

**University of Alberta**

**Composing Lives:**

**A Narrative Inquiry into Aboriginal Youth & Families' Stories to Live By**

by

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## **Dedication**

I engage in research  
for the children,  
children of the past,  
children of the present,  
and children of the future,

but

I dedicate  
this moment,  
this dissertation,  
this doctorate degree,  
to the grandmothers,  
to all of the grandmothers,

because I know

that I did not

do this work

alone.

I stood on the  
shoulders of giants  
and I  
walked in the footsteps  
of my  
ancestors.

## Abstract

Throughout my life I have heard stories about what it means to be an Aboriginal person, yet no story captured the richness and complexities of my experience. As an Indigenous scholar seeking a deeper understanding of Aboriginal education in and out of schools, I continue to hear stories about who Aboriginal youth and families are supposed to be. Each time I listen, I wonder how those stories are shaping the lives of Aboriginal children, youth, and their families. Do the stories enable or constrain the way they see themselves?

From within two larger SSHRC and ACCFCR funded studies looking at the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families in a Canadian urban, provincially-funded school system in Canada, I worked alongside Aboriginal youth and their families to inquire into their storied lives. My research puzzle specifically asked: What are the stories that Aboriginal youth and families tell of who they are and are becoming, and how do the other stories (cultural, familial, community, and school stories), especially those of *the Indian in mind*, influence or shape their stories of becoming?

I engaged in a narrative inquiry which allowed me to attend to the relational accountability that is important to me. My doctoral study built capacity for Aboriginal youth and families. This study too will contribute to the larger practical and social worlds, attending to the ways in which Aboriginal youth and families make sense of the available stories that tell them who they are, while also creating spaces for new stories to be told—stories which can inform policies to be more responsive to the context and lives that are unfolding and evolving. My

research has created possibilities to tell different stories of Aboriginal youth and families, while acknowledging the very real disparities and inequities Aboriginal people experience, it emphasises the possibility that Aboriginal education can build on a deeper understanding of the influence of the *Indian we had in mind*.

### **Acknowledgements**

I think back to the little girl who sat on the blue vinyl chair and remember how often I was lost in thought and dreaming of a future where I might be destined to be queen if what my grandma said was true. I think about what it took to get from that blue vinyl chair to a doctorate degree and I overflow with gratitude as I know I did not do this alone. There is not enough space to truly express how grateful I am for those who supported me as I travelled each year a little bit closer to achieving my dreams. I will name just a few here knowing that this is just the beginning of my expressions of gratitude to the many friends, family members, classmates, and colleagues who supported me in so many different ways.

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**To the many aunties and uncles** for helping to raise me and sharing their homes with me at different times in my life. I am truly blessed to have been loved by so many.

**To all the cousins** for being my first real friends and often my biggest supporters. You inspire me with your dedication to your families and to your dreams whatever they may be.

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## Chapter 1: Narrative Beginnings

### Acknowledging Those From Whom the Knowledge Comes

My name is Trudy Michelle Cardinal and I am a Cree/Metis<sup>1</sup> woman from northern Alberta. My maternal family, descendants of nimosôm<sup>2</sup> (my grandfather), John Felix Cardinal and nohkôm (my grandmother), Sarah Cardinal, are from Wabasca/Desmarais, Alberta. My paternal roots are with the Sinclair family from Slave Lake, Alberta. My grandmother Flora Wick was Cree and my grandfather (deceased before I was born) was a Swedish man named Fred Wick. I am the second born of four children (the youngest deceased as an infant) of Marie Augustine Cardinal and Inier Wick. I was raised in the communities of Wabasca/Desmarais, Slave Lake, and High Prairie. Because my mother's family is from Wabasca/Desmarais, that land calls me home. I have learned this way of introducing myself from other Indigenous<sup>3</sup> scholars who have come before me and from the introductions I have witnessed my whole life. When Aboriginal people meet each other for the first time, "Where are you from?" is the most common question. The question seeks identity through "location of your roots, your family, your ancestors, your relations, your home, your place, your tribe, your Reserve" (McLeod, 1998, p. 58). As I respond, I attempt to locate myself in my home communities of Wabasca/Desmarais, Slave Lake and High Prairie, and in the families of Cardinal and Sinclair so that readers of this work know who I am and where I come from. This kind of positioning is important because who I

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<sup>1</sup> I identify as a Cree/Metis woman because I have direct ties to both Cree First Nations ancestors (both maternally & paternally) as well as direct lineage to Metis ancestors (both maternally & paternally). I identify with both because the ways I, and my family, live in this world reflect the knowing gained by being a part of both traditions and cultures.

<sup>2</sup> The word "nohkôm" is the Cree word for "my grandmother", and "nimosôm" for "my grandfather." (<http://www.creedictionary.com/>)

<sup>3</sup> The terms Indigenous and Aboriginal are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation, depending on the context. I use Indigenous to honour the work of scholars like Steinhauer (2002), Wilson (2001), Weber-Pillwax (1999), Iseke-Barnes (2003), Kovach (2009), and Battiste and Henderson (2000). I use the word Aboriginal when I am speaking about the youth and families with whom we are working in the larger Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research funded study and Indian when I am speaking about my tensions and my understandings of who I am.

am and where I come from has impacted how I engaged in this research. It is also important because these families, the Cardinal and Sinclair families, and all who are part of them, have come alongside of me throughout my educational journey. As an Indigenous researcher, 'knowing my place' is my way of honoring and giving thanks to the ancestors and acknowledging that all that I "know has been given to [me] by all those who came before [me]" (Weenie, 2009, p. 57).

### **Stories as Introduction**

I begin with a story. I do this to draw you into relationship and to invite you to come alongside me as I begin to tell the story of my research. I do this because I believe that "stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live" (King, 2003, p. 9). The story I tell, one that has stayed with me for the whole of my life, is about me as a child when I still believed, as I was told by my grandma, that I would one day grow up to be queen. It begins when I had just moved in with my aunty, uncle and three cousins so I could begin grade one at the same time as one of the youngest girls. The move took me to a new house in a new town.

I remember missing my grandma and the blue vinyl chair I sat in so often when together we had quietly passed the time in her sunny kitchen. In my new home I spent time quietly trying to learn the new rules. In this house, with my 3 cousins, I didn't get the sense that they believed I would someday be queen. Inside of this new house, just as I remember doing for the whole of my early life, I hovered near the outskirts of the adult conversations listening to stories not meant for my little girl ears. It is here that I first heard Indian jokes about alcohol and laziness and free money given to the undeserving Indians, and it is here that *Indian* and *mother* first became connected. Being too young to fully understand all of this adult conversation, the only thing that I began to understand was that I

was no longer queen, and instead I might very likely be this *Indian* that they spoke of. Life in first grade progressed uneventfully yet ended with a Most Improved certificate. The former non-reader, who never did attend kindergarten, was now officially a reader! And if what my relatives said was true, I was an Indian reader and not a future queen.

I returned home to my grandma's house when school finished that year. I understood I was not going to be queen despite what my grandma told me and, with a now uncertain future, I turned to books and trusted they would tell me what my future might be. Adult conversations still intrigued me, but stories in books began to draw me away from the blue vinyl chair that had once been my queen's throne. Off I went to the quiet of my bedroom where storytellers drew me inside and transformed me into someone not quite myself and not-quite-queen, but still worthy of grand adventures. With that word, that *Indian* word, hovering above me as a little girl, I slipped inside of the story and began to dream. In these books, I read of Tom, Susan, and Betty and *The Little White House* (Russell & Ousley, 1961). Mother was blonde and wore high heels, and Father returned from work in a business suit. As I read, I became part of birthday parties and painted garages and wore pretty dresses and chased a dog named Flip. It was a different dream, but it was just as powerful and just as desired as the dream I lost when the world pointed at me and saw, not queen, but instead, little Indian girl. I loved staying inside of the story in those books but life often called and I was forced to return to the real world. The real world still had Grandma and a brother and a sister and little house. And the house was blue and not white. And father had died and mother was not around all of the time. Despite my longing to live in that world, inside of that book, I couldn't. I wasn't Susan or Tom or Betty. I longed to have light-coloured curly hair instead of hair that was long, dark and straight. I longed for a mother and a father and the laughter



and smiles and pretty dresses that existed in this world. I longed to stay inside of that story. I longed to be not quite myself. (Adapted from Cardinal, 2010, pp. 177–178)

### **Composing Stories To Live By**

I begin with a story because I think about what Greene (1978a) says, “[s]tories are related to our being-in-the-world” (p. 24). The stories that I tell, these stories of myself, “arise out of the patterns” (p. 24) that I have used as a child in the process of sense-making. These narratives were made available to me in the stories that I read, or that were read to me, in my childhood, including stories that I studied in school. Wherever they came from, they “comprised the canon on which [my] literary and cultural education was based” (Greene, 1978a, p. 24) and they began to shape the stories I told of who I was and was becoming.

As I was reading those stories in *The Little White House* as a young girl, I was trying to make sense of who I was in the world. The memories I recall of the experiences reading and re-reading the same story alone in my bedroom came to constitute a storied geography, a “landscape” as (Greene, 1978a, p. 2) describes that shaped my “standpoint” in the world (Greene, 1978b, p. 24). It is from these early experiences that I began to feel the tensions of wishing I was not the *Indian in mind* (King, 2003)<sup>4</sup> that others had planted in me or I unknowingly planted in myself (Okri, 1997, p. 46) and I began to yearn to be someone else. Greene (1995) also talked of the importance of returning to early landscapes. She says that the search for shapes of childhood is not a “memory game” (p. 77). Rather, it is the kind of search “intended to restore a visibility to the shapes of a primordial, perceived landscape; . . . and that literature (for [her and for] me) . . . has the potential of making visible what has sunk out of sight, of restoring a lost vision” (p. 77). The story I am telling now is a re-collection (Crites, 1986) of my early

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<sup>4</sup> I speak more to this later in this chapter but the concept of “Indian in mind” comes from a story that King (2003) tells of how he was told that he wasn’t the Indian that his German shipmates had in mind from reading novels about Indians written in Germany.

landscape. It is an attempt to understand where it is that I began to learn what it means to be an Aboriginal person; an attempt to understand the stories that have, as King (2003) would say, “[turtled] all the way down<sup>5</sup>” (p. 2).

This story told, to begin this dissertation, describes my earliest moments of forming the image of an Indian that would impact the rest of my life. I tell these difficult stories “not to play on your sympathies” (King, 2003, p. 9) but so you will know where I come from. They are told because they speak to the stories of how even now, I sometimes feel disconnected from Cree/Metis ways of knowing and my identity as an Aboriginal person continues to be filled with tension. I tell these stories also because for the whole of my life I have been told stories of what it means to be an Aboriginal person, yet no story has been able to capture the intricacies and the layers of my experiences.

These early experiences with my Indian-ness, and reading books that showed me lives of non-Indians, shaped the stories I presently “retell and live by” (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 37). Those early conversations about Indians that came to me “like the murmurings of our mothers” told me something of what “conventions demand[ed]” or expected from the Indians my relatives seemed to have in mind. I tell you these stories now because “these stories have formed [me]; they are what [I] must use to make new fictions, new narratives” (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 37). I tell them in an effort to make sense of my lived experience as I return to memory and tell “others the story of what I am about and who I am” (Young, 2003, p. 21).

### **My Master’s Work: An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry**

I first began to understand the impact of “stories to live by” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), as well as the tensions of living a storied life as an Aboriginal person, when I returned to university as a graduate student. By “stories to live

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<sup>5</sup> King tells the story of how the earth “floats in space on the back of a turtle” (p. 2). When asked what was below the turtle he would reply “another turtle” and below that “another turtle” until he finally responded by saying “No one knows for sure [how many turtles . . .] but it’s turtles all the way down” (p. 3).

by” I refer to Connelly and Clandinin’s (1999) work that shapes a narrative understanding of identity. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) define stories to live by as threaded together by concepts of personal practical knowledge and professional knowledge landscapes. Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2003) show how the conceptualization creates an understanding that “Stories to live by attend to the historical, the temporal, the contextual, and the relational. . . . [They] are fluid, evolving and profoundly experiential” (p. 347). I now realize my stories to live by began forming when I was a little girl and first heard the word *Indian*.

My first memories of being introduced to the word *Indian* was at the kitchen table of a Cree/Metis woman, my aunt, who was likely speaking with her non-Aboriginal white husband, my uncle. I understand now how that word *Indian* was shaped by the larger cultural narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Clandinin et al., 2006) that existed in the small northern Alberta towns where we lived. These pre-existing narratives, shaped by centuries of colonization of Aboriginal peoples and tensions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members, played themselves out in those kitchen table conversations that shaped for me the Indian they, my aunt and uncle, had in mind. I have thought about these stories many times throughout my life and spoken about them on many different occasions. Each recounting seems to shift depending on what has been called forth in the conversation and who it is that I am telling the stories to, illustrating the relational nature of stories to live by. The stories to live by that I embody shape who I am and am becoming as a Cree/Metis woman; that is, they shape my identity. These stories that I live and tell continue to evolve but will always be tied to those early landscape stories (Greene, 1995) revealing the temporal nature of this narrative conception of identity. In this way, the concept of stories to live by help me understand my identity as fluid, evolving and experiential.

This deeper understanding of my own stories to live by and a narrative conception of identity did not happen quickly. I can recall how at first I didn’t

understand the connection of my early Master's experience to Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) concept of stories to live by. I had arrived on campus for my Master's courses excited to learn more about my Aboriginal heritage and especially my Cree/Metis culture when I chose a program specifically focused on Indigenous peoples education and research. The experience, as a Master's student, was much more tension-filled than I anticipated. Because I had moved from my maternal home place as a young child and from my paternal home place as a teenager, my visits home were so infrequent that I felt very disconnected from my Cree/Metis family and community. I only became awake to these stories to live by when I felt them in my body. My sense of disconnection revealed itself as I squirmed in my seat, listening to the conversations, responding to the work of Indigenous researchers, yet sometimes unable to find the right words. I was coming to learn about the responsibilities of an Indigenous researcher through the writing of Smith (1999) who said that Indigenous scholars should look at their research projects through the prism of the Indigenous research agenda which should include "healing, mobilization, transformation and decolonization on many levels" (p. 116). She also spoke to the idea that "The indigenous research agenda should take into consideration survival, recovery and development, which are conditions and states of being, through which indigenous communities are moving" (p. 116). The weight of this responsibility felt very heavy and, because I believed in what Smith (1999) was saying, I began to wonder if I was lacking in essential ways as a result of drifting away from my family and from the land of my ancestors. The stories I was hearing and the image of Indigenous researcher that I was creating did not feel coherent with the stories to live by that I carried of who I was as a Cree/Metis woman sometimes feeling disconnected from cultural knowing or community relationships. I felt that I might not have the qualifications or even the right to try to do Indigenous research as she described. What I have come to understand now is that "it is not the method, per se, that is the determining characteristic of Indigenous methodologies, but rather the

interplay (the relationship) between the method and the paradigm and the extent to which the method, itself, is congruent to an Indigenous worldview” (Kovach, 2010, p. 40). The knowing that I embody as a Cree/Metis researcher embraces “relational assumptions as central to [my] epistemologies” (Kovach, 2010, p. 40) and that knowledge is “co-created within the relational dynamic between self-in-relation” (Graveline, 1998). In this way I had to choose a relational methodology that honored my Cree/Metis ways of knowing, and experiences.

My master’s research became an autobiographical narrative inquiry about my experiences of trying to become an Indigenous researcher upholding the responsibilities of what this entailed (Smith 1999; Wilson 2001; Steinhauer 2001). It was from this experience of inquiring narratively into my recollections that I began to understand the influence of those early stories where much of what I knew about being an Indian was overheard in adult conversations, and where I learned who was *not an Indian* in the books of Tom and Susan and *The Little White House* (Russell & Ousley, 1961). As I looked back to those early years I recall seeking a story that might show the multiplicity of who I was and was becoming as an Indian child, one that might also reflect my family stories which were so different from those I was reading about. Through the process of inquiring narratively into the field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) created by my writing over the 2 years of my Master’s program, I came to an understanding that the story of Indigenous researcher that I was creating also held the *Indian in mind* stories to live by that I had formed as a young girl. While engaging in this inquiry, retelling my stories to live by, they began to shift enough for me to begin to imagine possibilities for becoming an Cree/Metis person who did research, that is, an Indigenous researcher, where once I had not seen any.

### **Not the Indian I had In Mind**

The phrase “You’re not the Indian I had in mind” (King, 2003, p. 48) has lingered in my thoughts from the moment I first heard it as a Master’s student. It

featured front and center at the beginning of my master's thesis and it remains a thread throughout my doctoral work. In his book *The Truth About Stories*, King tells the story of working on a German ship sailing for New Zealand. The German crew was unsure what King was so he told them he was Cherokee, or "to keep matters simple, a North American Indian" (p. 48). He tells of how they were "intrigued" and "suspicious" (p. 48). The response of the German cook was to say that he "had read all of Karl May's<sup>6</sup> novels and he had a faint idea of what Indians were supposed to look like and that [King] wasn't what he had imagined" (p. 48). The German cook looked at King and said, "You're not the Indian I had in mind" (p. 48). His story resonated with my early stories of learning of *the Indian who was and was not the Indian*—stories to live by (Clandinin, 2006) that have shaped how I experience the world. It also reflects my tensions as a young teacher as I searched to find literature and stories that would better reflect the experiences of the Aboriginal children with whom I worked.

This tension also arose when I began to hear more and more about the "Aboriginal Learner."<sup>7</sup> A burgeoning topic in schools, professional development seminars, and staff meeting agendas, as educators sought ways to attend to the improving, but still significantly lower, high school completion rates of Aboriginal youth. Research was often focused on finding best practices for working with Aboriginal youth (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Toulouse, 2006). "According to the 2006<sup>8</sup> Census 31% of the off-reserve First Nations

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<sup>6</sup> "For generations Karl May (1842–1912) has ranked high as one of the best loved and most widely read German writers. His tales of adventures set in the American West and in the Orient have sold close to 100 million copies in German and dozens of more millions in translations (33 languages)" (Karl May - Life and Works, n.d.).

