meeting—which we did.

We talked about anonymity and confidentiality, and Linda stated that she did not have a problem with being identified in the thesis. As with Lily, I explained the need for anonymity as required by the Ethics Review Committee, and she accepted that. She chose the name, Linda, for her pseudonym. This is Linda's story:

"So I came into this Earth—I was rejected by my mom." Linda believes the rejection was because she had dark skin. Being of Métis heritage, most of her siblings were fair. Two of her brothers also had darker skin; however, their skin colour did not matter to the family. They were welcomed and very well treated. In Métis families, as Linda says, *"Male children were like little kings."* Linda, being a female with dark skin, felt the rejection and felt unworthy.

Linda was 13 years old when she discovered another possible reason for her mother's rejection of her. She was born in Fort Smith, in the Northwest Territories, and she was the only one of her siblings to have been born there. Her mother told her that she had gone to Fort Smith to have her. She had been pleased, thinking that her husband cared for her and was looking after her by sending her to Fort Smith. When she returned home to Fort Chip with baby Linda, she discovered that her husband was having an affair with her sister. She realized she had been sent to Fort Smith to get her out of the way. Linda believes her mother directed her pain and anger toward her because her father used Linda's pending birth as the excuse to send her mother away.

For many years, Linda received a strong message that she was not worthy, and she was driven to change that. She strove for perfection, to show her mother that she was worthy. She began working when she was 13 years old, washing dishes in a hospital and cleaning houses while attending school. Despite her efforts, she never felt that she achieved the acceptance she desired from her mother. She did not feel loved by her mother; instead she felt only resentment. She looks back to those times now and understands that her mother did her best for her family, given her skills and her knowledge. *"She's been gone now for 18 years, and I wish I had come to where I am today—to acceptance and understanding—while she was alive. It did take me a long time to get there."*

Although she was raised in a family that did not express love verbally, Linda knew she had her father's love. She saw him as a strong, proud, and hard-working man and believes that her values and beliefs were shaped by his example. He was a highly respected individual in the community. Linda says, *"You always knew where you stood with him."*

Linda said that people often commented that she was very much like her father. She takes pride in that. Like her father, she has a strong work ethic.

Linda believes in and uses aboriginal medicines for healing. When she was 5 years old, she observed the healing power of medicinal plants used by her great-grandmother, who was a medicine woman. Linda tells a story about how her great-grandmother healed her grandmother who was seriously ill and expected to die. *"I remember my mom taking me to see her that morning, and she was really upset. She told me I had to be quiet and behave myself because Granny was going to die. We get to Granny's house and it was like coming upon a house of death—that's how it felt because it was really quiet, and we had to be quiet."*

Her great-grandmother took Linda into the hills to help her pick medicine plants. They boiled the plants and gave the broth to her grandmother. After she was given the medicine, Linda's grandmother recovered her health. It seemed to Linda that her grandmother recovered within a day, and it was as though she had never been sick. This was a profound lesson for Linda, and she was honoured to have helped her great-grandmother in her work as a medicine woman. Later, she learned that her paternal grandmother had been a midwife and had delivered many babies. Linda feels blessed to have had these two strong healers in her life.

Linda attended the residential school in Fort Chip. *"Being Métis, we did not have to go into the residential school for the night. We didn't have to stay there; we day schooled. We were still impacted by the abuse; the verbal abuse was very prevalent. I was always told how black I was and that I was never going to amount to anything. I remember*

hearing that from the nuns and being strapped, my hair being pulled—all those things. Those are very, very clear to me, those memories. I was there for about two years, in Fort Chip." The children were segregated, even during meals. A fence divided the girls from the boys at the back of the building, and they were not allowed to talk to each other, even if they were siblings. Breaking this rule meant getting the strap.

"Back then, it seemed like I was always getting into trouble and I was always trying to run away or hide from the nuns. I remember taking off when I was being sent to the office for a strap. I remember a few times rather than taking the strap, I took off out the door and ran home. I do remember that." Logan (2007) explained that Métis attendance and discharge from residential schools was not as strict as it was with First Nations students who faced mandatory and forcible attendance. "Métis parents had a level of self-determination in deciding whether their children would attend residential schools" (p. 75). This made it possible for Linda to run home during school hours in order to avoid the strap.

Linda has good memories of her life in Fort Chip. They always had good food to eat, and they were well looked after. The children all had chores, and the family worked together. They lived off the land, and she recalls a time when they were out on the trapline. *"We were running short of food. I found out later the plane forgot to come and get us before the river broke. My father built a big raft out of logs, and he put what I call a Métis tent on top; it had a stove in it…and down the river we went, going back to Fort Chip. At one point we were all quiet…there was a lot of fear and my dad—to think all his kids were there and everything—he was taking us through to try to get us home safely and…we made it! My sister said that was a very scary time because he was taking us through the rapids,*

and of course I didn't know that—I was little, right? I knew enough to keep quiet; he was so stressed out."

Linda recently ran into a man who had lived in Fort Chip when they were both children. She assumed they would have been playmates, however, he told her that his family had not socialized with hers because her family was rich. She was surprised to hear this and mentioned the incident to her sister. Her sister confirmed that they were indeed considered rich when they lived in Fort Chip. They were the only people who had a generator and the only ones who ordered food from the boat which came twice a year. Linda remembers they would have big boxes of fruit brought in for them—apples, oranges, and watermelon. By the standards in Fort Chip, they were rich people.

Although Linda does not remember feeling like a second-class citizen in Fort Chip—those feelings of inferiority came later after their move to Fort Smith—her sister told her that she was not treated as well as she should have been when they were growing up there. This sister, who was nine years older, felt sorry for her and decided she would take care of her. Linda bonded to her and loved her as a mother and best friend. When they were adults and her sister was going into surgery, Linda had an opportunity to tell her how she felt. Her sister told her that she, too, loved her as a daughter rather than a younger sister.

When Linda was 7 years old, the family moved to Fort Smith, searching for better opportunities. Her parents were hard workers and both found jobs immediately—her mother as a cook and her father as a carpenter. In time, her father owned a taxi service, and her mother owned a Northern Fried Chicken restaurant.

In Fort Smith, her parents started drinking. Linda does not remember seeing anyone intoxicated when she was growing up in Fort Chip. Alcohol was not sold there. It was readily available in Fort Smith, and it brought violence into the family. Her parents would fight whenever they were drinking. *"My dad would actually seem like, at times, just like he was a crazy man. I remember him chasing us with a gun, chasing us and throwing stones at us. I remember hiding and living in fear when alcohol was around."* As a result of these experiences, as an adult, Linda was determined to keep alcohol out of her life. She refused to expose her children to a life which included alcohol or heavy drinking.

When Linda was 11 years old, rushing out the door to catch the school bus, she tripped on a power cord, causing a hot toaster to fall on her little sister's leg. Her sister, a two-year old toddler, was hospitalized, with burns. Linda overheard her father talking about the accident, blaming her for causing it. Her parents were drinking, and the more he talked about the accident, the angrier he became and the more determined that he would make her pay. Linda knew he would be looking for her, and she became fearful and hid. However, she had been raised to be obedient, and when he called her, she went to him, even though she knew what was going to happen.

"He started beating on me. First he took a skate and he was beating me up with the skate, and I remember I was just screaming, hollering for my life. He was just beating on me. Then, he takes…because, I'm guessing, he didn't see any blood or whatever, maybe he didn't feel he was having an impact…he picked up a cast iron frying pan and whacked me over the head. Then I had this big gash and blood just started pouring. At that point, I tried to get away from him. I remember I had a white sweater—I always remember that—and it was just soaked with blood really fast. I crawled up the steps and he left me then."

What troubled Linda about the incident, more than anything, was the lack of response from her mother. *"My mom only came out after she felt it was safe. That really impacted me for many, many years. I couldn't have this conversation like I am having with you about this today had I not done a lot of healing in my own time. I could not understand, as a mother, how she would not come to stop it, to protect me. How could she know, hear me being beaten, and not come to rescue me? That troubled me for a long time. I really had a hard time with that. I would cry every time I talked about it. I was 11 years old when that happened, and I left home when I was 15."*

Linda's mother was a residential school survivor. Linda says she never talked about what happened to her while in residential school, and she now attributes much of her mother's anger and self-destructive behaviour to those experiences. *"She never spoke about her experience; she never once talked about residential school. I believe things happened in residential school that she took to her grave with her…just from her behaviour. When I look back and see how she basically just self-destructed in a lot of ways, I think that had to do with residential school."*

Religion played a big role in Linda's life when she was young. The Catholic influence was strong, and Christianity had been entrenched in the family for generations. Linda's great-grandfather helped to build the mission in Lac La Biche. This mission, which includes a convent as well as a church, is now a Parks Canada National Historic Site. Her great-grandfather was a brother in the Catholic Church although he left the Church in order to marry her great-grandmother. One of her cousins is a nun. The family attended mass every Sunday and often during the week as well. The priests and nuns visited them,

especially in Fort Smith, at least once a week, if not more. Christianity was simply a part of their lives.

Linda does not recall having a sense of spirituality, of connection, when she married and moved to Grande Prairie. *"I felt a real void. I was feeling something was missing in my life."* She attended the Catholic Church, however, she felt as though she was simply going through the motions. Later on she tried other religions and found the sense of connection she was searching for at People's Full Gospel Church. Her family refused to attend that church with her, so, for a time she alternated between the two, attending the Catholic mass one weekend and the People's Full Gospel service the following weekend.

Linda had experienced racism in the past and assumed that people in Grande Prairie were prejudiced when they stared at her. However that might not have been true. *"When I first came to Grande Prairie, this one lady said to me, 'You know, you think that people are prejudiced towards you because they stare at you. Do you not ever think they stare at you because you're beautiful?' Well, I couldn't comprehend that. She said, 'You're a very attractive lady. You look like a model. That's probably why they stare at you, not because you're Native.' But I really felt inferior, and a lot of that, I understand now, comes from my own self and the messaging I was getting back from my own family of being dark and not accepted. There was a lot of different messaging that I got around me, and so that's what I believed."*

Linda says she definitely did experience racism at times. She hosted an open house when they first established their home in Grande Prairie. She invited her sisters to the open house. Her sisters were sitting together, speaking Cree. *"My neighbours were sitting near*

me, and I was enjoying my little glass of Baby Duck when I heard my neighbour say, 'I didn't know she was an Indian,' and his wife said, 'No, I didn't either.' The way they said it, it was like, 'What are we doing here? She's an Indian!' You know—as though I was something totally disgusting. It really bothered me. I got up immediately because, at that time, everybody thought all Indians drank wine. I got up and threw my wine away in the sink, and I poured myself coffee. As I was pouring the coffee, the guy followed me up into the kitchen, and he has one hand up and he's shaking his head. He says, 'You're an Indian?' and I said, 'Yeah, I am' because I didn't really feel I should have to explain I am Métis and who I am. He said, 'Where are you from?' After I told him where I was from, he said, 'You Indians must be really different up there.' You must be really different. So yeah, I experienced some of that definitely—the racism. Of course it contributes to your self-esteem, your self-identity."