<sup>7</sup> "Aboriginal Learner" is a term used by Alberta Education to describe students of First Nations, Metis, or Inuit ancestry. (Alberta Education, n.d.b)

<sup>8</sup> I have searched for more recent statistics on Aboriginal youth and educational attainment throughout the durations of the project however 2006 seems to be the most recent available and is the one most widely used in current research. Statistics Canada. 2001 & 2006 Census profiles. Available at: [www.statcan.gc.ca/](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/), as well as information from the City of Edmonton's Aboriginal Edmonton report (March 2008). A Statistical Profile of Aboriginal Population of the City of Edmonton. Partial Update. Available at: [www.edmonton.ca/city\\_government/edmonton-urban-aboriginal-acco.aspx](http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/edmonton-urban-aboriginal-acco.aspx) both retrieved in 2011 and again September 26, 2013.

population aged 25 to 64 did not have a high school diploma, compared to 15% of their counterparts in the total Canadian population” (Bougie, 2009, p. 11). I recall moments when I was teaching when guest speakers came into my school to tell us about Aboriginal Learners. What they told did not always resonate with my experiences as a Cree/Metis person. They told of life long ago, before colonization, and I wasn’t sure how this resonated with the children with whom I worked in the classrooms. I always called a family member to ask if this Aboriginal Learner they were talking of, and the stories they were telling, were also “true” in our family. Sometimes I was told they fit, other times they did not. I recall still hearing that Cree children and families did not look teachers in the eyes as it was a sign of disrespect in the Cree culture. I still think about that story and I still catch myself watching other Aboriginal people to see if this is true. Proving or disproving the validity of the story told is not what I am seeking to do; rather the fact that is important is that this description of an Aboriginal learner didn’t resonate with my experiences as an Aboriginal student or as an Aboriginal teacher. It seemed as if, despite our best intentions as educators, we were not able to articulate the breadth and depth of the lives of the children we were naming Aboriginal Learners.

When I came across the video Milliken and King (2007) made of the poem King created out of that original story, the writing also spoke to the tensions I was feeling as I was working on my Masters degree , as a teacher, and when I was a young child first hearing the word Indian. An excerpt of the poem (the narration of the video) follows:

I’m not the Indian you had in mind.

I’ve seen him. . . .

I’ve heard him.

I’ve heard him roar.

The warrior wild at the video store.

The movies that we all adore.

The clichés that we can't rewind.  
But I'm not the Indian you had in mind. . . .  
I'm that other Indian.  
The one who lives just down the street  
The one you are disinclined to meet.  
The Oka<sup>9</sup> guy. Remember me?  
Ipperwash?<sup>10</sup> Wounded Knee?<sup>11</sup>  
The other one.  
The one who runs the local bar.  
The C.E.O.  
The movie star.  
The Elder with her bingo tales.  
The activist alone in jail.  
That other Indian.  
The doctor.  
The homeless bum.  
The boys who sing around the drum.  
The relative I cannot bear.  
My father who was never there.  
He must have hated me I guess.  
My best friend's kid with F.A.S.  
The single mom who drives the bus.

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<sup>9</sup> "In the summer of 1990, all eyes were on the small town of Oka for a showdown between native people, Quebec police and eventually the Canadian army. The violent clash was triggered by something as simple as a golf course and as complicated as native burial traditions. The Oka Crisis drew worldwide attention, catapulting native land rights into the spotlight." (CBC Archives, n.d.)

<sup>10</sup> Dudley George was shot and killed in September of 1995 when police fired on natives occupying Ipperwash park. The standoff was over the Ipperwash, an Ontario Provincial Park, which was claimed to be sacred Indian burial ground (Salomons, T., 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Wounded Knee, (a village on a reservation in South Dakota) was the location of last major confrontation between the U.S. Army and American Indians. The event is known formally as the Wounded Knee Massacre, as more than 150, largely unarmed, Sioux men, women, and children were killed that December 29, 1890 day. (Wounded Knee Massacre, n.d.)



I am all of them.

They are us. (Milliken & King, 2007)

Through the poem and the video Milliken and King (2007) were able to demonstrate the tensions and the multiple layers that encompass the *Indian in Mind* that I hadn't been able to find in the children's books that I was seeking as a child and again as an educator, researcher, parent, auntie, and then as a grandmother. King was able to illustrate the tensions among the different versions of *Indians* that we (educators, society, Indians) all imagine, by laying them alongside the voices of variety of regular, ordinary Aboriginal people; people who carry in their bodies these stories that are told of them.

### **Shaping a research puzzle.**

As I heard more and more about Aboriginal education, the Aboriginal Learner, and their Aboriginal families, I wondered at the influence of the *Indian in mind* on children and families. Were they experiencing the stories in the same way as I was? The research from scholars such as Deloria (1998), Francis (1992), and St. Denis (2004) clearly show the harmful impact of the *Indian in mind* and its long history in North American society. Deloria explored the ways non-Aboriginal Americans played or acted out the *Indian they had in mind* in an attempt to shape their own identities. "During the past thirty years, playing Indian has been as much about reading books as it has been about meeting native people" (p. 189). The storying of what it means to be an Indian and the trying on these stories by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people has a long history. Deloria (1998) speaks of these tensions: "The dispossessing of Indians exists in equal tension with being Aboriginally true. The embracing of Indians exists in equal tensions with the freedom to become new" (p. 191). As Deloria makes evident, these tensions that have endured through time. My wonders as a teacher and a researcher are what I wanted to understand better in, and through, the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families.

Francis (1992) explores the image of Indian over time in Canadian culture in his book *The Imaginary Indian*. He asks questions similar to my own wonders around how I have been shaped. His questions focus more on images and stories themselves, rather than how Aboriginal people are living in relation to, and with, the images and stories. He asks questions like: “What did Canadians think an Indian was? What did children learn about them in school? What was government policy towards them? What Indian did painters paint and writers write about?” (p. 5). And he argues that more exploration of this topic is needed and his focus is on understanding the constructions of Indian, not so much the Aboriginal experience. His work has informed my research. However, my work comes from another direction. Rather than beginning from the concept of Indian in mind, in my doctoral work, I chose to attend to my own and to other Aboriginal youths’ and families’ stories. As we inquired into their and my stories, we needed to remain awake to, and attentive towards, stories that revealed tensions between experience and the constructions of Indian. However, I also wanted to understand what Aboriginal youth and families heard and saw about the stories that are told about and to them and I wanted to understand what stories and images they held for themselves.

I have been a part of many discussions as a teacher, as a parent, and as a graduate student about the need for, or against, more cultural revitalization practices in schools (St. Denis, 2004, p. 45). The focus of my research is not about the benefits or downfalls of such programs. My focus rather is how the stories told about the *Indian in mind* that could be in the context of cultural revitalization, or the basis of, are being heard by Aboriginal youth and families. I think about the tensions I felt as an educator trying to make sense of the stories told in the discussions of cultural revitalization and I wondered at how these stories are experienced by the Aboriginal youth and families whom they are designed to serve.

The topic of *Indian in mind* and understanding Aboriginal peoples' identities is certainly not new, nor has it been unstudied. My wonders, however, are around the dangerous images and stories that exist in the shadows; the ones even I, a Cree/Metis woman, have only recently come to understand, wondering at how I have not always been fully aware of or awake<sup>12</sup> (Greene, 1977) to the shaping influences of the stories I lived within. One of these shadow stories came to mind in my Master's work as I reflected on my immediate connection to King (2003) and his *Indian in mind*. As I wondered how it was that I came to my image of Indian and thought back to the adult stories told at kitchen tables for little girl ears to hear, I also thought about what I was reading. The retelling of these early memories of the little girl who dreamed of living inside of the stories in *The Little White House* (Russell & Ousley, 1961) was my way of trying to find a way forward, of trying to bring forward the stories of my early landscape (Greene, 1995). As I inquired into where the images of my *Indian in mind* came from, another favorite childhood book came to mind. This book was one of my first chapter books and a book that I could read on my own, disappearing into the story, as I hid within the library bookshelves or in the solitude of a corner of the house.

### **Little House on the Prairie: Stories of Indians.**

My early landscape was very transient and my siblings and I spent a lot of time living with other relatives—sometimes the three of us together and sometimes apart. There were many moments of feeling displaced and homeless but, again, I do not tell you to evoke sympathy (King, 2003). Rather, I tell you so that we can try to understand how easily I was convinced that I needed to be “otherwise” (Greene, 1995, p. 16). As I saw and lived the poverty and the effects

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<sup>12</sup> Greene (1977) describes wide-awakeness as being related “to being in the world [ . . . denoting] a plane of consciousness of highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements. [ . . . ] This attention is an active, not a passive one. Passive attention is the opposite to full awareness” (p. 121).

of alcohol on the adult generations who were still trying to deal with their own traumas of childhood, I yearned for a different life. I don't think I ever knew, as a child, that I could seek a different life and still be Indian. While there were many blessings in my life and lessons that I needed to learn from the aunties who raised me, I tell of the tensions because it helps me to understand how I drifted away from the family and the community. And it also begins to help me understand how I made sense of my eventual discovery that the life of royalty, the stories of being a queen, as my grandma told to me, were not possible if I was descendent of tipi dwellers<sup>13</sup>. I needed to inquire into where I had even come up with this image of my ancestors as tipi dwellers as this was a large part of the *Indian I had in mind* and one that caused me tensions as a child.

As I inquired into my coveting of the non-Aboriginal life depicted in *The Little White House* (Russell & Ousley, 1961), I also began to think about my early love of the Laura Ingalls Wilder book series, especially the book *Little House on the Prairie* (Ingalls Wilder, 1971). I was searching for where the idea that I did not want to be a descendent of those who lived in a tipi came from. This was a story of myself I told often when I searched, as a child, a parent, and a teacher, for books that would tell stories where Aboriginal readers would not feel so conflicted. As a child I recall wishing that I could time travel and live in settler times. But as I tried to imagine it up, I was always uneasy at the possibility that I would not be in a small wooden house but rather out on the land, in a tipi, with my Indian ancestors. This uneasy memory of time-travel dreams was one that I recall coming from my reading of *Little House on the Prairie* (Ingalls Wilder, 1971). I realized I needed to inquire more deeply into that recollection. As an adult I remember learning that inside of this favorite book the phrase “the only good Indian is a dead Indian” (p. 211) had caused some controversy. I remember feeling some tensions around this but ignoring the tensions because I still loved

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<sup>13</sup> A tipi is the traditional tent like home of the Plains Cree and is usually made of buffalo or moose hide.

the series for the image of family that it gave (ma, pa, and the three siblings). I attributed my unease to that single phrase, but acknowledged that the unease did not dim my love of this story.

I admit, even as I was inquiring into those moments of my early landscape as a Master's student, I did not re-read *Little House on the Prairie* (Ingalls Wilder, 1971). I had read it so many times throughout my life that I did not think it necessary. The last complete re-reading would have been in my 20s as a beginning teacher and I had told myself then that it was the difference between Laura Ingalls's life and mine that told me stories of an Indian life that I did not want. Then finally, for the last course in my doctorate program, I re-read *Little House on the Prairie* and I was actually mortified to discover that my story of a settler family is filled with words and images of Indians portrayed negatively and as a threat to my beloved settler family. I thought the phrase "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" (p. 212) was only an aside and that Indians played a small, negligible role in the story. But the chapter titles alone indicated how little I recalled about the actual Indian storyline and how much it was a part of this book. Of the 26 chapter headings in the table of contents there were 6 specifically about Indians: "Indians in the House," "Indian Camp," "The Tall Indian," "Indian Jamboree," "Indian War-Cry," and "Indians Ride Away." The chapters were filled with images and descriptions of Indians that could easily have caused me to question the stories I had been telling myself about what an Indian was and where the coherence and continuity of my personal narrative was possibly disrupted (Kerby, 1991). And yet somehow as a child I do not recollect that the continuity of my personal narrative was disrupted. I wonder how I smoothed over those stories of Indians that created them, and me, as other. Carr (1986) reminds me about the impact this reading and re-reading of a childhood favorite could have had on my stories to live by when he says, "[O]ur lives admit of sometimes more, sometimes less coherence; they hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart" (p. 97). The tensions I experienced as a doctoral

student in the re-reading of this book awakened tensions I may have felt as a young girl. As I think back to the first readings of this book that I so loved, I wonder how I could have made sense of the images and stories that were being told. Had I allowed these images of Indian to become who I storied myself to be, I wonder if it would have made things fall apart. I wonder now at how I didn't recall those Indian stories in my memories of reading *Little House on the Prairie* (Ingalls Wilder, 1971). Was this how I was able to continue to compose stories to live by with coherence? Coherence, Carr (1986) says, "seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense" (p. 97). As a little girl reading those stories, beginning to understand that I was very likely an Indian, I must have felt a lack of sense of coherence. I must have had a sense that the coherence was missing as I read about and viewed the images of Indians in that book. Looking back, and continuing to make sense of this experience and how it shapes the stories I tell today, as an adult, I see my search for a unity of self. For Carr (1986) this unity is not "an underlying identity" but "a life that hangs together, . . . not a pre-given condition but an achievement" (p. 97). As Carr points out, "[s]ome of us succeed, it seems, better than others. None of us succeed totally. [Still we] keep at it" (p. 97). As I tell and retell these early stories here I understand that I am "telling and retelling, to [myself] and to others, the story of what [I am] about and what [I am]" (p. 97) as a Cree/Metis woman.

In the retelling I became aware that stories were being told in the book *Little House on the Prairie* that I was not awake to (Greene, 1977) as a young child. Throughout the book, Laura is wishing for a baby in a way that makes the baby seem like a thing to be coveted, like a toy. For example, on page three the book tells of Pa's promise to Laura "that when they came to the West, Laura should see a papoose. . . . [a] little, brown, Indian baby" (Ingalls Wilder, 1971, p. 3). I remember how, as the storyline told of her desire that I too, as a child, wanted to see a little brown Indian baby. I did not even realize that the tiny baby cousins who I adored and pestered their parents to let me hold were these same

little brown babies. I did not always connect my own Cree/Metis family to the Indians she was talking about. As I read more in this recent rereading, it became clear how Laura herself began to make sense of the Indians in her life. I sensed how difficult it would have been for me, as a child, to want to accept that I too was the *Indian [she] had in mind*. In this next passage we hear Laura speaking of Indians in the same way she spoke of wild animals.

She knew they were wild men with red skins, and their hatchets were called tomahawks. . . . Pa knew about wild animals, so he must have known about wild men too. Laura thought he would show her a papoose someday, just as he had shown her fawns, and little bears, and wolves.

(Ingalls Wilder, 1971, p. 56)

I know I would not have wanted to be of the “wild men” (p. 56) she spoke of. The more I read of her description of the Indians, the more I could just imagine myself as a young 7- or 8-year-old Indian child reading and trying to make sense of what this meant for me and how little I would have imagined myself in this way. The gentle curiosity evoked in the desire to see that little papoose sits alongside of images and stories of Indians that induced fear. The first sighting of Indians is described in this way:

she saw two naked, wild men coming, one behind the other, on the Indian trail. . . . They were tall, thin, fierce looking men. Their skin brownish-red. Their heads seemed to go up to a peak, and the peak was a tuft of hair that stood straight up and ended in feathers. Their eyes were black and still and glittering, like snake eyes. . . . They looked at the place where those terrible men would appear when they came past the house. . . .

“Indians!” Mary whispered. (Ingalls Wilder, 1971, pp. 134–135)

And then while I, as the young reader, was likely experiencing fear of the Indians, the story also introduced the poverty and hunger of the Indians. The reading of this may have caused me tensions and worry that to claim my Indian ancestry and to place myself in the context of this story meant I had to also take on the story of

being so hungry that I would eat crumbs off the hearth. It is described in the story of the men who come into the house.

The naked wild men stood by the fireplace. [ . . . ] she smelled a horribly bad smell and she looked up at the Indians [ . . . ] she saw their leather moccasins. Then their stringy, bare, red-brown legs, all the way up. Around their waist each of the Indians wore a leather thong, and the furry skin of a small animal hung down in front. The fur was striped black and white, and now Laura knew what made that smell. The skins were fresh skunk skins. . . . The Indians' ribs made little ridges up their bare sides. Their arms were folded on their chests. [ . . . ] Their faces were bold and fierce and terrible. Their black eyes glittered. . . . Laura peeked, and hid, and peeked again, while the Indians ate the cornbread that Ma had baked. They ate every morsel of it, and even picked up the crumbs from the hearth. (Ingalls Wilder, 1971, pp. 137–140)

Included, as part of this story, is an image of Laura cowering against the wall peeking out at the two Indians as they stand there inside the little house. As I try to recollect those early reading memories, blurred by subsequent re-readings throughout my childhood, I still experience tensions around the image of what could be my Indian ancestors “picking up the crumbs from the hearth” and eating them (Ingalls Wilder, 1971, p. 140). In the rereading of the novel as an adult in a doctorate program, I saw another moment where the *Indian I had in mind* began to form and how I would have tried to make sense of the concept King alluded to when he says that “We are all of them. They are us” (Milliken & King, 2007). The Indians portrayed in *Little House on the Prairie* were not the ones I knew in my family and yet I had an idea that they could be because every time I dreamed of living there with the settlers I cringed in fear and dismay that should the time-travel happen I would end up a tipi dweller and not a settler. There was a knowing in my body even then that this story was not coherent with what I knew and was evoking a sense of unease. I had not even remembered that this book



was a story of settlers *and* Indians. I heard, and I yearned, only for the settler story. I see now that the early images I formed of my own Aboriginal ancestry are still tied up in what I learned about Indians from this book. As I spoke to more people about my mortifying discovery inside of a beloved story, I realize how they too focused more on the settlers and this quiet story of Indians slips silently inside of our images of the *Indian in mind*, almost without our awareness.

### **Indian girl?**

The story I tell of myself is more complex than can be captured in these first stories. I need to also tell the stories of how I didn't always *not* want to be an Indian, even as there was always tension around who I was as an Aboriginal child. I return now to the story of me as a little girl with which I started. I am older now and have moved once again.

Years go by, and I was a little older and perhaps a little quieter, and I still listened when I could to all the conversations, which swirled around me but still books were my true love. Books had become some of my best friends. I knew then that I was an Indian, although not the one in the books who scalp others and kill settlers and hunt buffalo. My name gave it away, and my mother and my mother's family confirmed it and even my grandmother as she pounded moose meat into pemmican<sup>14</sup> had given me some subtle clues about who I was, and I wasn't really sure that it is something to be very proud of.