When Linda was 28 years old, she was hired by a provincial organization which worked with aboriginal clients. Shortly after starting her job, she attended her first big Métis meeting in Valleyview, and she was appalled at what she observed. It was an election year, and people seemed so mean-spirited and unkind to one another. *"I remember thinking either I have to really get involved to try to make a difference, or I have to stay away from this. That's what I remember thinking as I walked away."* She resolved to get more involved.

Linda is grateful to the organization she works with. She believes that she connected with her Métis heritage as a result of joining the organization 37 years ago. *"I see (the organization) as my second family because it helped me to be who I am. I always think, 'what would have happened to me if I didn't start working here?' They connected me to my*

culture, and I wouldn't be who I am today if I did not embrace my culture and the ways of Aboriginal peoples." Her first experience with Aboriginal spirituality was a smudging at a work meeting in Edmonton shortly after commencing her employment. She did not understand what smudging was about, and no one explained it to her, assuming that, being Aboriginal, she would know all about it.

She connected with her Aboriginal community and her Métis heritage and helped to found Métis Local 1990. *"I think it's really important to have that strong self-identity. Because I look back and I think I was like a tree…waving back and forth at times and just kind of weak."*

Linda asserts that it is important to say Métis. *"For years I didn't say Métis, I used to say Aboriginal. I thought it promoted more collective thinking, and it was more inclusive."* At a national conference in Winnipeg, she learned that it was important to educate people about the Métis and to promote the Métis culture because the Métis are a distinct people from First Nations people. *"Back then, people used to mix those two. Our culture is very distinct from First Nations culture even though a lot of us practice First Nations ways."*

When Linda was 30 years old, she drove to the Northwest Territories with her children to join her husband who was working there. She bent over to pick something up off the floor and experienced a sharp pain in her head; in the area where her father had hit her when she was 11 years old. The intense pain continued to plague her during her two-week stay in the Territories, and she had a difficult time concentrating on the drive back to

Grande Prairie. In Grande Prairie, she went to QEII Hospital Emergency where she was diagnosed with a condition called Trigeminal Neuralgia and prescribed the drug, Tegretol.

She was on Tegretol for two months, and the side effects were almost worse than the pain. She felt disconnected and tired, and she could not think or focus. All she wanted to do was sleep. A side effect of the drug that she experienced was suicidal ideation. Although she had fleeting thoughts of suicide at times, she did not carry through, knowing that her children needed her. Linda returned to her doctor and told him she needed something other than Tegretol because she was neglecting her children. This was during the summer, and her husband was away. She would get home from work, fall asleep on the couch, and the children would put her to bed. She told her doctor she could not continue to live like that. Her doctor referred her to a neurologist in Edmonton for surgery. Linda felt that anything had to be better than the pills.

She chose her neurologist because his office was close to the offices of the organization she worked for. This decision turned out to be providential because the neurologist impacted her life in a positive way. He talked to her about her lifestyle, encouraged her to take vitamins, and to eat healthier foods. He suggested self-help books written by authors such as Wayne Dyer and Louise Hay. He refused to do the invasive surgery until she had tried the alternative approach he was recommending.

"It was the best thing he did because now I started journeying to the health food store, and I started looking at a different way of life. That's been a blessing because I stayed symptom-free most of my life, thanks to all the different therapies I've had, being

grounded; and connected to our higher power. For me, that's really what's kept me healthy."

Linda wanted to share her new knowledge with others and saw an opportunity when the restorative justice program they were using at work was ineffective. She told her team that they were going to do things differently. *"We look at our ancestors; they knew how to heal, right? If we look at the Medicine Wheel teachings…there are seven sacred teachings…it is about balance. If we can help people to look after themselves physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually—that's what we need!"* She told them the current program was too complex and difficult. *"If we can honour people where they are, honour the gifts they are given to come in to share, we can all strengthen our circle together."*

She developed the Healing Tears program, and it was hugely successful. Her own learning progressed during this time. She worked with Elders and facilitated healing circles. *"Really, it's about honouring one another and helping one another grow. You listen to one another in a circle. People come to a circle feeling alone and they're the only one suffering with whatever it is they're suffering from…marriage break-up, relationship break-up…or losing their children… there were many things…drugs, alcohol. Then they start listening to one another and it's like they start saying, 'Oh my God, I thought I was alone. You're just like you're telling my story.' All the common threads come together."*

This was a high point in Linda's career, and it is why she advocates for traditional ways of healing. She used the Medicine Wheel to provide opportunities for dialogue. When they focused on the physical quadrant of the Medicine Wheel, they discussed the impact of diabetes in the lives of Métis people. In her calm and gentle manner, she told them what

she learned from Louise Hay's book: that people who suffer from diabetes don't feel loved. *"I said, "Isn't that so, right? A lot of Métis people don't feel loved so it makes sense that we suffer from diabetes. So the affirmation is, "I love myself, I love myself.'"* She brought in a psychologist who worked with the group on the emotional quadrant of the Medicine Wheel. Working with an Elder, he helped people to understand trauma and triggers. Another team member focussed attention on the mental side of the Wheel, teaching life skills. *"Then we had Elders come in on the fourth week—male and female Elders—and I was amazed at what I witnessed. We would have 50 to 60 people in that room, including kids, and nobody would make noise. Everyone was so in awe at what the Elders were teaching. We always did our ceremonies with the Elders, and it was just rich—really, really rich."* The results Linda accomplished with her Healing Circle were powerful and effective. She saw the positive results in the young people she worked with, *"Seeing their transformation filled me with gratitude."* Linda explained that the young women became more nurturing mothers, no longer scolding their children and instead, treating them gently and guiding them with love. Those who needed it accessed addictions counselling and journeyed in healthy and traditional ways, becoming productive members of the community. Many accessed further education and are now gainfully employed. Linda believes the women transformed as a result of connection to Spirit. She says that's really what changed them.

Linda has worked with many powerful Elders over the years, and she has learned a great deal from them. One Elder she connected with was a medicine man, a highly respected sweatlodge holder and pipe carrier. The two of them had been selected to speak for the organization she worked for, and she was feeling some anxiety about speaking in

public. He noticed her anxiety and confided to her that he was nervous. He suggested a smudging to prepare for the interview and gave her a rock to hold. It was the perfect way to settle her nerves, and the interviews were a great success. She realized later that he was not nervous—it was his respectful and gentle way of helping her to deal with her anxiety.

He also encouraged her to carry out her first healing. She had asked him to help a woman who was not feeling well. He told her she could carry out the healing herself and promised to help her. As she was smudging with the woman, she kept receiving thoughts that she felt were coming from him. A recurring thought about an herb called black cohosh caused her to send the woman to the health food store. She deduced the woman was going through menopause and the herb would help with the symptoms. After the healing ceremony and the visit to the health food store, the woman regained her health and sense of wellbeing. Linda believes the healing—determining what was wrong and what to do about it—was successful and that the Elder's help was a factor in her success with this first attempt.

Many Elders and healers have told Linda that she has a gift for healing and that she needs to start doing this work. *"Some years back I was told I have the ability to help with healing. I pick up on energy. I am intuitive. I know things that are going to happen before they happen. Those are gifts that were given to me. I didn't like them when I was young. I would see things, know things—I really didn't like it, but as I've gotten older, I embrace it and I think it's a blessing."* She plans to work with an Elder who has offered to transfer her knowledge to her. *"Evelyn does energy work. It's clearing. So I'm really looking forward to working with her."*

Linda believes in reincarnation. As a child, she remembers running for cover from bombs and knows the memory is from a previous life. About 18 years ago, she went to an aura reader. She was told that she was an old soul and had lived many lives, most of them as a male. She was also told that she had been in a war in a previous life. She now understands why her memory of running from bombs was a vivid memory for her. *"Then she says to me…made me cry…she says to me, 'In this life, the reason you came back this time, you're here to experience rejection.' I can't tell you how much rejection I have felt in my life's journey. It's been very intense. To come into this world, being rejected…"*

Linda also kept seeing a landslide when she was 4 years old. That landslide actually happened five years later. *"You think I'm going to tell anyone? They would call me crazy! At a very young age, right? When I was 11, that land slide happened. I saw it a good four years before it ever happened. I think if I had said something about it, people would have said, "Oh, she's really nuts! That young kid is nuts!"* Today Linda does not hide her gifts. She is no longer afraid to be thought 'nuts'. She embraces the person she is, the power she has, and the ability to help others heal.

Linda has had other experiences that defy explanation. She connected with the eagle while attending a gathering of Aboriginal healers about 10 years ago. She went to two women for a healing. *"That experience was totally amazing. I went in there, and they wrapped me in a blanket. They were chanting and praying, and all of a sudden I feel like an eagle is flying in front of me. I thought they must have their eagle fans—the energy was really powerful. I opened my eyes, and they were both praying, and their eagle fans were laying on the ground. These past two years, when I am travelling, I always see eagles on my journey. I'm amazed. When I go to Slave Lake, I count 30 to 50 eagles. I see eagles as a*

strong spiritual symbol for us because they're the ones that fly the highest. I've always felt that when I see an eagle, I'm going to have a good journey. That's what the Elders say. If you see an eagle, it's almost like they're travelling ahead of you, and they see that your journey is going to be a good journey. I think it's really powerful."

"My journey really started when I got whacked on the head when I was 11 years old, and little did I know that it was going to lead me to the…more the wake-up in my journey. The pain I experienced when I was 30 was related to what happened to me when I was 11. That led me to a doctor who opened up a whole new world for me and that helped me move away from the feeling of being unworthy.

I've had opportunities from both worlds. I reached out and got the help I needed. My Aboriginal spiritualism, my connection with the smudging ceremonies, the pipe ceremonies—those were the things that helped me to ground myself and to connect to my higher power. Those were really profound for me. That's what really helped in terms of my healing journey."

I knew Linda in a professional capacity prior to having her participate as one of my co-researchers, and I wanted to make sure that would not compromise the research I was doing. There was no need for worry. She is a professional in her work, and once she decided to participate, she told her story without hesitation and in a matter of fact way. In my former human resources role, I often interviewed friends and acquaintances, and I learned how to do this in a professional, non-judgemental and unbiased manner. I automatically stepped into that role and listened as carefully and attentively to Linda as I had with Lily. I came to the interview with an open heart and no preconceived assumptions

much as I have done in the past with internal job interviews during my career in the human resources field.

As with Lily, I am humbled and in awe of this wise, strong, and powerful woman and all that she has accomplished in her life. I appreciated the time she took out of her busy schedule to share her story with me, and I cherish our friendship even more than I did before. I am grateful and honoured to share her story here.

I've got faith to believe
I can do anything

Diane Eve Warren

Chapter Seven: Summary of the Findings

But I'll be fine
Cause I've got faith of the heart

Diane Eve Warren

This narrative inquiry is to determine if Métis women had experienced a spiritual transformation as a part of their healing from trauma, and if the transformation was rooted in their spiritual heritage. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data, in the form of the life stories and lived experiences of my co-researchers. Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) noted that, when asked, people will usually tell their stories with a beginning, middle and end, and with a plot line, characters and resolution. The shared narratives of my co-researchers followed this order although there was occasionally regressive movement as they recalled details.

Three main themes emerged from the data analysis. These themes are grouped under the headings: (a) tragic life events with potential for traumatic responses, (b) spiritual growth resulting from life circumstances, and (c) returning to the roots of spiritual heritage. Detailed information on each theme is provided in this chapter.

Tragic Life Events with Potential for Traumatic Responses

Trauma-Potential Experiences in Childhood.

As children, my co-researchers and I experienced events that were potential stimuli for trauma responses. The life experiences that Lily and Linda shared with me may have contributed to trauma they worked through in their adulthood. My childhood experiences, although similar, were less distressing with less potential for traumatic outcomes.

My Trauma-Potential Experiences in Childhood.

I was cherished by my parents and my grandfather, and I was shielded from upsetting events. I remember sensing caution and wariness from the adults whenever a White man visited. As children, we were often sent away to play outside or kept close to my grandfather while he dealt with the visitor. I may have sensed the feelings of fear and inferiority being experienced by the adults for I remember asking my mother what we were. When she asked what I meant, I said, "Well, we are not White and we are not Indian, so what are we?" Her answer was a hesitant, "Half-breeds". Her response seemed to indicate that she was embarrassed, and I resolved then and there, that I would not accept that label. I did not know what I was, but I was not a half-breed.

Most of my father's siblings were alcoholics, and, when I was young, he also drank heavily. He was often away working in logging camps, and he would frequently party with his friends until the money was gone, instead of coming home with his pay. He and my mother fought whenever this happened. Although the fighting between my parents created anxiety and uncertainty, I did not fear or expect to be beaten. My father stopped his heavy drinking while I was still young, and even though I saw the adverse effects of alcohol in our neighbours and our uncles as I was growing up, I was not significantly distressed by it. If they were inebriated when they dropped by the house, I stayed away from them, and they left me alone. They knew they would face my father's wrath if they hurt me.

Lily's Trauma-Potential Experiences in Childhood.

Lily's childhood memories are not happy ones. She experienced many potentially traumatic events. She felt unloved and unwanted by her family and, for the first 15 years of

her life, she wondered why she was treated differently. She did not have birthday celebrations or receive Christmas gifts, and her clothing was handed down from her siblings, who received new clothes. She was expected to look after the younger children and do the majority of the household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Learning that she was adopted caused Lily to feel yet another rejection, this time from her birth mother.

Lily often incurred serious injuries as a child, and her mother did not appear concerned. Her mother dismissed Lily's complaints and accused her of using her injuries as an excuse to miss school. Lily was sent to school twice with injuries that were serious enough to result in her hospitalization—once with a broken back, and once with blood poisoning from a deep cut on her leg. In both cases, she was hospitalized only after someone outside of the immediate family noticed that she was in distress.

Many of the trauma-potential events in Lily's childhood happened because of her family's use of alcohol. She remembers her parents and older siblings drinking and fighting with each other. Whenever that happened, she tried to keep her younger siblings safe and out of the way, fearing they would be beaten. The children were frequently left alone for weeks at a time while their parents were drinking and partying. It would fall upon Lily and her brother to take care of their siblings until their parents returned.

When Lily was 11 years old, she was sexually assaulted by her oldest brother. He threatened to kill her if she told anyone. She never told anyone, and the assaults continued until she left home when she was 16 years old.

Linda's Trauma-Potential Experiences in Childhood.

Although memories of her childhood are generally good, Linda also experienced events with potential for trauma when she was growing up. At her interview, her first words were, *"So I came into this Earth—I was rejected by my mom."* For many years, Linda understood that she was not deemed worthy, and she worked hard to try to change that. When she was 13 years old, she worked as a dishwasher in a hospital and cleaned houses after school and on weekends. Despite her efforts, she never felt that she achieved the love and acceptance she was striving for. She felt only resentment from her mother.

Linda attended residential school in Fort Chip and, although, as a Métis, she was day schooled and not required to stay in residence, she, too, experienced physical and verbal abuse. *"I was always told how black I was and that I was never going to amount to anything. I remember hearing that from the nuns."* She also remembers being strapped and her hair being pulled. She often ran home during school hours to avoid the strap.

The use of alcohol also impacted Linda's family, creating situations that were potentially traumatic. Her parents fought when they drank. *"My dad would actually seem like, at times, just like he was a crazy man. I remember him chasing us with a gun, chasing us and throwing stones at us."* Linda remembers being fearful and hiding when her parents were drinking.

At 11 years old, Linda was brutally beaten by her father while he was intoxicated. He did not stop beating her until she was bleeding profusely from a head wound. To add to the physical and emotional pain of the beating, Linda was unable to comprehend her mother's

inaction. She could not understand why her mother had not come to her rescue while she was being beaten. She carried the pain of that memory for a very long time.

Our Trauma-Potential Experiences in Childhood.

As children, my co-researchers and I had similar experiences with alcohol abuse within our families during our childhood. We all witnessed our parents fighting when one or both were drinking. Lily and Linda both endured physical beatings from people who were intoxicated. Lily experienced sexual assaults. These experiences all had the potential to cause trauma responses in us (van der Kolk, 2014).

We also shared feelings of inferiority. Both Lily and Linda felt unloved and unwanted by their families. Lily was taught that Caucasians were superior to her. The nuns who ran the residential school in Fort Smith denigrated Linda over her dark skin and indicated to her that she was not good enough to achieve success in life. I wanted to know where I fit in the world, and I did not want to accept my mother's answer. I rejected the label 'half-breed' because that would make me inferior to others. Still, even at the time, I knew that a simple rejection would not change who I was. My attempted rejection of the label indicates, to me, that I did not like it because it made me feel as less than others.

Trauma-Potential Experiences in Adulthood.

In adulthood, we all experienced tragic life events that had the potential to cause traumatic responses. Rothschild (2000) stated that experiencing a traumatic event does not necessarily mean that a person will develop PTSD. She listed the following nonclinical factors as those which can mediate traumatic stress: successful flight or fight responses, preparation for expected stress, prior experience, a person's belief system, developmental

history, internal resources and support from family, community and social networks (Rothschild, 2000). Did my co-researchers and I have a sufficient number of those factors in our lives?

My Trauma-Potential Experiences in Adulthood.

During the early years of our marriage, my husband and I lived in Edmonton, Alberta. As a young Métis woman, I found living in a predominantly White community emotionally and soulfully challenging. I encountered racism at work, from co-workers and occasionally from management. I missed the sense of belonging and connection to others in the workplace, and although I would not have been able to express it at the time, I now know that I felt Spirit was missing from my workplace (Adams, Bezner, Drabbs, Zambarano & Steinhardt, 2000; Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008).

I also encountered racism at social functions. My husband is Caucasian, and people were often unaware that I was of Indigenous ancestry. I learned to expect and to dread thoughtless remarks about "Indians". My identity was interwoven with the term 'Indian,' and when people used the word to disparage anyone who was of First Nations or Métis heritage, I felt shocked, bewildered, and deeply hurt. I lived in constant fear of this occurring when my husband and I were at a social function. I recognize now that I experienced significant trauma responses whenever this occurred. I would freeze, my heart would pound, and I was unable to fight or flee (Rothschild, 2000). I was embarrassed, ashamed, and angry. I would think about my parents. They were hardworking, honest, respectful, and humble people. They did not deserve disrespect from these people.

Having a sense of belonging and feeling connected to others are both spiritual needs. When these needs are not met, we experience spiritual distress (Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen & Stollenwerk, 1985; Benner Carson & Stoll, 2008). I realize that I was experiencing spiritual distress (Falsetti, Resick & Davis, 2003; Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005; Perera & Frazier, 2013). I experienced physical illnesses, such as kidney infections and ulcers. Carmody, Reed, Kristeller, and Merriam (2008) found that improvements in spirituality appeared to be associated with improvements in psychological and medical symptoms. I wonder if those illnesses were symptoms of my spiritual distress.

One of my core beliefs is that we (humanity) are created equal. Bartel's (2004) definition of spiritual distress included conflict between a person's core beliefs and their personal experience as cause for spiritual distress (as cited in Skalla & Ferrell, 2015). Even though I did not describe my pain in spiritual terms in those early days of my marriage, I now acknowledge that each encounter of racism caused me to experience deep soul wounding. Each experience created a conflict between my core beliefs and my personal experience.

In 2006, my 14-year-old niece, Richelle, died. I was not prepared for this devastating death, and it caused me to descend into a dark, lonely, and bleak place from which I could not free myself. I exhibited many of the signs and symptoms of trauma outlined by Rothschild (2000), van der Kolk (2014), and van der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth (1996). My physical responses included fatigue, heart pain, palpitations, and blood pressure changes. I gained weight and had difficulty sleeping. My emotional responses included guilt, regret, anger, apathy, and pervasive sadness. My behaviours also changed. While I was usually outgoing and helpful, I became withdrawn. My mind felt numb, and I

had a decreased ability to pay attention, to focus, to remember, or to make decisions. I was disorganized and indifferent, yet I was determined to carry on in usual 'strict' ways, a symptom of deep loss described by Kaiser Stearns (2010).

During this time of intense sorrow, I experienced spiritual responses to difficult life events. I felt unable to give or receive love, and I had a sense of disconnection from family and society. I felt fear and anxiety which I described in emotional terms as a loss of trust. I was unable to take risks. I was filled with feelings of unworthiness and self-doubt (Simington, 1996; Simington, 2008).

Lily's Trauma-Potential Experiences in Adulthood.