I no longer lived in the town, in the low-rental house, in the safety of Grandma and a blue vinyl kitchen chair. Instead I lived with my grandfather (omosôma<sup>15</sup>) in a cabin in the woods with my mom and my

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<sup>14</sup> My paternal grandmother did not choose to be called by the Cree name. She was grandma to me and she would often sit in her favorite chair by the kitchen table pounding a bag full of dried moose meat into very fine powder. This powder could be mixed with lard, or moose fat to create a delicacy eaten by the Cree and Metis. This is called pemmican or in the Cree Language, pimihkân.

<sup>15</sup> The word "omosôma" is the Cree word for "her grandfather", and "nimosôm" for "my grandfather".

sister and my brother. My mosôm<sup>16</sup> spoke Cree and hunted and trapped and built his home himself. I can remember sitting and listening and wondering at what he was saying in Cree, understanding only bits and pieces, and yet I often peered into his face looking for similarities to my own. His face was large and dark and lined from years of being outside. His silhouette, as he sat by the kitchen window each morning, showed the slicked back-gray hair and the prominent features so unlike my own. He was often silent when we were alone, knowing I would not understand if he tried to speak to me in the only language he knew. He was not the Indian I had heard of. He was not lazy. He was not drunk. He did not get money because he was Indian. Although stories say he might have been different when he was young, the mosôm I knew then was not the Indian I had read of in books nor the Indian I had heard of in those secret whispers and hurtful jokes. I did not understand. If I was supposed to be Indian and not queen, why did I still feel not quite myself? Was it possible that an “Indian girl” with an Indian grandpa called mosôm could really claim to be Indian if she couldn’t even communicate with him in his Indian language? (Adapted from Cardinal, 2010, p. 182)

In this story I come again to the tensions I have lived. I tell you all of these stories as a way to introduce you to who I am and what it is that urges me to seek a deeper understanding of my becoming stories to live by. It is because of these stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), told to me at such a young age, that I learned what it meant to be an *Indian*. I choose the word *Indian* because that is the word that caused me tensions as a child and because it is King’s (2003) story of the *Indian in mind* that has helped me to makes sense of my early experiences.

In my Master’s research and in my doctoral course work I have had time to inquire into my early narratives of experience and see how I took on the stories told of Indians in ways that forever shaped the way I experience the world. In the

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<sup>16</sup> Growing up we shortened the Cree word for grandfather and just called him “mosôm”.

work of Minh-ha (1989) I see how deeply, and yet almost secretly, these stories attached themselves to me, never to be let go again. These stories and this experience of inquiring into them has led me to my wonders about Aboriginal youth and families and what stories are being told to them. I wondered how they were making sense of their own storied identities. I wondered what “forces have been aroused and set into motion” and I am aware of how important it is that we take the time to inquire into what stories are being told which “will linger on” in them (Minh-ha, p. 133).

### **The research puzzle.**

From within a larger SSHRC and the ACCFCR funded study looking at the lived experiences of Aboriginal youth and families in an urban provincially-funded school system in Canada, I worked alongside three Aboriginal girls and their families to inquire into their storied lives, as they tell them, and explore how relationships shape the ways we come to understand our experiences. My research puzzle specifically asks: What are the stories that Aboriginal youth and families tell of who they are and are becoming, and how do the other stories (cultural, familial, community, and school stories), especially those of *the Indian in mind*, influence or shape their stories of becoming?

### **Experience**

The focus of this study is inquiry into the experiences and identity negotiations of Aboriginal youth and families. The view of identity that informs my doctoral work is a narrative conception of identity, known as “stories to live by” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). I was drawn to narrative inquiry as a way to understand my experiences over the years in regards to negotiating my identity around the concept of *Indian in mind* (King, 2003) that I was coming to know. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry as a “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and

in social interaction with milieus” (p. 20). This idea of focusing on experience in collaboration and over time resonated with the ways I had come to understand my stories to live by and so I felt it was appropriate for the research I imagined alongside of Aboriginal youth and families. As a narrative inquirer I am able to “enter [into the] matrix [of the research] in the midst and [progress] in the same spirit concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experience that makes people’s lives both individual and social” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). I will speak more to the methodology in the next chapter. However I introduce it here as I recognize that the view I hold of identity reflects the central place experience holds in the research methodology as well as in the ontological commitments (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007) that frame the research.

The view of experience taken up by narrative inquirers has its roots in John Dewey’s (1938) pragmatic philosophy (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 38). Experience is important to the narrative conception of identity that I hold because I believe it is as Clandinin (2006) states, that “people shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories” (p. 375). A “Deweyan theory of experience [is] central to the epistemology and ontology of narrative inquiry” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 38). This view of experience resonates with an Indigenous paradigm as Wilson (2001) describes: “An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all of creation” (p. 176). This idea of not just interpersonal relationship between the researcher and the subjects, but rather also a relationship with all of creation seemed to invite knowing that came from experiences and that understood the importance of the metaphorical three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The three dimensions (common places) being the social and personal dimension, temporality dimensions (past, present and future), and place dimension (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Inquiring in this way, privileging experience, and the three

dimensional inquiry space, allows for the relational whether it be with the cosmos, with animals, plants or with the earth (Wilson, 2001) or whether it be with family and community members who are part of the inquiry, part of the experience. “It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177). Because my research puzzle seeks to understand more deeply the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families through narrative inquiry into the stories they tell of who they are and are becoming, attending to relational knowing was important.

“[N]arratives are the form of representation that describes human experience as it unfolds through time” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 40) and as such felt the most suited for my inquiry into the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families with the understanding that more than stories, the narrative inquirer also attends to “actions, doings, and happenings, all of which are narrative expressions” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 79). Dewey’s pragmatic ontology of experience emphasizes continuity which is:

the idea that experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum—the imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2)

Thinking about this continuum as it relates to my own stories to live by I see how my experiences as a child continue to influence my experiences as a teacher, and shape my stories to live by. The temporal unfolding of my life continues as I begin to imagine becoming a teacher educator and a researcher in the future.

A third feature of a pragmatic ontology of experience (Dewey, 1938) is the “emphasis on social dimensions of our inquiries and understandings” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 41). My research, a narrative inquiry into the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families, is grounded in Dewey’s (1938) conception of experience, as well as Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative

view of experience and their insistence on the relational, contextual, and temporal characteristics of experience. It is an inquiry that “explore[s] the stories people live and tell. These stories are the result of a confluence of social influences on a person’s inner life, social influences on their environment, and their unique personal history” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007 p. 41) with an understanding that “all of our experiences take place with our total being” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 26).

### **Narrative Conceptions of Identity**

Framed by a Deweyan ontology of experience my research on identity “begin[s] with experience as expressed in lived and told stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 40). Thinking about lives in this way, as storied lives, my research is also informed by Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative conceptualization of identities. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) write about how teachers’ knowledge, and the various context in which they lived, are interwoven, and how these stories, stories they lived and told of who they are and are becoming, are understood as identity stories, that is, “stories to live by” (p. 4). “Stories to live by” are “multiple, fluid, and shifting, continuously composed and recomposed in the moment-to-moment living” (p. 9). Thinking about my research wonders, about the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families and seeking a deeper understanding of the ways they negotiate their identities, their stories to live by, I was drawn to Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) concept of life as “filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities” (p. 17). Their work is deeply grounded in a view that humans are storytelling beings (Archibald, 2008; Heilbrun, 1997; King, 2003; MacIntyre, 1998; McLeod, 2007) and so my inquiry into identity, is framed by an understanding that identity is grounded in the stories we live, tell, retell and relive. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) further explain that lived stories are those we live.

Told stories are those that we tell. Retold stories are the stories used “to interpret lives as told in different ways, to imagine different possibilities” (p. 478) and to relive stories is to “live out the new person” (p. 478). I think about the stories of the Indian I, and others, had in mind, that I told as a child and into my adult years and how I began to retell these stories in my graduate studies, as I inquired into them seeking new insights and possibilities into the tensions I experienced when I imagined a story to live by of Indigenous researcher. And I understand how it was through the retelling that I was able to relive those retold stories, in that I am now able to live out my changed stories of who I am and am becoming as an Cree/Metis researcher; as an Indigenous researcher.

The conceptualization of identity which informs this research project is in contrast to the conceptualization of identity that I became familiar with in my undergraduate studies. I had been introduced to identity as “stages” from theorist such as Erickson (1970). I had to think about a theory of identity based on a person’s successful movement through eight stages. The theory focused on identity crisis and the resolution of such crisis as a movement up a stage. The stage that has the most relevance with my doctoral work is stage five. In this stage, the adolescent stage, the adolescent assesses their strengths and weaknesses as they negotiate who they are, and who they will become. Throughout this stage, an adolescent makes choices about who they think they are, based in part on what they believe. Viewing identity in this way indicates a search, a sustained effort to make sense of who we are. Erickson (1970) believed that to not engage in this work, identity confusion, alienation, and isolation might arise. While this theory takes into consideration the influence of historical and cultural contexts I was not comfortable with the potential for viewing identity negotiations in a deficit way and with a dichotomous, either/or view, with a focus on the attainment or lack of attainment of the next stage. In contrast to theorists like Erickson (1970) whose notion of identity I see as consisting of relatively linear movements through various stages, narrative constructions of identity speak to humans as storytellers

(Heilbrun, 1988; McAdams, 1993) in more complex and meaningful ways. Looking back to the stories I tell of coming to know who I am and am becoming as a Cree/Metis child with my grandma, then a pre-teen with my Mosôm<sup>17</sup>, and an adult mother and teacher and now a Kokôm (grandmother), I see identity in much more fluid and more contextual ways. I didn't experience a step-by-step, stage-by-stage progression as my stories to live by were formed. Rather I recollected (Crites, 1986) these same stories multiple times throughout my life, inquiring into them in my master's work in ways that I could begin to retell, and relive in ways that created possibilities. The stories to live by, my identity, continues to shift. I do not see identity as linear, and as striving to attain a stage. Rather I see it as a constant negotiation seeking narrative coherence within a life (Carr, 1986).

A narrative conceptualization of identity is informed by the work of many, such as Kerby (1991) who suggests that it is through self-narration that we think about identity and what it is to be human. It is also informed by the work of Bruner (1986) who argues that narrative knowing is primarily an act of the mind and Crites (1971) who writes that "the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative" (p. 291) and that experience is a storied phenomena. My research, informed by the many stories of Indians that I carried throughout my life, draws upon the ideas of Carr (1986) and Dewey (1938) as they attend to the temporal nature of experience as lives unfold. I was seeking to understand how it is that Aboriginal youth and families attend to the ideas of Carr (1986) and Kerby (1991) that is, to how narrative identity is dependent on the degree of coherence and continuity that can be construed as lives are composed. This understanding was in keeping with my experience of seeking coherence and continuity throughout my life.

MacIntyre's (1998) argument that humans are story-telling beings and that a person's sense of self is grounded in the stories people tell also helped me to

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<sup>17</sup> The word kokôm (also can be spelled kohkôm) means your grandma (or your grandmother) in the Cree Language and the word nimosôm means my grandfather but often Cree families just say Kokôm or Mosôm as a way of naming grandparents.



understand how influential the stories to live by that I held about Indians was and continue to be. I had been telling these stories for much of my life and feeling them in my body since I was a young girl. In this way, as MacIntyre explains, my stories gave context and this context is impacted by temporality and culture. As I began to think about identity, in relation to Aboriginal youth and families, I needed to think about how this would be influenced by their place in society and the interconnectedness of events. I began to understand how “the unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest” (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 211). Drawing upon MacIntyre’s (1984) work helped me to understand that my narrative conception of identity insists that I think about the interconnectedness of stories, and to consider how the stories of school, family and society influence the stories Aboriginal youth and families tell of who they are and are becoming. My own stories to live by were influenced by books I read in and out of school and by experiences alongside of many family members. As I reflect back on these experiences I understand now how the experiences might have been influenced and shaped by the larger societies construction of who were and were becoming as an Aboriginal family.

As noted earlier, Carr (1986) described coherence as “a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense” (p. 97). Carr argues there are two parts to this coherence. The first is the living out of a narrative and the second is the construction of narrative.

I think about how as a child how difficult it must have been to find narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) in the stories I was hearing about Indians and trying to makes sense of who I was in relation to the stories of Indian that I was hearing. I was, and still am, as Carr argues, constantly engaged in a process where I tell and retell stories of myself. In this I understand the importance of the over-time-ness to these experiences of retelling my story to create coherence. Carr (1986) reminds me of the importance of temporality in this work on identity as time will be around us, as researcher and participants, and the “past is still

viewed in light of its connection to present and future in an ongoing project” (p. 98). I needed to make sure that I stayed alongside of my participants for long enough to attend to the temporal nature of work around narrative conceptions of identity. Just as I was able to inquire into my own stories and experiences over the 5 years of graduate studies (two as a master’s student, and three as a doctoral student), an inquiry that stretches back to my childhood, speaks to my experiences in the present, and pushes out into my imagined future.

I have come to understand my life narratively and spoken to some of the work that has informed my understanding. I understand the lives of Aboriginal youth and families as multiple and always, as my stories are, in the process of being constructed and told (Bateson, 1989; Carr, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, Connelly & Clandinin 2006; Coles, 1989; Crites, 1971; Kerby, 1991). Bateson’s (1989) work speaks of “women ‘composing lives’ in improvisatory and relational ways, always making sense of transitions through inventing new stories” (Huber, Caine, Huber, & Steeves, 2013, p. 219).

I was especially drawn to the work of Lugones (1987) whose understanding of complex and pluralistic identities allowed for the exploration of multiplicity that I sought and helped to resist a tendency to pull forward an Indian I had in mind while engaging in research with Aboriginal youth and families. Lugones (1987) explores how “we inhabit ‘worlds’ and travel across them and keep all the memories” (p. 14). This concept of travelling across worlds spoke to a way I could think about the many moves I made as a child and how in those moves I would be entering into a “world” (p. 14) that might be different that the one I had known. This concept resonated with the sense I have been trying to make about the construction of Indian I was forming as I moved in and through multiple worlds. It resonated also with the unease I felt thinking about an Aboriginal learner as a singular entity. As we “world”-travel across worlds, Lugones (1987) shows that we construct images of who we are and what we are about, as well as images of who others are and what they are about. I understood

that this concept could help me to also think more deeply about the experiences, told in stories, of my Aboriginal youth and family participants as I began to think back to my experiences as a child, when I would cross into another world, like the world my aunt and uncle lived in, and my sense of dis/ease I understand now, was telling me that I was being constructed in ways that didn't resonate with how I had constructed myself (Lugones, 1987). I think about how now, as I carry "forward these images from across worlds, [I] gain deeper understandings of [myself and] of others, and of the contexts in which we live" (Huber et al., 2013, p. 219).

Attending to a narrative conceptualization of identity was also important as I thought about Nodding's (1991) sense that "stories have the power to direct and change our lives" (p. 157). There were moments in my Master's work where I felt as if the university was not a place where I felt a sense of belonging or where I imagined being sustained as an educator. I found myself often in a "world" (Lugones, 1987) having to think about whether I would live out or up to the image that other seemed to hold of me, or that I began to have in mind. Having the opportunity to inquire narratively into my own stories to live by, I came to a place where in the retelling of my stories, I began to see possibilities of playfully "world"-travelling (Lugones, 1987).

By "worlds" and "world-travelling" Lugones (1987) writes about how she experienced being an "outsider" (p. 3) as a woman "of color in the US" (p. 3). She saw herself as having to "travel" to different worlds, worlds in which she would construct herself and worlds where she might be constructed or seen in stereotypical or arrogant ways (Lugones, 1987). Thinking about the ways I too, as a Cree/Metis child often felt this same sense of "outsider-ness" that Lugones (1987) speaks of. There were times that I did not "understand or hold the particular construction of [me in a particular] world. . . . [or] that I understood the construction, but [did] not hold it of myself" (p. 10). As I revisit these memories I am filled with the same sense of unease that I still experience when I find myself

in a world that I am not at ease. Yet now, I begin to think about the idea of travelling playfully that Lugones (1987) introduces, as a way that I could possibly travel in and out of “worlds,” sometimes occupying more than one “world” at a time (p. 17).

By playful Lugones (1987) is speaking to the idea that “we are not self-important, . . . not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves,” and therefore we remain open to “self-construction” (p. 17). I think about how as a child and even now as an adult I am not always travelling playfully, in that I am “worried about competence” (p. 17) when instead I should be thinking about how to not be “wedded to a particular way of doing things” (p. 17) in the various “worlds” I find myself in. By being playful in “worlds” she is not suggesting that we “abandon ourselves” (p. 17) nor that we remain “stuck in any particular world” (p. 17) rather she suggests we be there creatively (p. 17). I think about this idea of travelling to “worlds” playfully, and doing so with an “openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred, and finding ambiguity and double edges a source of wisdom and delight” (p. 17) as a way that possibly allows for a deeper understanding of who we are as we experience the different worlds. In this way, travelling playfully, I see hope for the inhabitants of differing worlds, to begin to see with each other eyes, and see how both or all are being constructed, and witness the sense of selves we hold in these worlds. By attending in this way, I imagine as Lugones (1987) does that we will be able to identify with each other, and cease to ignore, exclude or separate in the ways that I experience when I enter into a world that constructs me as an Indian in ways that I might not understand. Seeing through each other’s eyes, allows for loving world travel, shifting the tendency we might have to view each other arrogantly (Lugones, 1987, p. 17).

Lugones (1987) helps me to think about identity, and of humans as storytelling beings which is coherent with the narrative ways I have come to understand identity. The concept of “thinking narratively” (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000) helps to make sense of the wonders I have around my identity as an Aboriginal person and how it is I “world”-travel carrying the stories of Indians others or I might have in mind, and experiencing being constructed or constructing myself as an Metis/Cree women in the multiple worlds I inhabit.

Seeing the world as a storied one, as people living storied lives in storied worlds also shaped my research puzzle. At first when I began to speak to others about my early experiences as a reader, where I began to wish that I was not the *Indian in mind*, I focused on books available to youth. Yet my wonders are bigger than this. My narrative conception of identity opens to ideas of life as a life story as Mair (1988) speaks to, “Stories are inhabitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world” (p. 127). I do believe that the stories of the Indian I formed as a child, have informed my life. They have shaped the stories I live by beginning when I was a little girl. I believe that as Aboriginal people, the Aboriginal youth and families and myself do inhabit the “the great stories of our culture” (p. 127). In my work I seek to understand how it is that “[w]e live through stories. . . . [and] are ‘lived’ by the stories of our race and place” (p. 127). I seek to understand more deeply what stories are being told to Aboriginal youth and families about who they are and are becoming as Aboriginal people, and especially what stories are they telling about themselves. I wondered if they experience stories told about the *Indian in mind* and how are they making meaning of these experiences.

### **The Urgency**

It came to my awareness how important my research was, for more than my own understanding, as I noted how the majority of the articles that appeared in my searches focused on things such as continued racism (Freidel, 2010), Aboriginal youth violence (Flanagan et al., 2011), Aboriginal peoples in the justice system (Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts, & Johnson, 2006), Aboriginal youth and gangs (Grekul, & LaBoucane-Benson, 2008; White, 2008), Aboriginal youth

at risk (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2001), Aboriginal peoples' mental health (Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000), and Aboriginal youth suicide (Chandler, 2005; Furi & Guimont, 2003; MacNeil, 2008). As I looked over the literature it appeared to address the statistically dismal story of poverty, violence, poor health, and low educational success rates of Aboriginal youth and families. In these particular studies, identity was always mentioned as a contributing factor. However it was not always clear what conceptualization of identity was at work and it was difficult to remain hopeful immersed in the narratives created by the statistics.

Through my stories I attended to the importance of understanding the impact of the stories we are told as children on my own identity but I could not assume that Aboriginal youth and families of today take up the stories in the same ways that I did. I could not know if they listen around the edges of adult conversations as children nor could I know if they take up the stories told in books in the same ways I have. However, I did come to know that the research I was seeking showed that identities of Aboriginal youth and families are still pressing concerns. The research illustrates what Friedel (2010) has come to understand as a need for research that moves away from a general "trajectory whereby Indigenous students are understood as 'the problem', resulting in the application of a highly problematic focus on culture" (p. 21) and instead involves "a serious examination of the troublesome realities of cultural fundamentalism and authenticity in Indigenous education, and the manner in which these serve to cover over critical matters concerning race and power" (Friedel, 2010, p. 21). While my research is not an inquiry into matters concerning race and power, Friedel's work shows that, for the Urban Aboriginal youth she worked with, identity and the image of *Indian in mind* continue to influence the stories the youth tell of who they are and are becoming. I think about the words of a participant in Friedel's (2010) study who spoke of the stories he hears and the tensions he feels: "[Stereotypes] kind of bother me sometimes. It seems the only

thing that people hear about is that there are gangs and they're bad and all of that stuff. All you hear is the bad stuff. You don't hear about the people who are good and are doing good stuff, and it bothers me" (p. 26). I can recall the tensions I experienced hearing the bad stuff stories as a child and trying to understand how to make sense of what it meant in relation to who I was. Friedel's (2010) research alludes to the fact that Aboriginal youth are still facing similar experiences.

McCarty, Romero, and Zepeda (2006) spoke about Aboriginal youth and identity with a focus on *Reclaiming the Gift: Indigenous Youth Counter-Narrative on Native Languages*. The research highlights the impact of the stories being told about Aboriginal youth and families on television, even in their absence. One participant, Johnathon, commented that on his television he never saw any "brown faced people", rather he saw the privileging of Whiteness. "There's us, the Native Americans, then come the Arab people . . . then come the Chinese and Asian people . . . and finally after all these people, then comes the African Americans. Then finally at the top of the chain there's white people [On TV]" (p. 30). Not being able to see himself on the shows that he was watching he concluded that mainstream culture, a "culture he embraced in some aspects of his life—notably his dress—[was] 'telling [him that his] culture is inferior'" (p. 30). Thinking about how similar the Aboriginal youth's experiences were to my experiences, I now seek to understand more deeply the impact of these kinds of experiences on the stories that children and youth tell of who they are and are becoming. I wonder how they formed their understandings of who they are as Aboriginal youth.

As I think about the stories shared by the youth in those two projects alongside my experiences, I think about the tensions I experienced trying to understand stories that tell me who I am in ways that don't make sense; ways that might be constructed as inferior, as Johnathon concluded. Throughout my life I have lived as if I am on a quest for, as Carr (1986) puts it, "narrative coherence of a life story" (p. 96). It has been a struggle with two aspects: one external and

cultural, the other internal and subjective. The first struggle involves living out/up to or outside of “a plan or narrative, large or small, particular or general”; the narrative of *Indian in mind*. The other involves negotiating what those narratives mean to me. In this doctoral work, I hoped to create spaces where the Aboriginal youth and I could begin identifying and negotiating these narratives, big and small.

I imagined identity consisting of not just one story, rather a cluster of stories (Anzaldua, 1999). Understanding identity in this way led me to wonder about the cluster of stories that may shape Aboriginal youth and families. It was important to understand which narratives Aboriginal youth and families are striving to *live up to* and to begin to work alongside of Aboriginal youth and families seeking ways to “construct or choose [other] narrative[s]” (Carr, 1986, p. 96).

### **A Statistical Story**

Thinking about the narratives that Aboriginal youth and families might be negotiating whether to live out or up to, I think about what I call the statistically dismal single story (Adichie, 2009) that seems to inform much of the research about Aboriginal youth and families. What I have come to understand is that the most recent statistical data, the data behind the dismal story of poverty, violence, poor health, over representation in out-of-home care, and low educational success rates of Aboriginal youth and families tends to be based on statistics from the 2001 and 2006 Canadian census. The lack of more recent data fuels my sense of urgency for continued research into the experience of Aboriginal youth and families in Canadian public schools.

In the 2006 census there were 52,105 self-identified Aboriginal people in Edmonton (23,985 households). Of these families, 42.6% live in lone parent families (almost 37% higher than non-Aboriginal families) with Aboriginal children and youth 6 times more likely to receive child protection services and



five times more likely to be in care under Permanent Guardianship Orders. Of the average monthly child protection caseloads, 43% are Aboriginal families (Statistics Canada, 2006). Based on the 2001 census these households also include a disproportionately high rate of unemployment (more than twice the rate as non-Aboriginal people) resulting in four of ten (42.3%) of Aboriginal people living in poverty. The National Household Survey (Statistics Canada, 2011) shows that these trends continue in Canada. Of the 30,000 children, aged 14 and under, in foster care in 2011, nearly half were Aboriginal despite being only 4% of the total Canadian population. The survey also showed that as of 2011, there were 14, 225 Aboriginal children listed as wards of the state. Aboriginal children continue to be under-represented in two parent homes (only 49.6% compared to 76% for non-Aboriginal families). Despite the lack of long term statistical date, the trend on these two reports indicate that issues surrounding Aboriginal youth continues to need urgent attention.

Evidence is shown in these reports that Aboriginal people are more likely than any other to leave school at an early age, although the reports also suggest they are more likely to return to school later in life. While Aboriginal women were making great progress in completing post-secondary education from 1981 to 2001, 36.6% of Aboriginal adults had less than a high school education. While there is a noted gap in the data, especially a lack of a more longitudinal study, the percentage of Aboriginal people in Canada with a university degree has increased, yet, Aboriginal people are still much less likely to have a degree than other Canadians (8% compared to 23% in 2006). While small gains have been made, the challenge continues as education success rates of Aboriginal youth continue to remain significantly lower than non-Aboriginal youth (Hull, 1996; Mendelson, 2006). The Auditor General's (2010) report illustrates positive changes are taking place more recently, especially among Urban Aboriginal youth, however there continues to be a widening gap in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. The health of Aboriginal youth is directly related to

educational outcomes, among other social determinants (Marmot, 2005) making this trend increasingly alarming. Educational experiences of Aboriginal youth and families continues to be shaped by “systemic inequalities related to Canada’s colonial legacy, including the intergenerational impacts of the residential school legacy and various other barriers related to curriculum design, geographic isolation, and the unique social support and infrastructure needs of Aboriginal youth (Battiste, 2000; Battiste & Barman, 1985; Silver & Mallet, 2002)” (Richmond & Smith, 2012, p. 1).

Edmonton has one of the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada and within that population the median age is 25.1 years which is much younger than the Edmonton Census Metropolitan area (CMA’s) median age of 36.4 years (The Edmonton Social Planning Report, 2008). Aboriginal youth are the fastest growing demographic in Canada growing 2.5 times faster than the overall CMA population in Edmonton (The Edmonton Social Planning Report, 2008). In Edmonton 26.6% are under the age of 14 (Statistics Canada, 2006). Between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population grew by 45%, compared with 8% for the non-Aboriginal population in Edmonton. Of most concern to me, of this young demographic, is the alarming statistics that Aboriginal youth are more likely than non-Aboriginal to be victims of crime or arrested and incarcerated for crime. While the Department of Justice has indicated there have been substantial reductions in the number of Aboriginal youth in custody since 2000 Aboriginal youth continue to experience a higher incarceration rate in Canada (Latimer & Foss, 2004). The rate of incarceration was 64.5 per 10,000 population while for non-Aboriginal youth it was only 8.2 per 10,000. Aboriginal youth were almost eight times more likely to be in custody (Kroes, 2008). Aboriginal youth are also more likely to drop out, repeat grades or fail, and experience violence and bullying in their school environment (Statistics Canada, 2008).

With such a young and quickly growing population of Aboriginal youth, and youth who most likely live in poverty, experience family break-down, racism

and violence, and face marginalization (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; Silver & Mallet, 2002), attending to the recommendations of the Royal Commission of 1996 and the acknowledged importance of education for Aboriginal peoples continues to be imperative. Yet, just as the Royal Commission (1996) noted it seems that “rather than nurturing the individual, schooling experiences typically erode identity and self-worth” (p. 434). “[N]o force has been more effective in oppressing First Nations culture than the education system” (Battiste, 2000, p. 163) especially as most urban schools continue to lack Aboriginal teachers, Aboriginal content in curricula, and awareness of the life experiences and cultural values of Aboriginal students and their families (Kitchen, Cherubinin, Trudeau, & Hodson, 2009). The lack of supports is known and yet traditionally the government funding and policy directives focus more on First Nations living on-reserve, leaving urban-based schools serving Aboriginal youth and families to endure significant demands, with inadequate funding, training and human resources (Hanselmann, 2001). The complex, perennial social and educational problem of Aboriginal school disengagement, affects the social fabric of society, and yet we still understand so little about how to begin to respond (Hallet et al., 2008).

The story told in these statistics about Aboriginal youth and families, point out that widespread poverty, low educational achievement, high unemployment, prevalent family dysfunction and child abuse, high rates of substance abuse, suicide rates three to six times the national average, and incarceration rates over five times the national average still the reality of Aboriginal peoples (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003). It is also a reality that there will be a higher than average number of placements of Aboriginal youth into “child welfare, mental health and other institutions” (Blackstock, Trocme, & Bennett, 2004; Grekul & LaBoucane-Benson, 2006; Trevethan, Auger, Moore, MacDonald, & Sinclair, 2002) all of which continues to perpetuate the image of an *Indian in mind*.

This statistically dismal story speaks directly to my Aboriginal family and friends, which left me compelled by a sense of urgency to focus my doctoral research on the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families, seeking a deeper understanding of how they negotiated their stories to live by in relation to this statistical story. Faced with the overwhelming negative statistics I chose not to engage in research that would merely repeat empirical data that portrayed the experiences and achievements and, more often, lack of achievement or deficit of Aboriginal youth in Canadian schools, rather I wanted to understand the experiences the youth were having and how these experiences influence the stories they tell about who they are and are becoming. In this way the voices of Aboriginal youth and families would have a place within Canadian schools, beyond pictures in books, and school policies that far too often reflect a colonial curriculum (Battiste, 2000; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).

### **Creating Possibilities**

Understanding the importance of an inquiry that attends to the statistics, without staying focused on “damage-centered-research” (Tuck, 2009) I attend to my inquiry beginning with the lives and stories of Aboriginal youth and families. I continually felt tensions around how to attend to this inquiry in ways that created possibilities for those who read this work to try to “world”-travel to the worlds of the Aboriginal youth and families, in an attempt to “understand what it is to be them” (p. 17), and to see the world from a different viewpoint. I worried that the dominant narrative told by the statistically dismal stories were perpetuate viewing Aboriginal youth and families in arrogant ways as Lugones (1987) speaks to. She borrows from Frye’s (1983) work when she describes arrogant perception as a failure to travel to someone else’s world or to see from their point of view. I hoped to find a way to engage in research that would shift the focus to allow readers of this work to begin to see ways to engage in “loving perception” (p. 17) which would allow an identification with others and an understanding of “what it

is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes” (p. 17). Knowing that the “structures [or storylines], seen and unseen, . . . do constrain . . . lives” I hold on to the hope that “when noticed can always be imagined to be otherwise, to be more open, to have alternative possibilities” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 89).

From the work of researchers such as Archibald (2008) I am able to see a more ethical way of doing research, a way that also honours who I am and the relational way I live in the world and hold the possibility of loving perception (Lugones, 1987). It is my hope that this work, will become part of the movement away from the trend in research on Aboriginal youth, families and communities that is as Tuck (2009) calls is “damage-centered” while still allow for the recognition of the need to continue to “document the effects of oppression on . . . communities” while considering the “long-term repercussions of continuing to think of [Aboriginal youth and families] as broken” (p. 409). By focusing on the story of the statistics and research that prioritizes the barriers and hardships experiences, then we miss the potential in seeing the lives of Aboriginal youth and families as “not yet” (Greene, 1993, p. 26) and filled with possibility.

## **Chapter 2: Methodology**

### **Narrative Inquiry**

The conceptualization of this study took place while I was a graduate student immersed in two larger studies funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research (Caine et al., 2010; Caine et al., 2012). These larger projects explored, through narrative inquiry, the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families in an urban provincially-funded school system in Canada. From my Master's work, as well as my experiences as a graduate student in these larger projects, I understand narrative inquiry as a methodology suited for the study of experience as storied phenomena. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) speak to the importance of narrative inquiry as a way to understand experience when they say:

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they are and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters a world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 479)

While Dewey's (1938, 1958) view of experience is used to underpin the philosophy of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), Clandinin and Caine (2013) remind us that narrative inquiry is resonant in the work of Bruner (1986) who speaks about narrative knowing; Carr (1986) and his understanding of narrative structure and coherence; and Bateson's (1989, 1994, 2000, 2004) attention to how people learn to improvise in response to life's ambiguities. These are only some of the voices that shape the "methodological commitments" of narrative inquirers whose work can be described as "a continuous attending to

lives in the midst, filled with complexities and ongoing negotiations” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 168).

Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) view of narrative inquiry is informed by Deweyan (1938) view of experience that acknowledges “interaction” between the personal and the social nature of experience; “continuity” or the temporal unfolding of experience; and “situation” which attends to the specific contours of the places where experiences evolve. Dewey’s criterion of interaction prompts narrative inquirers to attend to both the personal and social conditions of experience. Personal conditions include “the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Social conditions, then, are more “existential”—drawing attention to environmental “factors and forces,” human and otherwise, that give shape to each individual’s context (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). Narrative inquiry is concerned with inquiring into individual experiences, but it also acknowledges that the bodies that live through them are “always in relation, always in a social context” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 2).

Another Deweyan criterion of experience—“continuity”—suggests that present experiences (situated in the “the imagined now”) have their roots in previous experiences (“some imagined past”) and provide the grounding for new experiences (“some imagined future”) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Experience is temporal; a continuum that reaches back and strains forward while situated in and by the present. I understand that the stories we told about our experiences, in this work, were always positioned on a continuum of experiences, and that “each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future” (p. 2).

Finally, Dewey’s (1938) conception of “situation” shapes narrative inquirers’ attention to the particularities of place. In narrative inquiry, the notion of place “attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 51). As Basso (1996)

suggests, geographical landscapes may “become wedded to the landscape of the mind, to roving imaginations” (p. 107). In this way, places and locations . . . shape the images in [our] heads” (Caine, 2010, p. 1305). Attending to the particularities of place, in this research, also reflects an Indigenous way of knowing.

Taken together, Dewey’s (1938) criteria of experience—interaction, continuity and situation—provide the theoretical grounding for researching experience through the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (or a “life space”) (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In order to navigate these 3 dimensional life spaces, narrative inquirers move backward and forward, inward and outward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). In this metaphorical space, an understanding of continuity leads to an attentiveness to *temporality* and an awareness of “people, places, and events as always in process” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 23). Attention to *sociality* means that the narrative inquirer must learn to ask questions about the internal (inward) conditions of experience as well as the external (outward). *Place* is the third dimension, and attending to it acknowledges that “*where things take place* always makes a difference to how one may understand a life space” (emphasis in original, Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 361).

I have come to understand narrative inquiry as a way of understanding experience and inquiring into experience. I have come to understand human experience as a temporal and existential continuum wherein individuals lead storied lives. And I have come to understand inquiring into lived and told stories as “a portal to experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375) that draws on personal, social, cultural and historical narratives for its coherence. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) explain,

Framed within this view of experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on individuals’ experience but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals’ experiences are



constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted. Narrative inquirers study the individual's experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside another, and writing, and interpreting texts. (pp. 42–43)

### **Living alongside.**

Narrative inquiry reflects an ontological commitment to relationships (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). As a relational inquirer, I pay attention to those I am in relation with, honouring their voices and reminding myself of my long-term relational responsibilities (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). I become a part of the inquiry. In many ways I too lived on the landscape and was complicit in the world I inquired into (Clandinin, 2006). These responsibilities are grounded in my ethical responsibilities as a researcher and as a Cree/Metis person.

Caine (2007) describes the ethical responsibilities of narrative inquirers as “being marked by living in relation” and inquiry “as a space that brings forth our lived ethical understandings and tensions” (p. 141). Engaging in a narrative inquiry means “living and being in relational space” (p. 141) and as such “brings forth responsibilities where issues of attentiveness, presence and response matter” (p. 141). It was important to me that the research unfold in ways that allow me to attend to my responsibilities as a researcher, but in ways grounded in an ethics of care (Noddings, 1984) and a commitment to relationships and reciprocal respect (Bruno, 2010). Research which upholds an ethic of care needs to attend to social responsibilities, including attention to “equities and social justice” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 167).