As a young adult, Lily experienced several life events with the potential to cause emotional trauma responses. Many of the trauma-potential events in Lily's life were due to alcohol consumed by those who perpetuated the violence on her. From the age of 19 until she was in her 40's, Lily endured physical beatings from men with whom she had relationships. Many of these beatings were violent and brutal, causing serious injuries, including premature labour.

Lily lost two babies while still in her teens. When she was 15 years old, she gave birth to a baby girl. When she was questioned, she revealed that she was a single mother without family support. In the view of those employed by the government, this was justification for placing the baby in a non-aboriginal home. Lily was unable to object to the seizure of her baby. She had no power, no voice. She could only watch helplessly as her baby was taken away.

When Lily was 16 years old, her father kicked her out of his house, telling her she was old enough to look after herself. She relocated to the Yukon and supported herself with various jobs. After two years, she returned to her family in Alberta and became pregnant with her second baby. Fearing she would lose this baby as well, she walked out of the hospital with the baby immediately after giving birth.

At 19 years of age, pregnant and close to term, a beating by the baby's father caused Lily to begin labour. At the hospital, she was given drugs for the pain which put her into a state of unconsciousness. When she regained consciousness, she was told that her baby had died. This baby was also taken and placed in a non-aboriginal home. The birth and subsequent loss of this baby was not verbally acknowledged by her family, and Lily, following their example, did not speak of her baby, although she never forgot her.

When she was 35 years old, Lily was diagnosed with cancer and told she had six months to one year to live. This information sent her into a state of depression. Then she decided she needed to live for the sake of her children, and she asked the doctor to perform surgery. She survived. She had beaten cancer.

Released from hospital, she discovered that her husband was living with another woman. This final rejection was too much for her to bear, and she began a two-year drinking spree. During this period, her children experienced a lifestyle similar to the lifestyle that Lily had experienced as a child.

The drinking spree gave rise to her second marriage to a man who physically abused her. After several failed attempts to leave, she tried to kill herself, thinking it was the only

way she could escape. However, she woke up in hospital to find him sitting by her bed. Eventually, Lily managed to leave him, and she finally divorced him.

As a young adult, Lily experienced one trauma after another. Any of these experiences—the physical beatings, witnessing the beating of others, neglect, the loss of her children, a serious illness—had the potential to cause trauma responses (van der Kolk, 2014). Repetitive trauma, such as that experienced by Lily, can potentially recondition the nervous system in a way that makes the trauma victim unable to adapt to normal living (Familoni et al., 2016; Sah & Geracioti, 2013; Jackowski, de Araújo, de Lacerda, de Jesus Mari & Kaufman, 2009).

Linda's Trauma-Potential Experiences in Adulthood.

Linda's experiences with trauma-potential events in adulthood were limited to racism and a physical illness. These events, the incidents of racism and the physical illness, occurred about 30 years ago. There was no indication in her narrative of any, more recent, trauma-potential events that she might have experienced.

Linda had experienced racism as a child, and she found the same prejudicial attitudes in the people she met as a young married woman living in Grande Prairie. Linda recalls times when she was hurt by the thoughtless remarks of other people. In one incident, guests in her home confronted her directly about her ethnicity, revealing their prejudicial views about 'Indians'. She also spoke about an experience at a social gathering when a group of people laughed and ridiculed her about her identity. These incidents hurt Linda and she still recalls them clearly.

When Linda was 30 years old, she experienced a debilitating illness called trigeminal neuralgia. She experienced sharp, unbearable pain in her head, so debilitating that she was unable to function normally. Common side effects of the drug she was prescribed included drowsiness, loss of energy, loss of interest and focus, and a sense of detachment from self or body. These side effects caused Linda to be continually tired with a constant need to sleep. In addition, another side effect of the drug caused Linda to feel suicidal. It was a very difficult time in her life.

Linda believes her physical illness at the age of 30 was connected to the beating she endured as an 11-year-old child. The pain she experienced was in the same area where her father had wounded her. She was cured of her trigeminal neuralgia when she had dealt with the emotional pain caused by the beating.

Our Trauma-Potential Experiences in Adulthood.

Linda has explicit memories of the racist experiences in her life. Rothschild (2000) explained that explicit memory of an event involves being able to recall and recount the event in a cohesive narrative, and Linda is able to do this. Rothschild (2000) also speculated that some incidences of PTSD may be partly caused when memory of a traumatic event is somehow excluded from explicit storage. I believe my experiences were stored as implicit memories. I recall trying to prepare myself for the inevitable racist comments in social situations. I do not recall the actual incidents in a clear and cohesive manner. I remember the feelings of shame and anger and the physical responses in my body. This difference in our memories may indicate that Linda was able to use some of

Rothschild's (2000) factors to successfully mediate the traumatic stress while I struggled with the long-term effects of my experiences.

Lily's experiences of racism were on a deeper level. She was absolutely helpless and powerless in the face of the 'White man's' authority and supremacy over her when her baby was taken away. The non-clinical factors that Rothschild (2000) listed as possible aids to mediate trauma responses were likely not available to Lily. Her belief system was that the 'White man's' word was truth. Lily had been taught that she should never question the White man because *"they speak God's word."*

Culture is part of the soul, and when the soul or culture is demoralized, the soul can be wounded (Duran, Firehammer & Gonzalez, 2008). Cumulative small traumas, such as the racism my co-researchers and I experienced can cause soul wounding and deep spiritual distress. Caldeira, Campos Carvalho, and Vieira (2013) suggested that spiritual distress is "a state of suffering related to the impaired ability to experience meaning in life through connectedness with self, others, world or a Superior Being" (p. 82). This definition of spiritual distress seems to reflect the conditions my co-researchers and I experienced as young adults.

Spiritual Growth Resulting from Life Circumstances

My Childhood Experiences of Spirituality and Spiritual Growth.

My maternal heritage is Irish and Métis. My mother's great-great grandfather came to Canada from Sligo, Ireland as a young man and married a Métis woman from Manitoba. My family clan was the last of the Pagan Kingships in Eire after the arrival of Christianity.

My father's family is of French heritage. My paternal great-grandfather was a Métis who came west from Quebec to manage the Catholic Church farm in the Grouard area.

Although we did not participate in Aboriginal ceremonies, my maternal grandfather embodied a sense of peace and serenity in his belief in Creator. He exemplified the seven sacred teachings of humility, honesty, respect, courage, wisdom, truth and love (Bouchard & Martin, 2009-2016). He was the epitome of spiritual wisdom, and people would often seek his advice and guidance. He understood dreams, portents, and signs from the spirit world and interpreted them for people in the community.

In 1826, my maternal great-great-grandfather and three of his siblings were baptized by the first Church of England missionary in St. Albert. His children and grandchildren were subsequently baptized in the Catholic Church. My grandfather raised his children to follow the Catholic religion. My parents attended mass every Sunday, and the sacraments of baptism, first communion and confirmation were important occasions to our family. The priest and the nuns were a strong influence in our lives, and we were expected to confess our sins and take communion every Sunday. On Saturday afternoons, my uncles and I would get together to discuss what sins we could confess to having committed. It was challenging since we often felt we had not done anything sinful during the week.

Although we were raised in the Catholic religion, I felt closest to Creator during the times I was out in the natural world. I grew up in the country, and my family lived off the abundance of the land. We picked berries, hunted, and fished. I went 'sapping' with my uncles. (Sapping was a process of peeling the bark off poplar trees, scraping the sap off the exposed trunk, and eating it.) My mother encouraged me to say a prayer of gratitude

whenever I picked berries. She taught me that the abundance of food from the land was a gift from Creator. We lived close to the land, and it seemed to me that Creator was everywhere when we were out in nature.

Lily's Childhood Experiences of Spirituality and Spiritual Growth.

When asked about her childhood experiences with religion or spirituality, Lily did not remember any. She indicated that she was aware of the Catholic and Anglican religions; however, her knowledge was limited to an awareness of their presence. Her family did not practice either religion, and neither did she.

Lily never felt as though she belonged anywhere. She often felt lost, sad, and lonely and did not know where to go or what to do. She said she always seemed to be searching without knowing what she was searching for.

As a child, Lily did not know anything about Aboriginal spirituality. However, she had a close connection to the land. She respected and revered the land and Mother Nature. She lived off the abundance of the land when she was young. The good memories she has of her childhood are of the times when her family lived in the country, picking berries, fishing, and hunting.

Linda's Childhood Experiences of Spirituality and Spiritual Growth.

The Catholic religion was a significant part of Linda's childhood. The Catholic influence was strong, and Christianity had been entrenched in the family for generations. In Fort Chip and in Fort Smith, her family attended mass every Sunday and often during the week. The priests and nuns were frequent visitors to their home, especially in Fort Smith.

Linda's great-grandfather had helped to build the mission in Lac La Biche. Her great-grandfather was a brother in the Catholic Church although he left the Church in order to marry her great-grandmother. One of her cousins is a nun. Christianity was a normal and constant part of their lives.

In addition to the strong Catholic influence in her early life, Linda's maternal great-grandmother was a strong influence. Her great-grandmother was a medicine woman and taught Linda the value of traditional medicines for healing. Linda links traditional healing with Aboriginal spirituality. To her, the two are one and the same.

Linda's family lived off the land, and they also went hunting, fishing, and picking berries. She demonstrates a reverence for nature and for Mother Earth. She has fond memories of being out on the trapline with her father and picking medicine with her great-grandmother. She presently picks her medicine, such as the sweetgrass she uses for smudging, from her land. The land gives her everything she needs for her ceremonies. For Linda, the land is sacred.

Our Childhood Experiences of Spirituality and Spiritual Growth.

The Catholic and Anglican religions were in the periphery of Lily's life while Linda and I were both raised in the Catholic religion. However, it seems to me that we all remember the times we spent in nature, on the land as the happier and more soulful times. It is where we feel welcome and safe.

Experiences of Spirituality and Spiritual Growth in Adulthood.

My co-researchers and I experienced spiritual growth as a result of healing from traumatic events. The healing process from the traumatic events seemed to have propelled us towards a spiritual awakening, expanding our sense of meaning and relationship to the transcendent and the world around us. There are interesting similarities in our spiritual growth experiences, and our experiences often seemed to parallel each other's during this period.

My Experiences of Spirituality and Spiritual Growth in Adulthood.

In my late 30's, I left the Catholic religion. It had no significance in my life and did not meet my spiritual needs. I did not feel lost; in fact, I felt free upon leaving the Catholic religion. I still prayed to Creator daily. I thought I was happy and content; however, my life lacked the richness, joy, and peace I needed for spiritual health (Fryback and Reinert, 1999; Osterman Fieser and Rogers-Seidl, 1991). I believe this was my first step on my healing journey. The decision to leave the Catholic Church was my own decision, and it felt right for me even though my family still attended mass regularly, and my parents expected me to do the same. I was making my own choices.