In engaging in narrative inquiry as a Cree/Metis person I found myself following the lead of Indigenous scholars such as Bruno (2010), Lessard (2010), and Young (2003). Young (2003) describes the way she also came to choose narrative inquiry for her doctoral work when she says: “Through my proposal, I began telling my story and, as I relived significant moments in my life, I

concluded narrative inquiry honors how Aboriginal people learn and gain knowledge” (p. 25). She drew on the work of Battiste and Henderson (2000) who write that, “Stories are enfolding lessons. Not only do they transmit validated experiences; they also renew, awaken, and honor spiritual forces. Hence, almost every ancient story does not explain; instead it focuses on process of knowing” (p. 77).

The research that I engaged in took “the sphere of immediate human experiences as the first and foremost fundamental reality we have” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 44). It also focused on “the way the relational, temporal, and continuous features of a pragmatic ontology of experience can manifest in narrative form, not just in retrospective representations of human experience but also in the lived immediacy of that experience” (p. 44). In this way, following from this ontology I arrive “at a conception of knowledge . . . of human experience that remains within the stream of human lives” (p. 44).

### **A pragmatic approach.**

As a narrative inquirers we study our “experiences in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for [our]selves and others (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42). My research begins with experience, lived and told, and experience remains a central focus throughout. I adopted a “pragmatic” approach that “treats lived experience as both the beginning and ending points of inquiry” (p. 55).

Theory, in this inquiry, was positioned differently than those adopting a more formalistic view of research. Narrative inquiry begins with experience, lived and told, while formalists begin with a theoretical framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Hale-Hankins (2003) speaks to this when she says: “theory for the most part makes better sense if it is contextualized in the . . . narratives, because that is where it interacted with my questions” (p. 12). This way of engaging with theory is important; it is a process of working up or out, rather than “from the theory down” (Bruner, 1986, p. 12). As Bruner

warns, the theory down approach often results in “an attempt to force one mode of cognition onto another . . . an attempt at a fusion” that is unlikely (p. 12). Wanting to ensure that I remained focused on experience rather than trying to fit the experience into theories, I wove significant theory that informed my inquiry throughout the dissertation, rather than writing a separate literature review. This is a common practice with narrative inquirers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

## **Narrative inquiry methods.**

### **Narrative beginnings.**

In narrative inquiry, the idea of a research puzzle points toward an “enigma to be engaged rather than a problem to be solved” (Iftody, 2013, p. 385). In understanding research as a kind of puzzling, the emphasis is on “re-search, a searching again” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). The narrative inquirer begins with “life situations that seem puzzling, troubling, and ones that could, and should, be improved” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 359).

As I began to shape my research puzzle I was wondering about the stories that Aboriginal youth and families told of who they are and are becoming. I also wondered how other stories (cultural, familial, community and school stories), especially those of *the Indian in mind*, influence or shape their stories of becoming. My puzzling began with the images and stories that exist in the shadows; the ones that I, as a Cree/Metis woman, have only recently come to understand. In my narrative beginnings, I wondered how and why I have not always been fully aware of or awake (Greene, 1977) to the shaping influences of the stories I lived within. Attending to my experiences through the three dimensional inquiry space, I reached back into my childhood to better understand, ultimately name, my research puzzle and attended to the places and contexts where my “stories have unfolded” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 171).

Before I could engage in research with participants and their families, I engaged in an autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000),

one that began during my Masters and continued into my doctoral work, and led to my narrative beginnings. It was necessary for me, as a narrative inquirer to understand my experiences in relation to my research wonders, knowing where these wonders came from and that they are on a continuum. These narrative beginnings became an important part of my research process and shaped the research text as throughout the inquiry the resonance (Caine, 2007) of the youth's experiences drew out my memories, and became central to understanding the co-construction of the experiences I was inquiring into (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Negotiating entry.**

In narrative inquiry, a methodology that privileges experience as well as a relational ethics of care, the research relationship is continually negotiated. Before I began the research, I imagined what forms the relationships might take, and how the research puzzle might be explored in these relationships. I also considered how I would negotiate the “purpose, transitions, intentions and texts” that would shape the research understanding that these negotiations would be an ongoing process (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 170). As I imagined the research project I also had to consider how I would negotiate ways in which I could be helpful to the participants and their families throughout and following the research. As inquirers negotiate ways to be helpful “they call on, or are called, to live out professional responsibilities and to express personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and social positioning” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 170). In narrative inquiry we enter into relationships with our participants as researchers “participants come to know and see us as people in relation with them” (p. 170). This means that I needed to ensure I was always thinking about my “short-and long-term responsibilities” (p. 170). I wanted to be awake to moments where my participants might need or want me to help in some way so I could attend to those needs or wishes.

Narrative inquirers enter “into the midst of [their] ongoing personal and professional lives; in the midst of [their] lives enacted within particular institutional narratives such as university or other organizational narratives; [and] in the midst of social, political, linguistic, and cultural narratives” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 43) the lives of their participants. The participants, as well, are always in the midst of their lives. Narrative inquiry, therefore, involves a slow process (Clandinin, 2013), which requires “sustained attention, of attending closely, [and] of being in relationship, over time” (p. 51). As narrative inquirers we have to “be attentive to what it means to live as researchers in relationships, to live in collaborative ways in which we can co-compose and negotiate the living, reliving, telling and retelling of stories” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 169). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) draw on the work of Coles (1989) who writes, “We have to pay the closest attention to what we say. . . . Their story, yours, mine—it’s what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (p. 30).

Narrative inquiry spaces are understood to be “spaces of belonging for both researchers and participants; spaces that are always marked by ethics and attitudes of openness, mutual vulnerability, reciprocity, and care” (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 169). “While narrative inquiry opens up a relational knowing and understanding of experience, each relationship between researcher and participant opens up a relational world” (p. 169). Within this world, narrative inquirers attend to the lives in relation, that is the lives of participants and researchers, within the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Part of creating narrative inquiry spaces also calls us to think about “conversational spaces” (Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, 2012, p. 17). This draws my attention to spaces created where as researchers “we might learn to attend more to the voices of the youth” (p. 17). Conversational spaces need to be spaces of openness and vulnerability for both researcher and participants; spaces where stories can be told in their multiplicity, of whole lives, “stories that are in the

midst of living” (p. 17). These need to be spaces that are “not spaces to exchange and confirm . . . already familiar understandings, but, rather, are characterized by emergent occasions for exploring other possible stories” (p. 17).

### **In the field.**

In narrative inquiry “we negotiate with participants an ongoing relational inquiry space, a relational space we call the *field*” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45). Within this field there are two potential starting places, either “listening to individuals tell their stories” (p. 45) or “living alongside side participants as they live and tell their stories” (p. 45). When starting with listening to stories, the most commonly used method is conversations or “interviews as conversations” (p. 45). The conversations, “not guided by predetermined questions, or with intentions of being therapeutic, resolving issues, or providing answers to questions” (p. 45) while still building a reciprocal, mutually beneficial, relationship are important because they create space for both the “stories of participants and researchers to be composed and heard” (p. 45). “Sometimes artifacts (Taylor, 2007) are used to trigger the telling of stories”(Clandinin, 2013, p. 45). When the starting point begins with living alongside participants, in that we create spaces to come alongside, or we become a part of an ongoing space (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011), the telling of stories (conversations, oral histories, or interviews) may play a part but we also go where the participants take us. “[W]e meet their families and/or friends” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45), and enter places that are important to them. These places and relationships that we have become a part of “call forth the stories we, and they tell” (p. 45). Sometimes, when we begin our inquiries with the telling of stories we can be “drawn into participants’ other relationships” (p. 45), just as Lessard (2010) had with his participant Skye when she invited him to come alongside her sisters. Regardless of the beginning place of narrative inquiry, that is, with telling stories or living stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) we must always “attend to the ways individual narratives of

experience are embedded in social, cultural, familial, and linguistic, and institutional narratives” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45) and in this way the inquiry will reflect “the ambiguities, complexities, difficulties, and uncertainties encountered by the inquirer as she/he lives in the field and writes field texts and interim texts and final research texts” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 45).

### **Field texts.**

Field texts (the narrative inquiry term for data) are “composed, or co-composed by researchers and participants. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) chose to use the term field texts rather than data to signal that the texts composed in narrative inquiry are “experiential, intersubjective texts rather than objective texts” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 46). These co-compositions are “reflective of the experiences of researchers and participants, and they need to be understood as such—that is the telling and showing those aspects of experience that the relationship allows” (p. 46). Field texts, in narrative inquiry, can be composed, gathered, and created in multiple ways from “studying the experiences of participants and inquirers” (p. 46).

Given that much of work in a narrative inquiry focuses on telling stories, the method most commonly used is conversations. However, artifacts, such as photos, memory box items, scrap books, and school memorabilia can be used as “beginning places to tell stories” (Caine, 2007, p. 10).

As Clandinin (2013) notes, these items can be used to trigger the telling of stories or they themselves are part of the field texts. As the field texts are gathered, composed, or co-composed, there is an “ongoing interpretation of the stories lived and told” (p. 46). Narrative inquirers remain attentive always to “the relational aspects of working with participants within the conceptual frame of three-dimensional narrative inquiry space” (p. 46) and in this way, participants and researchers, must “acknowledge that they are always interpreting their past from their present vantage points” (p. 46). Because field texts allow us to see

“how others make meaning from experience and may also point us to possibilities of diverse final research texts – that is, the diverse ways we might represent the retold stories (Clandinin, 2013, p. 46) it is important to stay awake to the multiple ways stories can be told, and the multiple ways research text can be composed, and created.

Field texts, recording narrative expressions such as “actions, practices, and happenings, [are] embedded within the research relationship and reflect multiple nested stories” (p. 10). Field texts are composed both to help researchers memory, as well as being a “co-composition reflective of [me as] researcher and participant[s]” (p. 10).

### **Interim research texts.**

“Field texts are always embedded within research relationships. Working carefully from the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we – alone or with participants – begin to shape field texts into interim research texts” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 47). This move from field texts to interim research texts is “marked by tension and uncertainty” (p. 47). Interpretation is ongoing as the inquiry is lived out in the field with participants but “at some point there is a move away from the close intensive contact with participants to begin to work with the field texts” (p. 47). Because of the quantity and diversity of kinds of field texts this task can be daunting.

“Interim research texts are often partial texts that are open to allow participants and researchers opportunities to further co-compose storied interpretations and to negotiate the multiplicity of possible meanings” (p. 47). Further negotiations with participants around unfolding threads of experience is important and therefore repeated bringing back of interim research texts to the participants is central to composing research text (Clandinin, 2013). As the interim texts are negotiated, the dialogue between researcher and participant “around the research text can lead the inquirer back for more intensive work with



the participant if more field texts are needed to be able to compose [interim and final] research texts that the researcher and participant see as authentic and compelling” (p. 47).

Downey and Clandinin’s (2010) metaphor of a shattered mirror helped me to think about the move from field text to interim research texts. Downey and Clandinin speak to how the shattered bits can be seen as:

stories lived and told by a person in particular times and places. . . . [I]n narrative inquiry, we do not intend to reassemble the bits but rather to enter the strewn bits of a person’s life in the midst and in relational ways, attending to what is possible in understanding the temporal, social and place dimensions within an outgoing life. Attending to the multiplicity of what becomes visible in the unfolding life, the narrative inquirer attends to the particularities of each “bit” or shard in order to compose multiple possible story retellings or ways to move forward in imaginative and narratively coherent ways. (2010, p. 391)

Viewing the movement from field text to research text in this way, as a “shattered mirror,” (p. 391) Downey and Clandinin (2010) show how important it is to consider carefully our understanding of narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) so as we are not tempted to “create smooth texts that suggest that lives are smooth and narratively coherent in the living and telling” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 48). Narrative coherence as Carr (1986) reminds us “is a constant task, sometimes a struggle, and when it succeeds it is an achievement” (p. 96). This struggle has “an adversary, [namely]. . . temporal disorder, confusion, incoherence and chaos” (p. 96). As we struggle against this adversary, as we compose our lives, we experience, act, and live “in the most general sense . . . to maintain and if necessary restore the narrative coherence of time itself, to preserve it against . . . internal dissolution into its component parts” (p. 96).

To create the interim research text, a narrative inquirer begins by looking at all the field text, initially, as an “archival task” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.

131). That is to make sure to have “read and reread all the field text and in some way sort them” (p. 131) to better know what field text is available. This includes “careful coding of journal entries, field notes, documents, and all the rest, with notation of dates, contexts, . . . characters involved, . . . topics dealt with, and so on” (p. 131). This is done so as to position the field text “within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space” (p. 131). This positioning of texts speaks to the ways narrative inquirers engage in the analysis of text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Some might imagine that narrative inquiry “is merely a process of telling and writing down a story with perhaps some reflective component by researchers and participants,” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131) but the reality is that the process is far more complex. Many hours are spent “reading and rereading field text in order to construct a chronicled or summarized account of what is contained within different sets of field text” (p. 131). Initially the analysis “deals with matters such as character, place, scene, plot, tensions, end point, narrator, context and tone” (p. 131) however the process gets “increasingly complex as [narrative inquirers pursue] this relentless rereading” (p. 131). The process also includes holding “different texts in relation to other field texts” (p. 131).

What begins to shape the field text into [interim] research text is the “responses to questions of meaning and social significance” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131). These questions shape the “analysis and interpretation parts of our inquiry” (p. 131). The field texts are texts that have been descriptive, in that “they are close to experience, . . . are shaped around a particular event, . . . [and] have a recording quality to them whether auditory or visual” (p. 131). Research text, however, are “at a distance from field texts and grow out of the repeated asking of questions” (p. 131). The process of analysis and interpretation does not unfold in a linear, step by step process, rather “negotiations occur from beginning to end . . . [and] plotlines are continually revised as consultation takes

place over written materials, and as further field texts are composed to develop points of importance in the revised story” (p. 131).

In this process there is no “one bringing together of field text into research texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133). It is a process involving frequent writing of a variety of kinds of “*interim texts*, texts situated in the spaces between field text and final, published research texts” (p. 133). The many different forms of interim text “vary according to the circumstances surrounding the life of the inquiry and particularly the research and scholarly life of the inquirer” (p. 133). They are also written at “different times in the inquiry process and for different purposes;” (p. 134) sometimes even “serving their function in the transition from field text to research text without ever appearing in research texts” (p. 134). Inquirers might “try out one kind of research text and find it does not capture the meanings [they] have in mind, find it lifeless and lacking . . . [or] find that research participants do not feel the text captures their experience” (p. 134). [They] keep trying until [they] come to one that works for the researcher, the participant and the purpose. Negotiations of relationship with participants, and of interim and research texts is ongoing throughout the inquiry.

It is important to note that we are not alone in this and the crucial role of response groups to the inquiry process. Essential to my narrative inquiry was my various response communities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In these communities I was able to share my interim text and discuss so as to deepen my understanding and gain multiple perspectives. My response communities were critical elements in my inquiry, helping me to understand the ways I, and the texts created shaped the world of my participants as well as my research puzzle (Caine, 2007). One of my response communities was the CRTED research issues table, a weekly gathering of researchers and scholars coming together to discuss their research and share works in progress. Another community I had was a smaller works in progress group that met to share writing and discuss narrative inquiry methodological questions and issues. My

two co-supervisors, who are alongside for the duration of the inquiry, were also very important as my response community for they had been a part of the entire research process, able therefore to attend more closely to the temporal nature of the inquiry process. The final response groups consisted of the larger scholarly community, of which I became a part of as I worked alongside of my research team, committee members, and colleagues. As I struggled with certain aspects of the research, or needed more response to my written work I would often make contact through email and gain response in those ways with people less close to my work. These response communities, consisting of people I trusted to provide honest and constructive feedback, helped to deepen my understanding and provide a wider variety of perspectives. These kinds of responses helped to deal with the tensions that arise in written work including issues of ambiguities, complexities, difficulties, and uncertainties (Caine, 2007).

### **Final research text.**

The final move to research text is often difficult “because it is at this point that we make . . . texts visible to public audiences, unknown audiences who may be far removed from the lived and told experience of participants” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 50). In the composition of final research text, narrative inquirers must return to “the personal, practical, and social justifications of the work” (p. 50) and think about how the final research text will also reflect “temporality, sociality, and place” (p. 50). “Only through attending to all dimensions can we see the disruptions, interruptions, silences, gaps, and incoherences in participants’ and our shared experiences” (p. 50). Final research texts might include “traditional academic publications, dissertations, theses, and presentations for academic and non-academic audiences” (p. 50). “Final research texts do not have final answers, because narrative inquirers do not come with questions” (p. 50). The intent for a narrative inquirer, is to create research texts that “engage audiences to rethink and reimagine the ways in which they practice and the ways in which they relate to

others” (p. 51). As the audience reads the final research texts they are “engaging in resonant remembering” (p. 50) by laying “their experiences alongside the inquiry experiences” (p. 50) and begin to wonder alongside of the researcher and participants.

Moving from interim text to final research text, also involves considering the ongoing ethical issues that arise in narrative inquiry, being that it is first and foremost a relational research methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Because as Craig and Huber (2007) note, “relationship is the heart of living alongside in narrative inquiry, [and] relationships form the nexus of this kind of inquiry space,” (p. 249) these ethical concerns are more than just institutional requirements of informed consent for, and remaining anonymous in the final research texts. The first responsibility is always to the participants and as such throughout the research I continually revisited their right to give and withdraw consent, and discussed issues of the final research text becoming publically available to a larger audience. Lives of participants, and the stories they tell of who they are and are becoming constantly shift and so in narrative inquiry there is a need to ensure that as the shift the final research text still represents a story that resonates with the ways they see themselves. The final research text speaks to personal experiences but there is also the role of the research text in how to understand these experiences within a larger context (Caine, 2007). It is important, to remain attentive, in the creation of final research text, to ethical issues that will unfold, long after the field is left, as well as after the final research texts are composed and negotiated (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

#### *Narrative form.*

Looking to the work of Ely (2007) I considered how representations have a “double-edged meaning: (1) the rhetorical forms we use in our efforts (2) to represent, evoke, and discuss what we have lived and learned in doing narrative research” (p. 568). I had to consider how I might create a final research text, in a

form that would “come closest to the essence of our understandings and [present] them in trustworthy ways, . . . [a process that is] an ongoing, interactive dance” (p. 568). From the often overwhelming amount of field text, and various forms of negotiated interim texts an inquirer might be looking upon hundreds of pages of transcribed conversations, photographs, artifacts and multiple versions interim texts, (Clandinin et al., 2006) and researcher notes therefore, the movement to final research texts is a slow and intense process. “No matter how excellent the gathering [and co-composing] of information [field texts], in the final instance people must want to read what [inquirers write, and] must want to stay” (p. 569). The final research text needed to “glow with life, . . . not only to honor our stories, but more importantly, to support the ethic that undergirds them: . . . [narrative inquiry research] centers on information people have provided” (p. 569). In the negotiation of what form the final research text might take I understand how important it is that the stories are presented “in ways that cleave as closely as possible to the essence of what and how [the stories were] shared” (p. 569).

Ely (2007) captures this process in the following description:

Research writing is birthed from data collection writing. But it is far different. it has been transformed out of the hundreds, often thousands, of . . . pages, transcripts, and collected . . . evidences—from the raw, scribbled, unburnished, messy writing that is often characteristic of [field text composition]—that first and essential narrative research phase, already shaped by the researcher. There the drive was to ‘get it down,’ do recursive cycles of primary analysis for in-process direction, work with a [response group], and ‘get it down’ some more. Never mind great readability, beauty, and wider communication. (p. 569).

#### *Narrative accounts.*

In the creation of final research texts narrative inquirers need to be attentive to the three dimensional narrative inquiry space of sociality, temporality,

and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The term that I use to name the final research text created from the multiplicity of interim texts, is called *narrative accounts* (Clandinin, Lessard, & Caine, 2012, p. 9). The term narrative account, or “narrative accounting, allows [inquirers] to give an account, an accounting, a representation, of the unfolding lives, both participants and researchers, at least as they [become] visible in those times and places where . . . stories intersected and were shared” (p. 9). The narrative accounts, drafted and negotiated with participants, “are a way . . . to show layered relationships between researcher and participant” (p. 9) making visible how the accounts were co-composed.

### **Unfolding Stories in the Field**

#### **Negotiating entry into the afterschool arts club.**

The research began in a Canadian urban public school in the afterschool arts club in a that was established as part of the larger research projects. It was here that I met, and began negotiating relationships with three Aboriginal youth participants, Drew, Jayanna, and Barbara. The project design was such that I would begin to negotiate relationships in the club space, and then follow the youth to where they might take me, including inviting family members into the research. Because I began my research project already immersed in the larger research projects, I had time to live alongside Drew, Jayanna and Barbara in the afterschool arts club before I negotiated ongoing relationships with them as participants. The afterschool arts club, part of the larger project, took place from October 2010 to June 2012 and my own doctoral research project formally began in November of 2011. It was in this way, in the midst of the larger projects, in the midst of our now interconnected lives, having met in the afterschool arts club, that my participants and I began the negotiations of our relationships.

### **Coming to know Drew.**

Drew was in Grade 9 in October of 2010, when I first met her as part of the larger projects, in the afterschool arts club. As part of the larger project she became one my participants, and agreed to join me for one-on-one meal time conversations that would take place first in the school during her lunch hour, and eventually out of the school over the supper hours. The field notes for Drew were composed from October 2010, documenting our time together in the afterschool arts club, and then began to include transcribed one-on-one conversations starting February 2011. The intentional creation of field texts stopped in November 2012 when we began to negotiate the final version of the research text. By November of 2012 we had nine months of time together in the club space, and over 20 one-on-one conversations that continued over 3 years. Field texts included art work, old photographs, memory box item, and conversations recorded in response to items inquired into.

The negotiations of the first interim text, inquiring into the club experience, mostly in the form of photographs of Drew in the afterschool arts club, photographs of her artwork, and co-created word image poems (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 99) took place early in 2012. Then more field texts were composed from then on until near the end of 2012. In the fall of 2012 more pieces of the interim text were co-composed and then negotiated and new field text created in the negotiations until the final research text was created. The research text, the narrative account (Clandinin, Lessard & Caine, 2012), consisting of a compilation of photographs and word image poems, interspersed with writing, was then negotiated first with Drew and then with Joelle, her foster mom, in the spring of 2013.

The family conversations also attended to the dimension of temporality, in that they attended to reflections of Drew's earlier life experiences, but also in that they attended to the reflections, as parents, of their own earlier life experiences. Including the family members in this research was important for attending to the



temporal nature of experience and identity. While my research puzzle had a strong emphasis on stories to live by, and the importance of understanding the importance for young people to narrate themselves (Giroux, 1998), it was also important to recognize that their experiences would be embedded within place, family and community (Kirmayer, Tait, & Simpson, 2009; Restoule, 2008). With the family member participant the inquiry would be able to also consider the intergenerational impact of family stories on youths' past experiences, present and forward looking stories, as well as the longitudinal impact of school engagement on youths' experiences (Caine et al., 2010). Aboriginal youth experiences, especially as they negotiate who they are on and off school landscapes, are only part of the experiences and "educational journeys of multiple generations, journeys that are neither smooth, nor void of obligations, responsibilities and challenges" (Caine et al., 2010, p. 6).

Drew chose her foster mom, Joelle, to be the family member who would participate in the research. Joelle and I met for tea at their family home for the first time early in May of 2011 and then again to negotiate the interim research text created from that conversation and again to negotiate the final research text, once it had been fully negotiated with Drew. While we met for formal, recorded conversations only 6 times, I also attended Drew's Grade 9 graduation with the family and we were in regular contact through texting to negotiate the meeting times for Drew and I. As such we also negotiated our relationship in this way as well. While James, Drew's foster dad, was never formally a part of the research, he, along with Louis and baby Brie, were often there during the visits to the family home and at pick up and drop off times so negotiations with the family were a part of living in the field alongside of Drew.

### **Coming to know Jayanna.**

I first met Jayanna in January of 2011 when she moved to the school where the afterschool arts club was held and began to join the club. The one-on-

one mealtime conversations began in September of 2011, at the school over the lunch hour before moving out to lunch or dinner hours at local restaurants. By the end of November 2012, we had over 20 one-on-one conversations. Field texts for Jayanna also included art work, old photographs, memory box item, and conversations recorded in the midst of art creation and in response to items inquired into. Interim research text, mostly in the form of word image poems, began to be negotiated in the fall of 2012. There were a number of word images created that spoke to tension filled experiences Jayanna had shared and so we would revisit and renegotiate those accounts multiple times throughout our time together. As her living situation shifted, and her familial relationships were in negotiation during these transitions, I wanted to ensure that I attended to the potential shifts in her responses to the interim text as well. These continual negotiations created new field texts, mostly in the form of transcribed conversations or research notes, about our experiences in the midst of these negotiations. Eventually, the negotiated interim text was composed into a larger research text that consisted of a narrative of an experience, found poetry and my own writing weaving those texts together. The research text was negotiated late in the spring and summer of 2013.

Jayanna first chose her dad to be the one who participated with her as that was who she was living with at the time of the formal request, and who signed her permission form. However, about November of 2011 she had moved back in with her mom, so her mom Larissa was also asked to participate. In the end both of their word image poems were included as interim text was first negotiated with each parent and then became a part of Jayanna's larger narrative account, the final research text. I met with each parent only twice formally, however in the arrangements of meeting times for Jayanna I was in contact through text messages, and I would greet either parent at pick up and drop off locations. In this way I also got to negotiate relationships with Jayanna's grandmothers (both maternal and paternal), her grandfather (maternal) and many of her siblings. We

also took one of her younger sisters with us to a movie during one of the times they lived apart as she expressed her desire to reconnect with her. The final research text as a whole was negotiated with Jayanna's parents, only after Jayanna had multiple opportunities to co-compose, negotiate and give her assent for the final research text.

### **Coming to know Barbara.**

For Barbara the gathering of field text began in the club space in September of 2011, in the form of photographs, art work and recorded observations of her in the club, as well as of my experiences interacting with her as we began to negotiate our relationship. Our one-on-one conversations began in December of 2011 and lasted into the spring of 2012. We also met for just over 20 meal time conversations. During the spring of 2012 we began to co-compose poetry filling in the outline of photographs that had been taken of Barbara in the club space, with words from the transcribed conversations of stories she told about who she was and was becoming. New field texts were created from the conversations we had during the creation of the interim text, and my reflections in response to those experiences. Interim texts were also created inquiring into Barbara's school experience and a story was co-composed retelling Barbara's experience watching a residential school movie clip that had been shown in a Social Studies Class. Together we co-composed a first person story of Barbara's experience, trying to articulate in story how she was experiencing the movie clip viewing. New field texts were created by recording the conversation that took place as we negotiated and continued to co-compose the telling of that experience in a story. This story became only one of the many interim texts we co-compose, some which includes word image poems, and shape poems created from words Barbara and I had used to tell stories of who Barbara was, from our many conversations. With the help of my response communities, particularly my supervisors, I became aware to how these poems might be too restrictive, and

speak to labelling more than experience, so an idea of an interim text that might better reflect the performative nature of our relationship was developed. The final research text is in the form of a screen play which included images, and stories that were shared in our research. This screen play was negotiated in the summer of 2013, as Barbara finished Grade 8.

For Barbara, the negotiating relationships with her family was more complicated, in that the family was less involved in the research. She asked her mom to participate and her mom agreed, so we met for one conversation in the family home. She read, and signed the ethics forms and we made plans to meet again. She wanted to meet outside of the home, and away from the children (Barbara and her little brother). However, our schedules did not allow for a second meeting. We discussed possibly Barbara's Kokôm also participating, but her Kokôm chose not to and so Barbara's narrative accounts contains the stories of family as shared by Barbara and as experienced by these negotiations but not any direct references to conversations with family members as was done for Drew and Jayanna. Even the drop off and pick up negotiations took place with Barbara meeting me alone, and returning home before her mom was home from work. In this way the inquiry into Barbara's experiences had a focus more on the negotiated relationships between Barbara and I, and less on her relationship negotiations with her family.

Barbara's narrative account has been created in the form of a screenplay and is presented in that format.

### **Word Images**

Because in the creation of many field texts, and interim texts I found myself continuously drawn to word image poems (Clandinin et al., 2006) it was important that I explain what I understand these poems to be. Word images are composed from spoken word and phrases in told stories. I composed the word images in my field texts, interim texts which became the final research texts from

words selected from transcribed research conversations, emails to supervisory committees, researcher notes, and any where words were a part of the field texts co-composed. Creating word images, is a “highly interpretive process” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 99) “which create[s] a temporal sense of . . . particular experience[s]” while also providing a “more vivid rendering” (p. 99). The word images, became the interim research text, and allowed me to begin to tell the participants stories more succinctly while the power of word images seemed more likely to “portray the deep impact [of the experiences of Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, and their families, and do so] with emotion” (Young et al., 2012, p. 292). In this way I was trying to “create the appearance of ‘experience,’ the semblance of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute[d] a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of virtual life” (Langer, 1953, p. 212). I hoped that I could, using word image poems, “streamline, encapsulate, and define, . . . with brevity but always with intent to plumb the heart of the matter” (Ely, 2007, p. 575). In trying to share our experiences, as researcher and participants’, in this final research text I wanted to bring the reader “to live the emotions, the tone, the physicality, the voiced and not-voiced moments” (p. 575).

### Chapter 3: Drew's Story

#### Time

She knows time.  
She has a sense of it.  
A sense of  
how it can be measured  
in years  
or in months  
in days  
or in hours.  
She knows when to wait.  
She knows when to go.  
She is able to negotiate  
her space,  
her time.  
She knows what stays  
even in the waiting,  
separate in the margins.  
She enters,  
she *always* enters  
knowing  
that one day  
she will leave.

#### The Afterschool Arts Club

I first met Drew in October of 2010. It was the first day of the U of A afterschool arts club. In those first months Drew and I didn't have many conversations. Instead I learned who Drew was through the words of Jean and the other researchers as they formed relationships with her. I also came to know her

through her artwork. To illustrate this slow negotiation of our relationship this next section is written to mimic the glimpses of a teenage girl that I began to know. Included are only a few of the days she came to club and only a few of the photographs that captures her time in that space.



Figure 3-1. Week 1

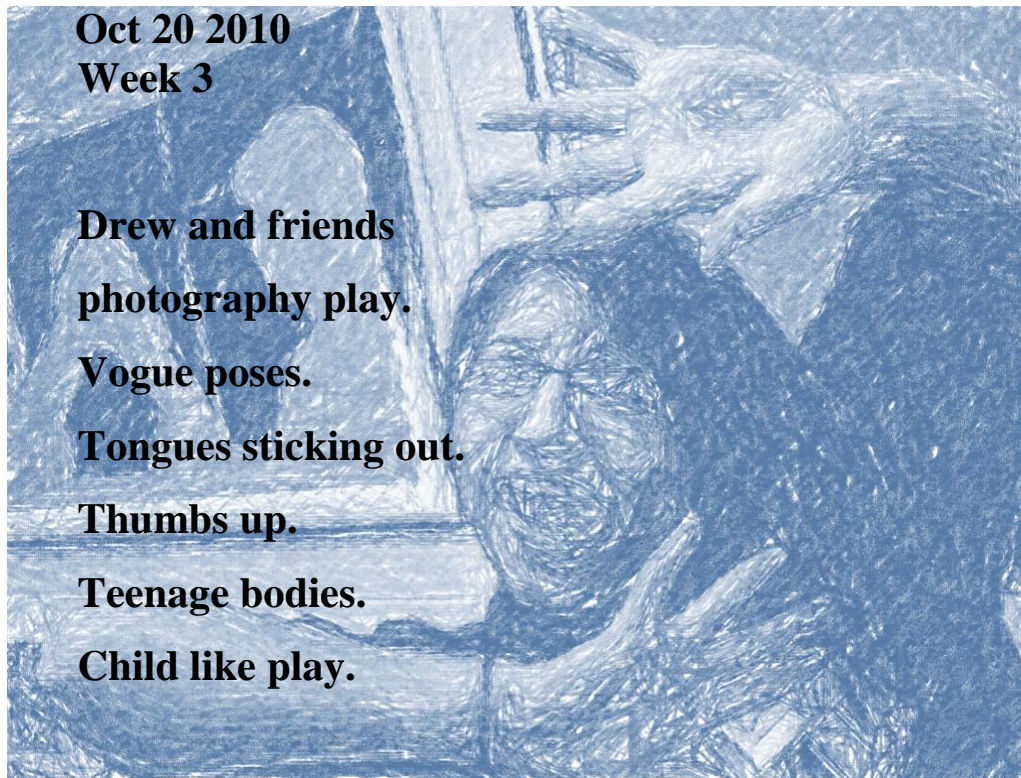


Figure 3-2. Week 3.



**November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010**

Week 5.

Relationships are forming.

Drew and Jean.

Stories are shared.

Of Drew's foster mom

Of decisions to be made.

Grade 10, Where to go?

How to decide?

A district policy?

Catchment areas?

Not the Aboriginal school. "I will be the only white kid there".

"I'm not into that culture stuff".

Instead an open house

on a whim

a smaller school

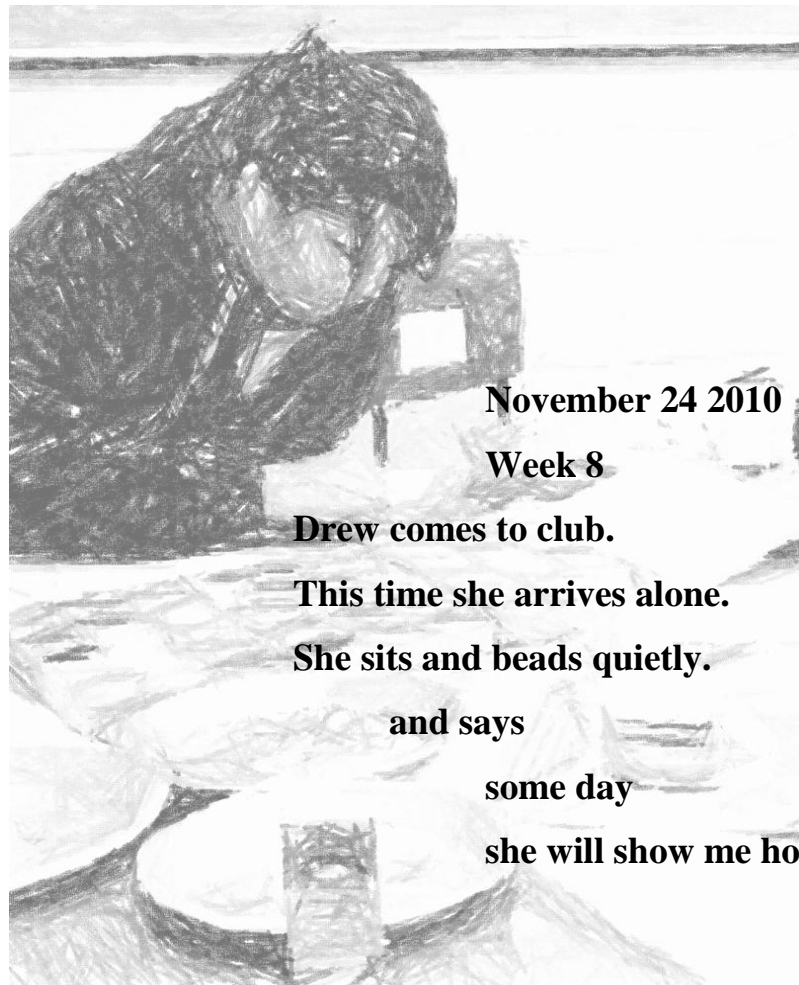
It felt right.

A decision made

by Drew.



Figure 3-3. Week 7.



**November 24 2010**

**Week 8**

**Drew comes to club.**

**This time she arrives alone.**

**She sits and beads quietly.**

**and says**

**some day**

**she will show me how.**

Figure 3-4. Week 8.

February 23 2011  
Week 19

Be my participant I ask her?  
One-on-one conversations?  
Just you and me?  
“Yes”, she says.  
Drew  
my first participant.  
We talk of her bus ride.  
Hours it takes.  
Bad weather and bad roads.  
Missed connections.  
3 busses to get home.  
She comes anyway.  
Dedication.