My fundamental beliefs about spirituality changed when I discovered a book, *Embraced by the Light*. Eadie (1992) described her near-death experience and her journey to Heaven where she learned that we are all spiritual beings, and we come to Earth to learn and grow. We choose the experiences that will facilitate our desired learnings. This information helped me to understand that my father, who was dying from cancer, had chosen this manner of death. The pain and suffering he was experiencing was for his

growth. Now that I was able to accept his choice, I was there for him in a different way—I was able to support him instead of suffering with him. I was full of love, respect, and admiration for this amazing Spiritual Being who had the courage to choose a hard path. The knowledge that people are on different paths and chose their paths for their own reasons brought peace and comfort into my own life. It assisted me, in many ways, to feel a deeper sense of connection with the universe, the Creator, and humanity.

The death of my niece was a huge and devastating blow. It catapulted me backwards to a darker and lonelier place than I had ever experienced. I struggled to come to terms with her death. How could this have happened? A major part of my healing from this trauma was a journey into the inner depths of my being, where I found spiritual growth and movement, towards a deeper and more meaningful spirituality that reflects who I am as a Métis woman. The Trauma Recovery therapy training initiated and supported this spiritual growth and movement.

Early on in the training, I was led on a guided visualization to reconnect with Heaven and Earth. The first time I participated in this exercise, I felt a flash of recognition and welcome from Creator. It was as though I had been disconnected and lost and was now back where I belonged. This was what had been missing from my life. I began to know who I am, at the core of my being. I experienced a deep sense of connection, an emerging sense of meaning and purpose in my life.

I began to spend a great deal of time outside, rediscovering the world which had been a key part of my childhood. I opened myself to everything. The world was full of energy, mystery, and meaning and I wanted to experience it all. There were incredible, numinous

moments when it seemed as though I was connected to everything on Earth and the universe. I experienced truly profound and magical moments. I was rediscovering and remembering the world I had left behind. I was given glimpses into the spiritual world and into the universe. I embraced it. I accepted everything with humility, joy and gratitude.

Lily's Experiences of Spirituality and Spiritual Growth in Adulthood.

In her 30's, Lily experienced high and low points in her life as she attempted a positive move forward with her life. She was determined to do something for herself and enrolled in university courses. Then she was diagnosed with cancer and survived, only to find that her husband had left her. After her divorce, she met and married another abusive man. When Lily was 41 years old, she decided it was time to do something about the sadness, pain, guilt, and shame that she had been carrying all her life. She accessed a training program to become a counsellor in order to work on her own personal healing. After completing her training, she began working as a drug and alcohol counsellor.

While at the training institute, she was invited to participate in a sweat. She had not known anything about sweats because her parents had not practiced any Aboriginal ceremonies. She attended her first sweat and found it to be a profoundly moving experience. *"I remember crying inside that sweat, and I couldn't figure out why I was crying. I was just crying, crying, crying, and I couldn't stop crying."*

At one sweat, she was invited to dance with Sun Dancers. While at her first fast and first Sun Dance, she remembered that she wanted to heal from her traumas so that she could give back to her children, to make up for the times when they were hungry, thirsty,

lonely, sick, and scared, and she wasn't there for them. She honoured her children in her thoughts as she danced and when she became a pipe carrier.

Lily learned to forgive the people who had harmed her and, more importantly, to forgive herself for the harm she had caused her children and others. She says forgiveness is a major part of healing. She forgave her brother before he died. *"I didn't go there to make things right for him; I went there to release myself. It was for my own personal healing that I went and did that, and if it helped him cross over, that's good."*

Lily says that she has found herself. She is no longer lonely. She is not in search of something or someone any longer because she believes that she has found what she was looking for. She has found Lily.

Linda's Experiences of Spirituality and Spiritual Growth in Adulthood.

When Linda moved to Grande Prairie as a young, married woman, she continued to attend mass at the Catholic Church; however, she was merely going through the motions. She did not find the spiritual connection that she was seeking. She tried other religions and eventually found the sense of connection at Peoples' Full Gospel Church.

She became interested in Aboriginal spirituality when she connected with her Métis roots through her work. She met and began to learn from Aboriginal Elders. She recalled her great-grandmother's teachings, and she embraced the traditional medicines. She participated in Aboriginal ceremonies, such as smudging, sweats, and pipe ceremonies and began to use the Medicine Wheel as a guide for those who came to learn from her.

While she was in the process of learning from Elders and healers, she developed a severe, debilitating pain in her head. The neurologist urged her to try alternative therapies

for her pain—a healthier lifestyle, eating healthy foods, and taking vitamins. He also recommended books authored by spiritual leaders such as Wayne Dyer and Louise Hay. Linda followed his advice and immersed herself in a healthier lifestyle. Blending the Aboriginal spiritual practices with the new lifestyle and the knowledge she gained from reading helped Linda to become a strong, spiritual, and healthy individual.

Our Experiences of Spirituality and Spiritual Growth in Adulthood.

There are some interesting similarities in the spiritual growth experiences my co-researchers and I had as a result of healing from our experiences of traumatic events. We all experienced regressive as well as progressive movement. Our experiences often seemed to parallel each other's during this period.

When we were in our 30's, we all made a change in our lives. I left the Catholic religion, Lily enrolled in school, and Linda began a search for a religion that would meet her needs. Shortly after, we all had to deal with deep emotional or physical pain from which we each gained insight and movement forward. I found a new respect for and a sense of connection with humanity after my father's death. Lily found a new purpose in life when she resolved to live for her children after she was diagnosed with cancer. Linda began a healthier lifestyle and immersed herself in learning about spirituality after she suffered a serious and debilitating illness.

While Linda continued her movement forward, Lily and I were each dealt another blow which catapulted us backwards once again. I lived in a fog of grief and pain for two years after my niece died. The trauma recovery training began my healing journey. Lily went on a two-year drinking spree when she discovered her husband had abandoned her

while she was recovering from cancer. She began her healing journey when she began the counselling training.

Today, we have reached a point in our lives where we are certain in our spiritual faith and in our purpose in life. We accept that our experiences were necessary for our growth. We all had help from others as we moved forward. We have all returned to the roots of our spiritual heritage.

Returning to the Roots of Spiritual Heritage

My Return to the Roots of Spiritual Heritage.

As a young, married adult, I was lost and disconnected to spirit. Something was missing from my life, and I did not know what it was. I knew I was Métis, but in my world, that held no special meaning. I had interacted with Métis and First Nations people in a former position within the forest industry. My ability to speak Cree meant that I was designated to attend meetings when the oil and gas and forest industries needed to 'dialogue' with Aboriginal communities. During these occasions, I sat across from the Aboriginal people, on the side of the companies. I had no real opportunity to interact with them on a personal basis.

When I worked for the City, I gravitated towards those projects that involved the Métis people in the community, and I began to feel a kinship with them. They were welcoming and inclusive, and I felt a sense of connection. They reminded me of my childhood and growing up with my large, fun-loving, extended family. However, these occasional meetings were not enough to encourage me to join the community and become an integral part of it.

When I began the training in Trauma Recovery and saw that other Aboriginal people had enrolled, I was reassured that this training was right for me. I felt safe in their company. In the Trauma Recovery training, I participated in opening and closing ceremonies using the elements of earth, fire, water and air. I now know that I identified with these elements because of my Irish and Métis ancestry. The elements are very much a part of Celtic spirituality and the activities appealed to my Celtic roots. Everything we did was in circle and it felt right and true for me. I had glimpses of past lives as an Aboriginal person and realized my Aboriginal ancestry was a deep and enduring part of me. I learned about spirit guides and power animals, the healing and grounding power of rocks. Spirit guides, power animals and the elements are rooted in Aboriginal spirituality and my Indigenous roots responded as I reconnected with my spirit guides, power animals and Mother Earth. I reconnected with 'all my relations' in the natural world.

As I researched Métis history and culture for my thesis, I began to remember my life as a Métis child living with a large, extended family, in a Métis community. I began to remember the music, the jigging, the story telling, and the sense of community and connection. I remembered how my grandmother and my mother would always offer food along with coffee or tea to visitors. I remembered the camping trips, the hunting and fishing, and living in the logging camps in the summer. I realized I had lived as a true Métis during my childhood.

I am a member of the Métis community, and it is where I belong. I had a sense of what this truly meant when I recently attended a meeting to plan an Appreciative Inquiry process into Truth and Reconciliation hosted by the Catholic Church in our city. Instead of

sitting back and listening, allowing others to speak, as I have done in the past, I spoke up on behalf of my people, the Métis, with the conviction that I had every right to do so.

My sense of who I am is continually evolving as I learn about my people and retrieve my early memories. My spirituality is connected to my identity as a Métis woman. I know who I am, at the core of my being. I had a rich and wonderful life as a Métis child, and I resolve to live a similar life as a Métis woman.

Lily's Return to the Roots of Spiritual Heritage

It was not until she was in her early 40's when Lily began to connect with her Aboriginal spirituality. On a bus on route to Edmonton, she looked to the east and made a decision to seek help to heal from her various traumas and to change her life. On the Medicine Wheel used by Aboriginal people for health and healing, East signifies beginnings, sunrises – a new dawn, new birth, new ideas and new light. It is a time of change (Neseba Marsh, Coholic, Cote-Meek & Najavits, 2015). East also holds the spiritual aspect on the Medicine Wheel. It signifies our sense of belonging and connection (Roberts, Harper, Tuttle-Eagle Bull & Heideman-Provost, 1998). It seems appropriate that Lily looked to the east when she decided to make a change.

Lily began her healing journey and connected with her Aboriginal spirituality when she started participating in smudges and sweats. While going to group therapy, she was invited to a sweatlodge ceremony and she began attending sweats on a regular basis. She searched for someone to teach her Aboriginal spiritual ways within the Cree Nation, however, she did not find what she was looking for until she connected with the Blackfoot Nation. She found the spiritual connection she needed within that community, and she

began to participate in their Sun Dances. The Blackfoot Nation taught her about Aboriginal spirituality, and she embraced it with all her heart. She has fully embraced her Aboriginal heritage and is a sweatlodge holder and a pipe carrier. She has earned certain rights such as the right to conduct traditional wedding ceremonies and the right to give Indian spirit names. She leads healing retreats which include smudging, drumming and sweats. She has truly found the spiritual connection she was looking for as a young person.

Not only has Lily returned to her spiritual heritage, her children have as well. She is the center of it all. Her children and grandchildren attend her sweats and have received their Indian spirit names. Her family has come together since she started Sun Dancing and she acknowledges her spirituality brought them together.

Today Lily lives on an acreage which is surrounded by trees. She uses the land for her ceremonies. Lily believes that we all have a spirit, *"Everything has a spirit that lives on Mother Earth."* She finds that spirit on the land, in her work, and in the Aboriginal ceremonies that she practices.

Linda's Return to the Roots of Spiritual Heritage.

When Linda was a child in Fort Chip, the Métis Association moved into their town, and her father insisted his children stay away from the group. He did not want his family to have anything to do with them. He did not want to be identified as Métis. *"He'd rather be a half-breed than a Métis, my Dad, back in the day when we were growing up."*

Linda moved to Grande Prairie and people ridiculed her for identifying herself as a half-breed. *"They were making all kinds of derogatory comments. 'Is that like a Heinz 57?' It really affected me and I felt really hurt. I went home and I said to my husband, 'Why*

would they have laughed?' and he said, 'Well, my dear, probably because in the South they refer to you as Métis.' I said, 'My Dad didn't want us to be Métis!' and he says, 'But that is what you are.'"

Linda resolved to learn more about the Métis and became involved in establishing Métis Local 1990 in Grande Prairie. She connected with her Aboriginal community and with her Métis heritage. While she was learning from Aboriginal Elders, she began to remember her great-grandmother's teachings. She participated in ceremonies that helped her to ground herself and to connect to her higher power. As she started connecting to "spiritualism," she saw the difference. *"You know, it's a way of life; something you live by every day, not on Sundays only. I think that's when I started to feel connected and more fulfilled in my life because it's who you are; it's connecting to your higher power, and it isn't about the religion. It is about spiritualism."*

The strong self-identity she has as a Métis person is important to Linda, and she tries to instill that same strong self-identity in the young people she works with. She is grateful to the organization that employs her because that was where she first connected with her Métis culture and learned to embrace Aboriginal spirituality. *"I always think, 'what would have happened to me if I didn't start working here?' They connected me to my culture, and I wouldn't be who I am today if I did not embrace my culture and embrace the ways of Aboriginal peoples."*

Linda now identifies with her Métis heritage, and she is proud of who she is. She loves the laughter and the camaraderie that is prevalent in the Métis culture. She deems laughter an important element in healing and advocates traditional healing approaches for

Métis people. She shares her medicines with others. *"I feel like I am helping to pave the way to connecting our people with our medicines."* Linda believes our true healing comes from the pride of our Métis crafters, our music, our dance, our drumming and the medicine. When she embraces all of those elements, she feels grounded and at peace.

Our Return to the Roots of Spiritual Heritage.

Lily participates in Aboriginal ceremonies, and, in fact, leads them on a regular basis. Linda also participates in Aboriginal ceremonies through her work. My ceremonies, to date, are private as my current work is not conducive to including them. My co-researchers and I embody a sense of peace and serenity in our spiritual beliefs. I believe we try to exemplify the seven sacred teachings of humility, honesty, respect, courage, wisdom, truth and love (Bouchard & Martin, 2016). We have returned to the roots of our spiritual heritage—to our unique Métis spirituality, which is rooted in our culture.

New Purpose in Life Following Healing from Trauma.

Traumatic events can produce negative problems such as physical illness, depression, and anxiety. The struggle can also facilitate positive changes and provide opportunities for growth (Leeman, Dispenza & Chang, 2015). We can choose how we move forward from trauma—do we choose to be bitter and reject spirituality or do we choose to focus on why the trauma happened and what we can learn from it? The choice is ours (Daniel, 2012).

My New Purpose in Life Following Healing from Trauma.

I am now retired from the City and I co-facilitate sessions on grief and loss for seniors in assisted living accommodations. It is likely that this work will continue and

expand in the future. I also counsel two individuals on their mental, emotional, and spiritual needs and their workplace issues. Both individuals are in management positions and have asked if I would consider more clients. My background in human resources management and my training in Trauma Recovery therapy and psychotherapy at the graduate level have made me well qualified, and I truly enjoy the work.

My future plans include helping Aboriginal communities in Northern Alberta with their trauma. I do not know what that will look like at this time. I will focus on plans to make it happen after completion of my Masters' program.

Lily's New Purpose in Life Following Healing from Trauma.

Lily has a consulting business with a meaningful name which honours the seven directions. She explains that the seventh direction is the direction within *"where we have all our answers to all questions we have in life."* Her business is geared towards helping women heal from trauma. Her services are in great demand in Canada and in Europe, and her workshops fill up quickly. She is also an Elder for Child and Family Services in Northern Alberta and two Treaty regions.

She travels to Europe to facilitate healing workshops and to share her story about being a cancer survivor. She also shares her story about the loss of her daughters through the 60's Scoop and how they returned to her. She talks about being a Sun Dancer and how her family has come together since she began her spiritual journey. She attributes the coming together of her family to her spirituality.

She hopes to write a book about her life story. To that end, I have offered, and she has accepted, the audio recording of the story that she narrated. She also has my transcription of her story in electronic form.

Linda's New Purpose in Life Following Healing from Trauma.

Linda is still working full time; she is also working with an Elder who plans to transfer her knowledge to her. She will use that knowledge to become a healer—something she has been doing on an informal basis. She uses traditional medicines to help others, and she holds healing circles. She often has people drop by her office seeking her help.

"Somebody came into the office just before Christmas. I didn't know she was coming; she dropped in. Her guy had passed away a year ago. He had been having a hard time, struggling with his identity. He was raised as a White person in foster care, and although he is clearly Native, he hadn't really embraced his heritage at that time. He was using drugs and alcohol. I talked to him about being a warrior, gave him sweetgrass and told him to start asking for help, to connect. I told him he had to stay clean and to honour the medicine I gave him.' She came to tell me that the day I spent with him had meant a great deal to him. While she was talking, I started getting a message I was supposed to pass on to her. He gave me a message to give to her." Linda passed on the message and the woman's reaction indicated that she recognized the message was meant specifically for her. She accepted it with gratitude. Linda said the moment felt amazing and profound. She felt her abilities were validated, and she knows she can help others in many different ways. *"You can help, you know, if you listen. Just listen."*

Our New Purpose in Life Following Healing from Trauma.

So, do we choose to be bitter and reject spirituality, or do we choose to focus on why the trauma happened and what we can learn from it? My co-researchers and I chose the latter. We all have a new purpose in our lives as a result of the traumas we experienced. We have a strong desire to help others and we are doing that in various ways. We have a sense of rightness in what we are doing as well as what we plan for the future. We are learning and continuing to grow as we move forward.

Summary of the Findings

For Métis women who experienced a spiritual transformation as a part of their healing from trauma, was the transformation rooted in their spiritual heritage? Three major themes emerged in my research. These themes are (a) tragic life events with potential for traumatic responses, (b) spiritual growth resulting from life circumstances, and (c) returning to the roots of spiritual heritage.

Tragic Life Events with Potential for Traumatic Responses.

My co-researchers and I experienced tragic life events in our childhood. These events had potential for traumatic responses, and our responses to those experiences appear to indicate we were traumatized. Tragic life events in adulthood also caused us to experience spiritual distress. We all faced racism which exacerbated the feelings of inferiority we felt as children. We each experienced major events that had huge potential for traumatic responses. Lily experienced several tragic life events during her adulthood while Linda and I were each faced with one major traumatic event.

Spiritual Growth Resulting from Life Circumstances.

My co-researchers and I experienced profound spiritual growth and transformation. Linda and I had the guidance of our grandparents when we were children, and we were familiar with Aboriginal spiritual beliefs. We were raised in the Catholic religion and taught the importance of prayer. Thus, we had a foundation to draw upon as adults. Most of our spiritual growth occurred in our adulthood, as we worked on our healing. Lily did not have a foundation of either Aboriginal spirituality or the Catholic faith in her childhood. She began her spiritual growth late in life and, like Linda and I, fully embraced her spirituality as an adult.

Returning to the Roots of Spiritual Heritage.

I believe our narratives clearly show that we have returned to the roots of our spiritual heritage. We participate in Aboriginal ceremonies, and we honour the seven sacred teachings of humility, honesty, respect, courage, wisdom, truth and love (Bouchard & Martin, 2009-2016). Linda, Lily and I strive to honour and embrace these sacred teachings throughout our daily lives. We live in peace and harmony with 'all our relations.'

Summary of Research.

This thesis is about the life-long spiritual journeys of three Métis women. I am one of the three. We all live in Northern Alberta. Lily lives east of High Prairie, Linda lives north of Grande Prairie and I live south of Grande Prairie, near the hamlet of Grovedale. Our stories are similar in that we all experienced major traumatic, events at different times in our lives. Lily had to deal with physical beatings, sexual assaults, and the loss of her babies; Linda recalls a severe physical assault when she was 11 years old; and my trauma

was the unexpected death of my niece, at the age of 14 years. Our healing journeys from these traumatic events led us to spirituality and a reconnection with our Métis roots.

In addition to the major traumatic events we experienced, we had to cope with feelings of shame and inferiority caused by racism and prejudice. Linda and I both encountered racism which was traumatic for us especially because we were trying to fit into the White world. Lily experienced racism at a deeper level. She experienced a complete lack of power and ability to prevent the theft of her children.

There are common threads of spiritual growth and transformation in our narratives describing how we worked through our traumas to lead lives of meaning and purpose. We grew up in Métis families, shared similar experiences of living off the land and we all were exposed to varying degrees of Christianity as young people. Linda and I also had Aboriginal spirituality teachings. All three of us lost our way until traumatic experiences shocked us out of our complacency and we permitted "our religious and culture definitions to be transformed into something that gives meaning and purpose to our lives" (Daniel, 2012, p. 20). Lily speaks for all of us when she says:

This has been an amazing life for me and I love it and I wouldn't do it any other way. I don't think I would change anything if I had a chance to change anything, I don't think so because it would not have turned out the way it turned out. I really believe that I've come to find myself. I am not lonely anymore. I am not in search of something or someone anymore because I believe I have found what I was looking for, and that's me, in here.

Cause I've got faith of the heart
I´m going where my heart will take me

Diane Eve Warren

Chapter Eight: Implications for the Research

I´ve got faith, I´ve got faith,
faith of the heart.

Diane Eve Warren

Implications for Professional Practice

There are some important implications for professional practice in this research. These implication are (a) a need for mental health professionals to be mindful of inconsistencies in a person's words and demeanor, (b) a need for mental health professionals to encourage and support the spiritual journeys of those people they work with, (c) a need for information to be provided to family and friends on how their response to the traumatic event impacts the victim, and (d) the importance of the Métis to recognize and embrace their own unique culture.