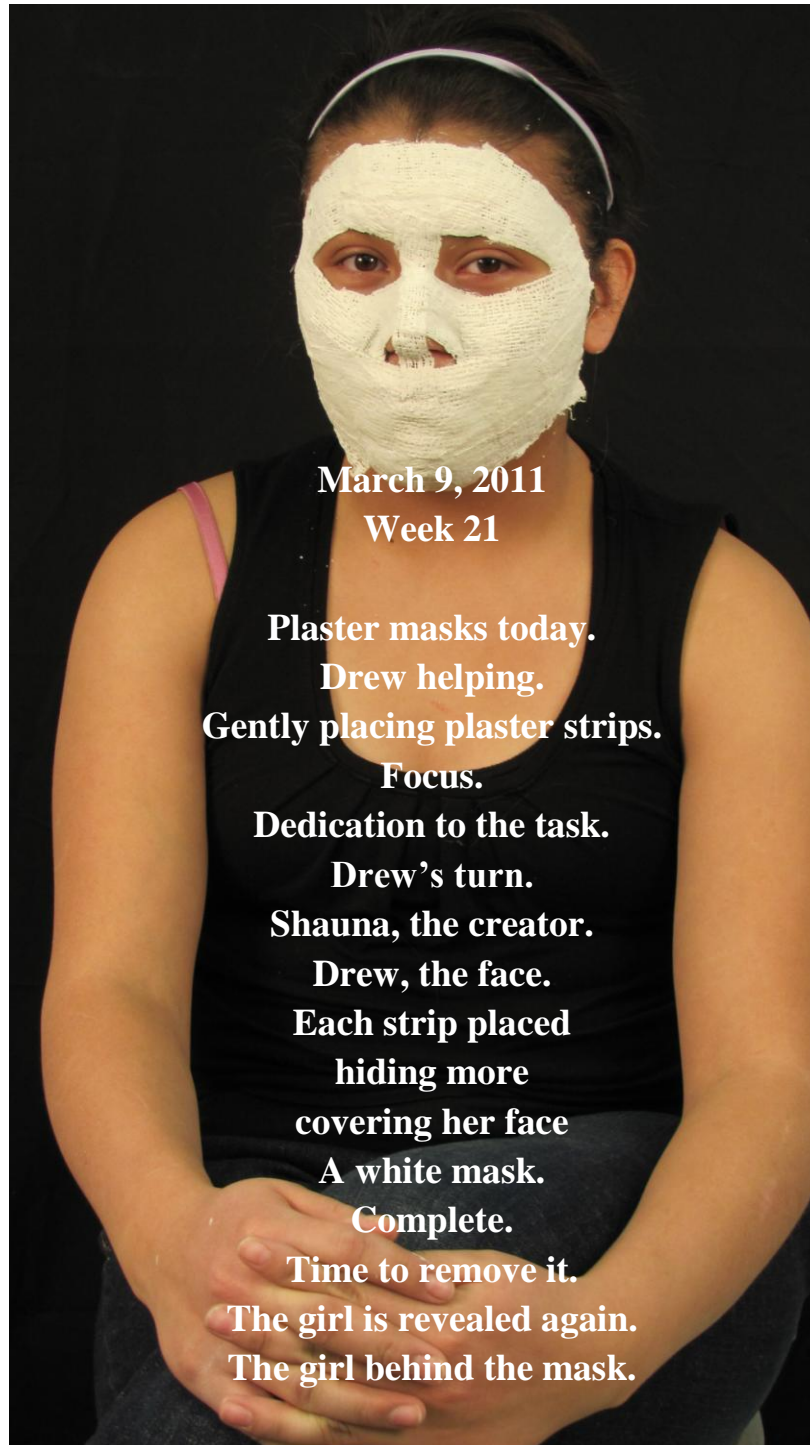


Figure 3-5. Week 21.

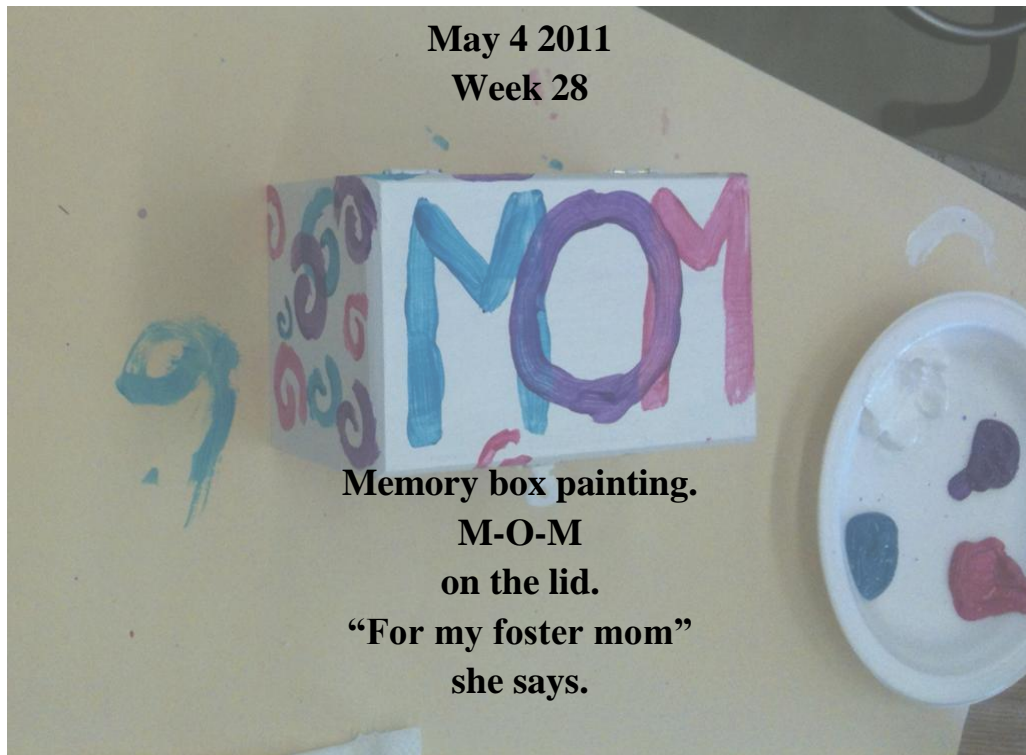


Figure 3-6. Week 28.



**May 11 2011  
Week 29**

**Drew stays  
close to Jean.  
Playing  
games  
on her  
phone.  
While  
the other  
girls  
socialize.**

Figure 3-7. Week 29.





**May 25, 2011**

**Week 31**

**Today she paints.**

**A butterfly.**

**beautiful.**

Figure 3-8. Week 31.



**June 15, 2011**

Week 34

A story told  
of Grad  
of hair extensions  
of waiting.  
Just one more week  
then junior high  
ends.

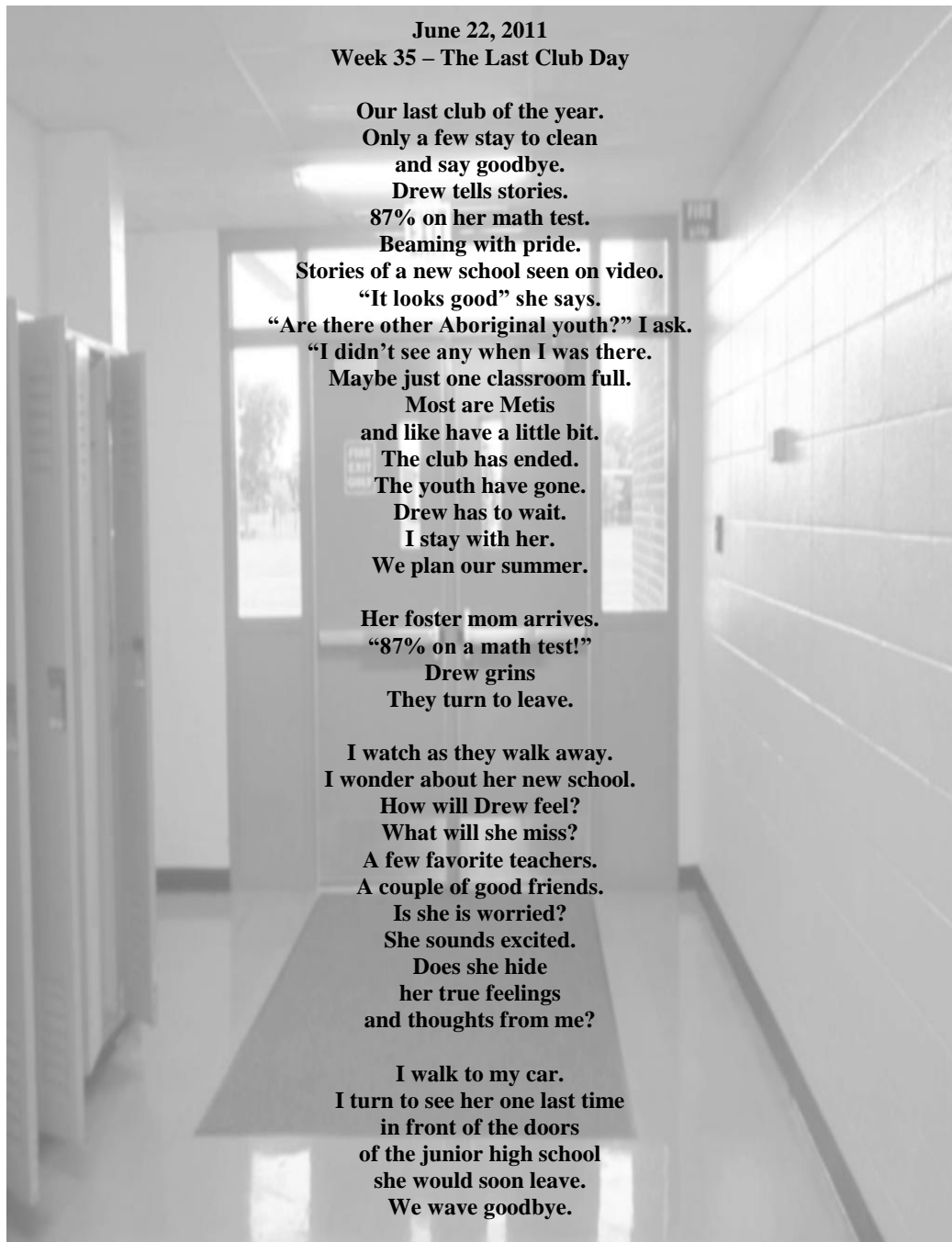


Figure 3-9. Week 35.

## **You Would Never Know**

In June of 2011, I had returned to the school where the afterschool arts club had taken place to watch Drew walk across the stage and receive her Grade 9 diploma. I remember thinking about the stories she had shared over that first year that we had known each other. And as I had watched her waiting for her name to be called I was aware that, in that moment, I could not see the many tensions in her life, nor could I see the many transitions she lived through. None of these stories were evident, as she stood nervously in line, in her beautiful dress, with her long hair extensions artfully curled to perfection. In the club space Drew had chosen, through her actions and her words, to tell us a story of being happy and content. We saw her as calm and gentle. We saw the ease she had building relationships with the researchers and the distance between her and the other youth near the end of the club, after her friends had left, and she stayed. There was a sense that she had been telling us a good story, wanting us to see her life as one that was lived well. She was retelling her stories in a way that made sense to her, retelling the stories in the process of composing a life.

Drew had shared stories of first jobs, learner's permits, birthday parties and first crushes. She had told me about Disney World school trips, and camping with friends. The stories were told over lunch conversations at schools, trips to malls, suppers at local restaurants and visits to her house where she showed her home place. Drew and I also shared stories about the Indian we had in mind, and the stories of Indians that we heard from others. I wanted to understand how she was making sense of who she was, and who she was becoming. I had a particular interest in understanding how she was negotiating her identity as an Aboriginal person.

## **Stories of Indians**

As Drew shared her stories with me, over the duration of our relationship, I always listened carefully for the words Aboriginal, Native, Indian or Cree. It

didn't happen very often and usually only if I asked specific questions. While I was seeking to understand how Drew was negotiating her identity as an Aboriginal youth, Drew was in the process of negotiating her identity on many landscapes. *Aboriginal youth* didn't seem to hold the same place of importance, for Drew, as it did for me as a youth. Her stories did contain negotiations of herself as an Aboriginal youth from an Aboriginal family but I became awake to how much more was constantly in negotiation. While Drew wasn't drawn to conversations about being Aboriginal, I was also aware of how all negotiations seemed to have a sense of resistance, a push back or a straining against the stories of Aboriginal that she carried with her. I wanted to know more about the stories of Indian, Cree, Native or Aboriginal she knew and where she had heard the stories that would form the Indian she had in mind.

To try to find ways to evoke these kinds of stories, I asked Drew to take photos of things that came to her mind when she heard the words "Aboriginal, native, Indian and Cree" in the spring of 2012. The next few times we met she had not attended to the task. Eventually Joelle told me that she was having trouble thinking of what to take pictures of. She could only think of negative things and she was uneasy bringing only those images to me. Hearing of this uneasiness I experienced a bumping place<sup>18</sup> in the way I imagined the research. I had to think about how she was experiencing the question I was asking. I decided that I would not ask her to bring stories, her Indian stories, to me without me sharing my own. To not bring my own stories was to leave her exposed and in the open, alone. I could not do that so in Drew's narrative account I include segments of the conversation we had after Joelle informed me of the unease Drew was feeling.

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<sup>18</sup> Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin (2003) speak to how bumping is when tensions arise as one's story bumps up against another story, and there is discordance, tension or unease and needs further inquiry.

## **Residential Schools, Beer, and Young Mothers**

We met at Smitty's restaurant in our familiar, comfortable booth near the end of May 2012. As we got settled I asked if she thought about my request to take photos of anything that came to mind when she heard the words "Indian, Cree, Aboriginal or native". I asked her if different images came to mind for the different words. She said that "no, the words did not feel separate to her" and then she said:

*I only took two pictures.  
I couldn't think of anything else.  
I wanted to find  
something  
to represent  
those  
residential schools  
but  
I couldn't think of  
anything.  
So then  
I took pictures of beer  
and then  
I took a picture  
of one of  
Joelle's ultrasounds  
and I put  
young mothers.*

What stories Drew carried about how she was making sense of what it means to be an Aboriginal youth are reflected in those three images. I thought about the weight of those stories: residential schools, beer and young mothers. I thought about how she will always be negotiating her identity around those images. I thought about how I still have to negotiate who I am in relation to those stories, just as I had as a teenager. It saddened me that the next generation of youth carry the same stories as I did decades ago. And yet, as I listened to Drew continue to tell me the ideas she had for the photos I heard how she moved away from those images and began to create different ones.

*And then  
I wanted to show  
the costumes  
'cause those are pretty.  
I also  
wanted  
all the art  
kind of stuff.  
I thought it'd be cool  
to show somehow  
the way they lived  
before contact with people.  
They were clean  
and everything.  
They had rules  
I guess.  
A system  
or something.  
Like when  
they get married.  
And then  
I was thinking of,  
what are they called,  
they're kind of like  
government grounds  
like treaty  
and how  
we get certain things  
certain rights.  
And then I thought  
of some of their stories  
they used to tell.  
The only stories I heard about  
were from  
elementary school  
but I can't  
remember them.  
That's all I thought about  
so far.*

As she imagined these other stories I heard how she yearned, just as I did  
as a youth, for good stories of Aboriginal people, stories of structure, and ways of

living that were sustaining. Stories told to her in elementary school. Stories she can't always remember but she knows exist. I remembered how for me, the yearning came from a desire to escape the bad stories. So I asked her to tell me more. I asked her to tell me of the stereotypes she heard. And then, because I know what it is to hear stories of who Aboriginal people are supposed to be, and I know what it is to live those stories, I asked her to think about which stories we heard, which came from books or movies, and which stories we actually lived. She replied by saying:

*I think near my grandma's<sup>19</sup> house  
I would see a lot of  
drunk natives  
on the streets.*

I told her, for me, the drunken Indian stories were true at times in my family. I told her that this one stereotype I lived with as a child. Yet, now as I look back, I realize how it feels misleading to say that I have lived it, knowing it was never all that we lived. Knowing that our lives are all so different now. As I struggled with how to express this, I again felt the weight of this story and how it shapes the ways Drew and I must negotiate who we are. It shapes the stories we tell about who we are. To my story, she responded by telling me a little more about the role alcohol played in her family stories.

*Yeah my dad,  
but only on my dad's side,  
it was only him who  
drinks.  
I think he still is  
but I'm not sure.  
And then my mom,  
my uncles,  
they all did  
I think my mom's still is  
she's an alcoholic  
a little bit.*

---

<sup>19</sup> In Drew's narrative grandma and Kokôm both refer to her biological grandmother, her mother's mother. She uses both terms and interchanges them regularly.

*But my uncles  
they all stopped  
especially after  
they had  
kids.*

As she shared stories of alcohol in her family stories I sensed the shifting of her stories over time. I heard the way the stories of alcohol were included and yet, for her too, the people had changed. Lives had been composed and renegotiated and were constantly changing. I wondered how many times these stories will be told and retold in our lives. I wondered how each telling, from a different place, a different landscape, at a different age, will tell a different story.

*Another stereotype  
I hear about  
one that I lived too  
It's about the dropout.  
My sister,  
she lived  
that  
one.*

I told her that I heard that one too. That I hear it still. I told her that even though I heard it my whole life that neither my siblings nor I dropped out. It wasn't a story we lived but certainly one we heard about. Then I thought about my parents, and I realized that they lived it too. They lived the drop-out story. I told her that many of my aunties dropped out too. Then, just as I began to unravel the drop-out story and the threads it wove in my family I realized that many of the aunties, and my mom, all went back to school as adults. I recalled how we grew up watching the women in the family struggle to finish their education while taking care of their families. The story that we were told as we lived along side of them was one of women dedicated to education, and not one of the drop out. The story my siblings and I lived was not one of drop outs because we were surrounded by graduates. Drew then told me more.

*I think my mom dropped out too.*



*All my uncles graduated I'm pretty sure.*

I told Drew that I heard about Indian dropouts a lot as a teacher in the schools, in meetings, and at professional development seminars. I asked if teachers spoke to her about it at school. She said,

*A little bit,  
no, not really though.*

Then I asked her how she learned about that stereotype? She told me,

*I don't know.  
I think  
I kinda  
knew about it  
my whole life.*

I wonder what it means, for Drew and I, to grow up carrying these stories of Indians our whole lives. I told Drew how for me, hearing and living these stories affected how I thought about myself. I was always more aware of being different. I was shy and sometimes I felt like I wasn't as good as the "white people"<sup>20</sup> that I knew.