Inconsistencies in a Client's Words and Demeanor.

As noted earlier, when I was interviewing Lily, I noticed that she presented with a frozen aspect while narrating the harrowing details of her early life. It was not until she talked about the healing she had done that she became animated and relaxed. I wonder if this frozen demeanor was due to the need for more healing in spite of her claims to have done much healing work or was it simply her way of narrating the story. She has told her story many times in many different venues to many different audiences. Nevertheless, the implications for professional practice indicate that mental health professionals need to be mindful of such inconsistencies, for they may be clues that the client still has some layers of the trauma that require further healing.

Encouraging and Supporting the Spiritual Journey.

For my co-researchers and me, spirituality was an important component in our healing journeys. Although awareness of religion and spirituality by mental health professionals continues to increase, many professionals do not use this valuable resource. My co-researchers and I are fortunate that we found what we needed in our therapies. The Trauma Recovery therapy training supported my spiritual journey, Linda's neurologist steered her towards the writings of spiritual leaders where she found the affirmation she needed to pursue her spirituality, and Lily sought the guidance of the Blackfoot Nation, who supported and guided her spiritual journey. This support for spiritual growth needs to be easily accessible from all mental health professionals. It is important that they support and encourage the spiritual journeys of their clients as those clients work through their traumas.

"Religion and spiritual practices are traditional ways through which many people develop personal values and their own beliefs about human meaning and purpose" (Weaver, Flannelly, Garbarino, Figley & Flannelly, 2003, p. 216). Trauma shatters our sense of order and will often bring about a crisis of faith. The traumatized may turn to faith and spirituality in order to answer the question of why it happened. People who have a sense of purpose and meaning in life experience positive psychological benefits (Cohen & Cairns, 2012). While some people experience increased existential despair following trauma, others experience a deeper sense of spirituality and a more profound sense of meaning and purpose in life (De Castella & Graetz Simmonds, 2013; Daniel, 2012). "Whereas secure relationships with God are thought to aid in the coping process following stress and trauma, the presence of a spiritual struggle is thought to exacerbate distress"

(Ano and Vasconcelles 2005 as cited in Werdel, Dy-Liacco, Ciarrocchi, Wicks & Breslford, 2014, p. 59). A bitter rejection of spirituality does not promote the type of healing that my co-researchers and I achieved.

Hill & Kilian (2003) noted that mental health professionals tended to ignore religion or spirituality when treating clients and suggested that this neglect was because they considered religion and spirituality of less importance than do their clients. However, people may also be reluctant to bring religion or spirituality into the counselling sessions. Carlisle (2015) found people were reluctant to discuss their religious or spiritual practices with their mental health professional. They believed mental health professionals should focus on mental and physical health and that spiritual health was not within the scope of their work. Some participants were also concerned that their religious or spiritual views would be viewed as indicative of mental illness.

Stewart-Sicking, Deal and Fox (2017) said that an increased awareness of religion and spirituality has not translated into changes in practice, and the reason is because we lack "a broad, heuristic model for integration that seeks to embrace the complex, fluid, and negotiated nature of spirituality and religion" (p. 234). They suggested the "Ways Paradigm," a trans-theoretical tool for teaching counselling theory and practice, may be useful in helping counsellors understand the ways in which to integrate spirituality and religion into their work. "The paradigm consists of three dimensions—a way of understanding, a way of being, and a way of intervening—arrived at through a close examination of counseling theory" (Stewart-Sicking, Deal & Fox, 2017, p. 235). The ways of understanding involves the body of knowledge that explains personality theory and structure, human development, both normal and abnormal, and the ways people change.

The ways of being refer to who the counsellor is, the empathy and values he or she demonstrates, the boundaries he or she sets and the importance he or she ascribes to the client/counsellor relationship. Ways of intervening is the work of therapy or the means by which a counsellor intervenes and allows for the processing of healthier ways of thinking, feeling and behaving (Stewart-Sicking, Deal & Fox, 2017).

I believe that mental health professionals need to strive for a deeper sense of spirituality and a more profound sense of meaning and purpose in life when working with people in distress. The counselling process needs to encourage and support the spiritual journey. In order to accomplish this successfully, mental health professionals need to be more cognizant of the spiritual needs and basic spirituality of their clients.

Spiritual Distress.

Throughout our lives, my co-researchers and I were in spiritual distress as we struggled with difficult life events. Traumatic events create breaks in relationships, creating a sense of disconnection in the traumatized person (Carruth & Burke, 2006). Having a sense of belonging and feeling connected to others are spiritual needs. When these needs are not met, we experience spiritual distress (Hungelmann, Kenkel-Rossi, Klassen & Stollenwerk, 1985; Benner Carson & Stoll, 2008).

Culture is part of the soul and when the culture or soul is demoralized, the soul can be wounded (Duran, Firehammer & Gonzalez, 2008). The racism my co-researchers and I experienced was an attack on our culture and our souls. I believe it caused deep soul wounding and deep spiritual distress. In order for mental health professionals to help clients work through their traumas, they may need to find out, especially with clients from

minority groups, how society treats them. Questions that ask how people are treated in social situations, in the classroom or at work can be revealing. Dealing with the spiritual distress caused by racism will help clients to work through their traumas from a position of strength.

My co-researchers and I were in spiritual distress during our traumas, and we awakened our spirituality as we worked on our healing. The awakening of our spirituality came out strongly in our narratives. I found "me", the core of my being, during the Trauma Recovery therapy training, and I realized that the racist comments no longer had the power to hurt me. I know who I am, and if others do not know or understand "me", that is fine. The Trauma Recovery therapy supported my spiritual journey, and my spiritual awakening gave me the strength and power to move forward to spiritual transformation. My soul responded to the spiritual aspect of the Trauma Recovery therapy. It brought my grandfather back into my life and helped me to draw on my memories of his love for me, his wisdom, and his strength. Those memories supported me as I worked through my traumas.

I strongly urge mental health professionals to find ways to bring out the basic spirituality of those they work with. My literature research confirmed the importance of spirituality, faith, and religious beliefs to the Métis. It is important that mental health professionals understand and accept a different worldview, a worldview outside of their own, without seeing it as wrong. It is equally important for mental health professionals to convey to their clients that it is okay and safe to talk about particular religious or spiritual beliefs without being thought 'nuts'. If we cannot talk about it, how can we use it to help

us move toward a more profound sense of connection, a spiritual awakening and transformation?

The importance of the role of traditional spirituality in the healing process cannot be overstated. Naseba Marsh, Coholic, Cote-Meek & Najavits (2015) concluded that "there is a continued need to consider treatment and healing programmes that have a focus on Aboriginal peoples and are able to blend Western knowledge and Aboriginal healing practices to better reach and affect those in need" (p. 9). Using traditional spirituality may include cultural practices such as sweats, ceremonies, sharing circles, herbal medicines, sharing food, and Elder teachings (Naseba Marsh et al., 2015; Richardson, 2012; Puchala, Paul, Kennedy & Mehl-Madrona, 2010).

Responding to the Traumatized Victim.

Carruth and Burke (2006) emphasized the importance of how others respond to a traumatic event. The manner in which friends and family respond to the victim has a significant impact upon the victim's response to the trauma. If those close to the traumatized person respond in a supportive way, with compassion and acceptance, they will help the person work through the trauma. A non-supportive reaction will have a detrimental impact.

I think what Carruth and Burke (2006) stated about the importance of how others respond to a traumatic event is extremely important. The traumatized victim needs to be assured that his or her feelings are normal and that he or she is not to blame for what happened to him or her. A person experiencing trauma responses needs to feel safe and to know that his or her reactions to the traumatic event are normal. He or she may feel

disconnected from others and may see his or her reactions as a personal failure. Comments that are intended to comfort may have the opposite effect when the receiver is in emotional turmoil. People need to know that what they do and how they react is important and that it can be beneficial or detrimental. This can be a difficult balancing act, and some people may be reluctant to approach the victim to talk about the event. It is sometimes easier to avoid the situation, and so we tell ourselves to 'give them time and space.'

My major trauma was the death of my niece although I now realize that I also had not dealt with the death of my father. The experiential activities we carried out during the Trauma Recovery therapy and Grief Support training were a clear indication of this as I found my thoughts frequently going back to when my father was dying of cancer. I had just started working for a new organization, and we were busy starting up a production plant. I did not receive any sympathy or even an acknowledgement of his death, a death that was devastating to me. I was expected to set my grief aside, to return to work immediately after the funeral and to be at peak performance. I was in a better situation when my niece died. I worked for a caring organization where the focus was on service to the community rather than on profit. However, even though I was working for an organization where the majority of people were caring, compassionate and supportive, I felt isolated and alienated while I struggled to cope with her death. I found the acceptance and compassion I needed within the Trauma Recovery group. This was where I felt safe enough to be vulnerable and to begin to repair the damage to my sense of self.

Linda's major trauma was the physical beating carried out by her father when she was 11 years old. It is likely that this trauma would not have been as devastating if her mother had reacted differently. Linda could not understand why her mother had not come

to her rescue while she was being beaten. Her mother could hear her screaming with pain and fear, and she did not emerge until the beating was over. Linda was troubled by this for a long time, especially after she became a mother herself and thought about how she would react if her children were being hurt. If her mother had responded differently, perhaps tried to stop the beating, or comforted Linda afterwards, the effects of the trauma might have been greatly ameliorated.

When Lily thought her baby had died while she was unconscious in the hospital, the support of her family would have been beneficial. In addition, when she went home, no one mentioned the baby. Linda perceived the unspoken judgement that she should not have been pregnant in the first place. No one acknowledged her baby or her loss. She followed their example and never talked about her baby. The effects of this trauma might have been moderated if she had been able to acknowledge the birth and subsequent loss of her baby. However, she needed her family's support to grieve the loss of her baby, and she did not have it. As Carruth and Burke (2006) pointed out, society often blames the victim for their vulnerability. "The impact on those who are blamed for their own victimization is often a pervasive sense of being invisible and devalued" (p. 7). Lily experienced blame and judgement from her family. She did not receive the love, support, and compassion that she needed.

In addition to helping victims understand how others' reactions impact their ability to heal, I think it is important that the people in their support systems be helped to understand. The more we can teach others, help them understand how their actions impact others, the more effectively they can help each other. People want to know what to do – we just need to teach them.

Finding Self in the Métis Culture.

"We are not White, and we are not Indian, so what are we?" When I was a child, I asked my mother that question, and I did not accept her answer. "I know I am Métis – I don't know what that means." This sentence described me before I began this research inquiry. I had the label, not the context. I thought that I had grown up in the periphery of the true Métis culture; that other Métis people lived in and understood the culture, and I did not. It was not until I researched Métis history and culture that I realized what being Métis really meant. I understood I had been raised in the culture, and it is an integral part of me. I am a true Métis, and this is something to be proud of.

That self-identity, knowledge and pride should be nourished in Métis people today. The trauma recovery training was the first step for me. During the training, I discovered who I am at the core of my being, in the many lives that I have lived. That was extremely important because it gave me the strength and power I need in order to find my purpose. The research and my thesis journey is yet another step to discovering who I am as a Métis person living this life. This is equally as important. It helps me to refine my purpose, and it gives me a place and context for this lifetime.

Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, and Altschul (2011) stated that "individuals recognize the validity of traditional Indigenous culture and practices for a path to healing and recovery" (p. 287). They concluded that healing must begin within a culture-specific context at the family and community levels and the development of culturally responsive interventions that reduce the emotional suffering among Indigenous peoples. I think it needs to go beyond that, especially for the Métis.

We need to celebrate who we are, as Métis. My uncle recently voiced his desire for people to gather for a feast. He wants to see people sit down together and share stories, music, and conversation, in Cree, "just like the old days". My uncle's wish sparked interest in his siblings. They want to bring this event about for his next birthday—not only because they want to surprise him with what he wants—but because it is something they will truly enjoy as well. An event such as this will give the youth in our family a glimpse into the past, an understanding and recognition of their Métis heritage, and a vision for the future as a Métis.

Linda included Aboriginal spiritual teachings, using the Medicine Wheel, in her Healing Tears program. She saw immediate, positive results. She introduced our young people to their Métis culture. However, our leaders need to work with the young people to help them integrate their Métis heritage into their lives. They need to recognize fragments of that culture within their lives so that they can embrace it as their own, rather than regard it as distant history. How do we help them to recognize that the Métis culture is theirs? I do not have the answers, and I believe that this is work that is the responsibility of Métis communities rather than the work of mainstream mental health professionals.

Possibilities for Further Research

I experienced a profound healing and a movement towards spiritual awakening and transformation during my Trauma Recovery therapy training. I began this inquiry because I wanted to know if other Métis women had the same type of experience in their healing journeys. One of my discoveries, through my life story and the life narratives of my co-researchers was that religion had not met our needs, and we moved from that religion to

spirituality. We found what we were looking for in our spiritual practices. Why did this happen? Is it because for the Métis, as Linda said, *"It's a way of life; something you live by every day, not on Sundays only...it's who you are; it's connecting to your higher power and it isn't about the religion."*? The Métis faith is integrated into the Métis culture. It is a way of life, in contrast to the traditional religions which seem to be practiced on Sundays only.

However, is there another reason? I wonder if this is a common outcome of healing from trauma. As people move through healing, is there movement from religion to spirituality? I would be interested in further research which investigates this question. A first step would be a deeper exploration into religion and spirituality in the literature. What is religion, and what is spirituality? What are the differences between the two? How has this been researched?

Now the winds I feel
Are only winds of change

Diane Eve Warren

A Métis Prayer

O Lord, help us to organize and work together
To put our heads up
To be proud of ourselves
To open our eyes to see the world
To share and listen with our ears
To speak our rights with our mouths
To use our hands to work together
And move our bodies actively
So that we can stand on our own two feet.

Protect us everywhere we go
For we are the Métis, People of the World.

The Métis Prayer (A Métis Prayer, 1984) made my heart swell with pride for "the Métis, People of the World." It resonated within my Métis soul. Then a friend offered the following revision. Her version makes my heart swell with love for humanity. It resonates within my human soul. I respectfully offer the Soul Prayer with love and joy, to humanity, to "the People of the World." It is time to share our gifts with the world.

A Soul Prayer

O Lord, help us to organize and work together
To put our heads up
To be proud of ourselves
To open our eyes to see the world
To share and listen with our ears
To speak our rights with our mouths
To use our hands to work together
And move our bodies actively
So that we can stand on our own two feet.

Protect us everywhere we go
For we are the People of the World.

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Appendix A

Letter of Informed Consent

I, _____ , consent to participate in a research study titled "Searching for Threads of Spiritual Growth Interwoven into Trauma Healing". The aim of this study is to learn more about the effects of trauma and what role, if any, spirituality plays in healing.

I am aware that this research is being done by Joyce Mearon, a student of the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality Program (MPS), at the St. Stephen's College in Edmonton, Alberta. I also know that this research study is a partial requirement of the degree, and that it is being supervised by Dr. Joan Wagner RN, PhD.

I understand that my participation in this research study will involve the following:

- an introductory meeting
- one interview of about one hour in length
- a follow-up meeting also about one hour in length
- phone calls for consultation during the process, and
- a final phone call or meeting.

The interview will be scheduled at my convenience and will be conducted at a time and place that are good for me. I understand that I will be asked to share my life story and the traumas I have experienced from which I have mostly healed. As well, I will be asked about any experiences or resources that may have helped me on my healing journey.

I understand that the interview will be recorded and the audio recording will be written up by Joyce Mearon. The recording and transcript will be securely stored in a locked cabinet. Dr. Joan Wagner, thesis supervisor, Dr. Jane Simington, thesis consultant, and Ara Parker, Chair of the MPS program will have access to the recording. I understand the recording will be permanently erased once the thesis has been accepted by St. Stephen's College. I will be informed by Joyce Mearon once that happens.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I can withdraw from the project at any time without it affecting me. If I choose to withdraw, the data provided by me will not be used and will be destroyed. I will be informed once this has happened.

The content from my interview will be set down, analyzed and explained in a narrative form. I will have an opportunity to review the transcript of my interview to make sure that it has been accurately and correctly explained.

I understand that all information provided by me will be confidential and anything that could identify me will be changed to ensure I remain anonymous.

I understand that benefits to me will be of a personal nature and that I will not be paid for taking part.

I understand and agree to the full nature of the study. If I need further information, or if I have any concerns, I can contact Joyce Mearon, or her supervisor, Dr. Joan Wagner. I have been provided with Dr. Wagner's contact information.

I authorize Joyce Mearon to use the data provided by me in journal articles, books, or for other educational purposes. Joyce Mearon will update me before any such publication.

Joyce Mearon and I have reviewed each point in this letter of consent and have a mutual understanding of the meaning of each paragraph.

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

_____ _____

Joyce Mearon Date

Appendix B

Letter of Introduction and Information Page

Thank you for your agreement to assist me with the recruitment of co-researchers for my thesis.

As we discussed previously, I am a student of St. Stephen's College, enrolled in the Master of Psychotherapy and Spirituality Program (MPS). As part of my program requirement, I am planning a research study entitled "Searching for Threads of Spiritual Growth Interwoven into Trauma Healing".

A major part of my healing from trauma was a journey into the inner depths of my being to find spiritual growth and movement, toward spirituality that more closely reflects who I am as a Métis woman. My question for this graduate level research is: do other Métis women, who self-describe as having done considerable healing from trauma, also identify that spiritual growth was an important part of their healing?

I am looking for two other Métis women, between the ages of 55 to 70 years, who have experienced a major trauma from which they have done considerable healing, to participate in my research. Two women will be chosen, by random draw, from those who express an interest in participating.

Participation in the research study would involve an initial phone conversation or meeting, one video-taped one-hour interview, and one one-hour follow-up meeting. There may be some phone calls for consultations, and a closure phone call or meeting. The dates for the interviews and phone calls will be scheduled according to the convenience and availability of the co-researchers.

During the interviews, co-researchers will be asked to share a bit about their life story, the traumas they have experienced and what experiences or resources may have helped them on their healing journey.

There is no monetary compensation for participating in this project; however, participants' contributions could help to increase the knowledge and understanding of Métis people who have experienced trauma. Considering the prevalence of trauma in our society and in particular within the Métis communities, this contribution could be valuable for psychotherapists and society as a whole.

I would appreciate your contacting the Métis women you know who meet my criteria with the request that they consider participating. If they are interested, they can contact me directly for further information. Attached is an information page that you can provide to those who indicate an interest in participating. It is important that they contact me by (date) if they wish to be considered for participation.

Thank you once again for your time and attention to my request.

Hello. My name is Joyce Mearon and I am a student of St. Stephen's College, enrolled in the Master of Psychotherapy & Spirituality (MPS) program.

I am Métis and grew up in Peavine Métis Settlement in northern Alberta. My grandfather was Albert Cunningham and my parents are Fred (Big Man) Mearon (deceased) and Flora Mearon.

I am doing a research project on trauma and the healing journey. I want to find out if spirituality is a part of the healing journey and what other experiences or factors might have affected the healing process.

I am seeking other Métis women, between the ages of 55 to 70 years, who have experienced a major trauma from which they have done considerable healing, to participate in my research.

Participation in the research study would involve an initial phone conversation or meeting, one video-taped one-hour interview, and one one-hour follow-up meeting. There may be some phone calls for consultations, and a closure phone call or meeting. The dates for the interviews and phone calls will be scheduled according to the convenience and availability of the co-researchers.

During the interviews, co-researchers will be asked to share a bit about their life story, the trauma(s) they have experienced and what experiences or resources may have helped them on their healing journey.

There is no monetary compensation for participating in this project; however, your contribution could help to increase the knowledge and understanding of Métis people who have experienced trauma. Considering the prevalence of trauma in our society and in particular within the Métis communities, this contribution could be valuable for individuals, psychotherapists, the community, and society as a whole.

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please contact me by telephone or email by (date). I will be pleased to answer your questions and provide more information.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully

Joyce Mearon
(Address)

Home phone: (xxx-xxx-xxxx)
Cell phone: (xxx-xxx-xxxx)
Email: (email address)

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your early life.

2. Tell me about any early life experiences that caused you pain and suffering.

3. Tell me about any early life experiences of spirituality.

4. Tell me of any ways in which you might have used spirituality to help you during difficult early life experiences.

5. Tell me about the most major trauma you experienced.

6. Tell me about the healing journey you underwent as a result of having experienced that trauma.

7. Tell me about any spiritual growth you might have undergone as a part of your healing from this major trauma.

8. Tell me about any connections you believe there might have been between your major trauma and any earlier hurts.

9. Tell me about any connections between any spiritual growth you experienced as a result of healing from your major trauma and any spiritual experiences you had in your early life.

10. Tell me about any understanding and clarity you may have gained about who you are at the core of your being.

11. Tell me about any ways in which you feel more connected to yourself as a Métis person as a result of your spiritual growth.

12. Is there anything you wish to add?