*It didn't affect me  
'til I went into foster care  
and then I realized  
how it could  
affect me.  
Like we have like rules  
in the foster home  
and like at home  
you just did whatever,  
stayed out  
as long as we wanted  
and we didn't really care.  
But in the foster home  
it was different  
we had different rules  
we had more .  
I always felt bad for my friends,*

---

<sup>20</sup> White is the term used as I was growing up for the non-Aboriginal people in the community.

*'cause I could see the difference  
in how we were cared for  
and everything.  
Then it wasn't 'til  
I was in  
at least  
junior high  
when I started hearing  
of those stereotypes  
and everything.  
My big sister Sheila  
was always making fun of me  
cause I was hanging out  
with the White people  
all the time.*

When Drew told me about hanging out with White people all the time I recalled experiencing the same thing as a youth. I told her how sometimes my cousins would say that I was acting White. Only now do I wonder what White person they had in mind as they storied me this way. I wondered aloud with Drew what it meant to “act Indian.”

*Well I had a guess  
about what it means  
to act Indian  
because whenever I like go visit  
my older sister,  
I would buy  
similar clothes  
to what she would do  
and when I finally got an iPod  
or an mp3 player,  
I got all the songs  
she had  
on hers.  
Like all rap  
and everything.  
I didn't mind some of them  
but I kind of liked  
everything,  
every kind of music.  
I still do.*

*Yeah I like country  
and everything .  
And to her  
I think  
that's like  
white music.  
And the clothes  
More like sweat pants  
and like high tops,  
and sweaters.  
I thought I liked them  
'cause she  
liked  
them.*

I asked Drew why she thought her sister she had a stronger sense of what an Indian is supposed to do and wear than she did? She responded by saying,

*Because  
when she stopped  
running away  
she always lived  
at my auntie's,  
they like live on the rez<sup>21</sup>  
and so she had  
that kind of thing  
going on.  
She would stay there  
living with friends  
and family  
and now  
her  
boyfriend.*

I pictured the kind of Indian she was painting with her words, with stories of her sister Sheila. I thought about the rap music, the gangster style clothing, the talks of fights and the image of her sister that she held. Because she did not live on a reservation and had very little connection to it the only stories she held were these stories. I realized that I knew this kind of Indian too. It is interesting to

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<sup>21</sup> Rez – A word used to represent Indian reservation.

think about those two very different images of Indians, one in leather clothing and feather headdresses and the other Indian who likes rap music, wears sweats, sweaters and high tops. I wonder about the Indians Drew and I and our families had in mind and how that image shifted constantly as we negotiated our identities in the midst of living our lives. I also think about how many stories are missing in the stories Drew tells of life on the rez, and of what acting Indian could possibly look like. Drew then added her own stories of Indian stereotypes.

*I don't know  
if it's really negative  
but there is  
a stereotype  
of being  
tough.*

*I was thinking  
'cause my friend Lynn  
she's practically albino  
and so  
whenever we're together  
we always joke  
about when we are downtown  
and everything,  
hopefully  
they'll leave us alone  
'cause I'm Native  
and they will think  
that I am  
tough.*

*I was never  
really tough  
but my older sister Sheila  
she would  
go at  
it.  
Yeah whenever we had visits  
with her,  
it was like  
nobody  
would bug us  
at all.*

Sometimes there is a sense from the stories that Drew tells or the words she uses to speak about Aboriginal people that she does not identify strongly, right now, as Aboriginal. One story she told when we first met was about being afraid, alongside of her non-Aboriginal friends, of the “native<sup>22</sup>” volleyball player on the opposing team. She looked “tough and scary” was what Drew and her friends described her as. I found it very interesting to hear Drew take on the story of being a tough Indian and wear it in the hope that it protects her and her friends, keeping them safe.

I then spoke to Drew about how I had wished to learn about the spirituality of my Cree ancestors, and about the kinds of medicines my mosom (grandfather) had known about. I told her how I yearned to know the arts, the beading and the making moccasins that my aunties knew. I told her how I carried many negative stories about what it is to live as an Aboriginal person but how I was drawn to the stories of the beauty of our culture too.

*Yeah we learned that in elementary  
‘cause we had a Cree class,  
I never paid attention to it.  
And then we also had a teacher  
who would teach us  
to do crafts  
and he was also  
the one who  
taught us Cree.  
He was  
my favourite  
teacher,  
Mr. C.  
There’s a few things  
that I wish  
I knew.  
I wish I could  
dance the traditional dances,  
And I like the medicine too  
I think*

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<sup>22</sup> Native is the term the youth used to describe the Aboriginal students in their school.

*that would  
be  
cool.  
I also like the singing  
and the flutes,  
the music.  
I love listening to the flutes.  
I always thought  
it would be fun  
to learn how to play.  
I also liked  
how in the culture  
the men and the woman  
were a little bit  
more equal  
than in the  
Western world.*

I think about how important schools can be for sharing the stories of Indian, Native, Aboriginal and Cree peoples. How lucky Drew was to attend a school that also shared some of the traditional aspects of the Cree culture because I still yearn for that knowledge as an adult. School was the only place Drew noticed positive images of Indians. As she held some of these more positive stories and spoke to them I wondered how it was that when she was first asked to take photos, the stories that surfaced first were of residential schools, beer, and young mothers.

*I wish I knew  
my Cree name.  
I always wanted to find  
mine out  
but then  
because I had white friends  
and I didn't  
speak the language  
I always thought  
that I didn't  
have one.*

### Aboriginal Youth in Care<sup>23</sup>

One of the earliest stories I heard about Drew, one that didn't come up when we had our Indian in mind conversation, was that she was a foster child. The research team knew her foster mom through the school system and so we also knew that Drew lived in a non-Aboriginal foster home. Hearing this story of Drew took me back to my own childhood and the times my siblings and I were also *Aboriginal youth in care*. With this shared experience I was very interested in trying to understand how Drew was making sense of who she was in her new foster family<sup>24</sup> while still negotiating who she would be in her bio<sup>25</sup> family. It is important to note that as Drew negotiates who she is and the stories that she chooses to tell about herself, being *in care* is what she lives. I also wondered what *Indian I had in mind* when one of the first stories told of Drew was that she was *in care*. I wondered what stories came to mind in others as they looked at her and her families (bio and foster) as those who live with the dominant narrative of *Aboriginal youth in care*. At the beginning of this research project I had only imagined that I would inquire into the stories Drew and the other youth told about being Aboriginal. I had not been awake to how much this story would be intertwined with stories of being in care, nor had I been awake to all of the stories I carried of being *in care*. Listening to her stories, and retelling them together, we began to deepen our understandings of how Aboriginal youth navigate through this particular web of stories to negotiate who they are and are always becoming and how these stories of being *in care* influence them in this negotiation.

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<sup>23</sup> Aboriginal Youth in Care – a term used in the Canadian child welfare system to represent children. (Youth in Care Canada, 2009).

<sup>24</sup> She joined this family in her Grade 9 year a little over a year to when she became a part of the larger research project. I have in some small way been alongside of her since the beginning of her time in this new foster home.

<sup>25</sup> Bio family is a term that I heard through the stories Drew told of different programs she was involved in to help support her as a child in foster care. Drew rarely referred to her family as bio-family, or her mom as her bio-mom. However, occasionally in this narrative account, I will refer to them in this way or footnote which “mom” she is talking about for clarity.

## **Statistically Dismal Stories**

At times during this inquiry the dominant narrative of the over representation of Aboriginal youth in the care of the Canadian Child welfare authorities seemed to take over the story of Drew that we were co-composing. I did not want to tell of Drew's life as a mere confirmation of the statistics; as merely another one of the "22,500 to 28,000 Aboriginal children in the child welfare system" (Farris-Manning & Zandstra, 2003).<sup>26</sup> I didn't want her story to become lost in the midst of the statistics that showed that despite Aboriginal children making up about "9% of the child population in Alberta" [they] comprised 62% of all children in care (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009). While the statistics do speak to Drew's story as an Aboriginal youth in non-Aboriginal foster care, the statistics do not in any way speak to her lived experiences. I wanted to be able to retell Drew's story in a way that invited the possibility, as Maxine Greene (1995) suggests, of being able to look between seeing big—that is, seeing the particularities of Drew's life; and seeing small—that is, seeing the trends and patterns. I was determined to find a way to ensure that the dominant narrative and dismal statistics would not draw the reader to only seeing small; would not draw the reader away from Drew's story.

These statistics also took me back to my early landscapes (Greene, 1995) as I began to think about the times Child Welfare was involved in my life experiences. I recall moments of tension when many in the community were aware of our family struggles and the school playground became grounds for discussions or questions from my school mates about the now public story. Not only was I negotiating entry into a new, albeit usually familiar, extended family

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<sup>26</sup> In 2006, there were 97,275 First Nations people in Alberta; they represented 14% of the total First Nations population in Canada and 3% of the population in Alberta (Statistics Canada, 2006). First Nations children (aged zero to nineteen) constituted 5% of the child population in Alberta; an additional 4% of the child population was non-First Nations Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census). Aboriginal children made up about 9% of the child population in Alberta yet comprised 62% of all children in care (Alberta Children and Youth Services, 2009).



home, I was also thinking about what story I told publicly about this experience. My youth participant and I decided how to tell this story in this dissertation. In the telling we brought along family members and we tell only certain moments of their lives. In my Masters work I was very conscious of how I brought others along in the telling (Dillard, 1987) and how I wanted to do no harm. Something I was awake to throughout the writing process. Would Drew realize that in the stories she told she was also sharing moments in the lives of her families? As an adult looking back I realize how those family members that I bring along in my stories, and the family members Drew carries with her, are also negotiating constantly who they are and are becoming as they navigate their many lived experiences. And we can only tell our experience in the moments we lived along side of them. With great care and love Drew and I co-composed the narrative account, including the stories of others we brought along in an attempt to deepen our understandings of how it is to live as Aboriginal youth and families, carrying the stories, and living the experiences of being in care.

### **Liminal Spaces**

As I think back to our many conversations I recall how Drew told her stories easily in a rather matter of fact tone giving a sense of the ordinary and everyday even in conversations about her many moves. The Drew that I grew to know was always smiling and willing to have conversations about whatever I asked. What weren't always evident in her stories were the tensions that I remembered in the different homes that I had lived. I recall feeling as if these homes were liminal spaces (Heilbrun, 1999) where I was neither of the family, nor was I not of the family; I was instead somewhere in between. I grew to understand that for me, it was likely I would return eventually to my mom and my siblings and so it often felt as if I were waiting. Yet in the waiting process, relationships were forming and being renegotiated where cousins became like siblings and aunts became like mothers. Drew's stories are different. When I

met her in Grade 9 this foster home was relatively new and perhaps then she had a bit of that sense of waiting but I wonder when it was that Drew began to understand that perhaps she wasn't going to go back to her bio family; nor was there going to be a next foster home.

### **Three Homes in 2 Years**

*My first foster home  
was a  
Filipino family.  
They were very strict.  
The foster kids ate  
at their own table,  
separate  
from the  
rest of the family.*

*My younger sister Kendra  
and I  
were together  
in that family  
for awhile.*

*The next foster family  
were Mormon.  
They had a big house.  
Kendra and I  
were both there  
but then  
she  
had to go  
to a group home.  
I stayed  
at that home  
for awhile  
then  
I  
moved  
in  
with  
Joelle and James.*

*Joelle was a teacher  
in a girls' group.  
Joelle would ask me  
about my foster home.  
I would tell her  
what it was like.  
While some things  
were not working well.  
I did like them.  
I like them still.  
As Joelle got to know me  
she would asked me over  
to her house.  
We got along so well.  
Eventually Joelle asked  
"Do you want to move in  
after spring break?"  
I said  
"yes".*

*My old foster family  
told me  
they would miss me.  
I like my Mormon foster family  
and I would miss them too  
but she had a little boy  
and she was having another one.  
It was time to go.  
The family  
has three boys now.  
I still go for sleepovers  
sometimes. (Youth D-4).*

### **Maintaining Relationships**

I think about what it means to be in a home and to know, to be able to sense that perhaps it is time to go. When I imagine children in care I don't always think about the relationships that are formed in the process. There are relationships with families that Drew has sustained throughout the many moves. I am not sure I was awake to that in my moves as a child. For me, much of my

time in care was with relatives and so the maintaining of relationships seemed natural. I never thought about what it meant to be in the care of strangers, to come to know them as family and then what the leaving of that home means to youth. I recall Drew and I looking through her photos and the keepsakes she keeps of her life, and the Mormon foster family, and the three boys were very present. I don't have very many photos of me as a youth but when I visit my aunties, and I come across one that was taken while I was in their care nostalgia fills my heart. And now, as an adult, I have a greater understanding of what it means to open a home, and a family, to take in another child.

### **Milestones Measured in Government Allowances Increases**

*Children in care  
get 11 bucks a week.  
The government decides.  
It increases at age 16.  
to 13 bucks a week.*

We talked about allowances and I wondered how it was that she saved up money before she had her first job. I wondered because I remember being told by my social worker at age 14 that if I wanted new clothes I would need a part time job as the money my cousin was getting to keep me was not very much, not nearly enough to cover new clothes. It is no surprise then that my first part-time job as a dishwasher was at age 14. As I wondered about relationships, I was also reminded of the logistics, of the negotiations, even financially that have to be made when you live under the care of the Alberta Child Welfare system. I also became aware of how the sense of time passing, and the milestones of growing up also become measured by the regulations in place for youth and families in care.

### **Age 18: An End, and a Beginning**

*Kinship care  
is what it is called.  
I am*

*under the care  
of Joelle  
and child welfare  
til I am 18.  
No official adoption  
can happen.  
Treaty rights make it hard.  
My family might fight.  
It is just easier  
to wait.  
Kinship  
is not like adopting  
but still kind of  
permanent. (Youth D-13).*

Drew began to talk about Joelle's home as more permanent about a year into our conversations. This was an experience I did not share with Drew. I never had to negotiate what it meant to choose to become part of a new family, while still negotiating relationships with other foster families, as well as with the bio family. In this story, this moment, Drew brings me back to her early years as she brings up her biological family, and she brings me through to the present as she speaks of her new home with Joelle, and I am drawn forward to her future as she begins to try to create the sense of permanency through the kinship care, and talk of adoption. In her story of "waiting . . . because her family might fight it" I am given a small glimpse and am left to wonder about what it means to maintain relationships with one family, while trying to negotiate a permanent place with the new one. In this story I think about how important my relationships and connections to family, to my siblings, to my mom, and even to my extended cousins and my aunties are to how I negotiate my identity. I am often at a loss to tell someone who I am and what I am about, especially as an Aboriginal woman, without referring to these influential people in my life. I wonder how it is that Drew negotiates the family stories she tells to others about who she is.

I think about the teenage years and how much my hair, my clothes, and my way of being in the world changed as I negotiated who I wanted to be and

how I wanted to show who I was becoming. Looking through the images of Drew captured in photos taken over the 3 years we were in relationship I can see the same changes in clothing and hair and the ways she posed her body. While I am thinking of this playfulness, I also think about the restrictions created by the Alberta Child Welfare policies that determine much of how Drew lives her life. I wonder then how much room Drew had to playfully negotiate or imagine when she is bound in by other's stories of who she is. As she is trying to imagine being adopted, she is also imagining the fight and the policies that deny her this story. I wonder about how Drew restories her life constantly. I think about how she seeks a way to tell stories to sustain her while knowing that she is bound in by other's stories of who she is and who she can become. I think about how each story told, each step she takes, she does so tentatively because she doesn't know how the restorying will affect the many relationships she is maintaining. In this newest foster home right from the beginning Drew was told that this placement was permanent, that she was "theirs" legally or not. For the Foster parents they could see her as part of the family before Drew was able to decide this too. It took her awhile. I also think about how at the age of 18, the child welfare policies shift and she becomes an adult. She is released from many policy restrictions and I wonder what that must mean to her story and her relationships with her foster families and her bio families.

### **Creating New Stories to Tell**

*I started a new program  
for me and Joelle.  
We do different activities.  
Once we  
had to show  
our safe  
place.  
My safe place  
was on an  
island.*

*A giant house.  
Close to the ocean.  
Surrounded by trees.  
A tropical forest  
full of  
everything I would need.  
A place  
where my family,  
my friends  
and I  
can go if there  
ever was an  
attack.  
It is every Tuesday morning.  
I will have to miss some classes  
and get a tutor.  
I can't see my mom<sup>27</sup>  
for the whole time of the group.  
It gives me time to figure things out  
and bond with my new family.  
Joelle has to come  
with me  
for a whole year.*

Her stories send me back to my growing up years and to the many moves I made from family to family, always ending up with my mom again. Sometimes the moves were with government Child Welfare support and intervention and sometimes the arrangements were made within the family. As I listened to Drew tell of her life I began to wonder how I felt in each home, to think about the time it took to negotiate and renegotiate my identity and how I was to live in the new home, with the new rules, forming new relationships. I also think about how the moves back to my mother would require the same transition time where we all, as a family, had to begin to renegotiate identity, and how we would live together. We returned to the family home never exactly the same as we left. We came back

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<sup>27</sup> She is referring here to her biological mother. She usually referred to Joelle as Joelle in our conversations and her Mom as “mom” however there are times when she refers to Joelle as mom and so I will footnote if it seems unclear in the writing. I choose to use the words that Drew used in the telling.

with experiences that were new to us and that were separate experiences from each other. I wonder now how it is that children and families in care do this constant negotiation. I wonder how it is they compose a life that hangs together (Carr, 1986). I wonder what it was for Drew, to begin as a teenager to think about this new family as “kind of permanent” while always keeping in mind that Child Welfare policies shift at age 18. Policies she knows of having been a regular part of the discussions and meetings alongside of her foster mom and social workers as they planned her future and organized her life. She negotiates and renegotiates who she is while working within the parameters set out by the Child welfare policies and the families she lives with.

### **Negotiations with the Past**

*When did I  
last visit my mom?  
It is July now.  
I think it was  
in the spring  
but when the snow  
was still here.  
I am to visit her soon.  
I am a little bit excited.  
I think.  
I don't talk to her much.  
She calls my cell sometimes.  
But she's like  
a quick little talk  
because I am always busy  
when she calls.  
Bad timing.  
My mom  
isn't allowed to call  
unless it is supervised.  
So I would have to hide  
the call  
from Joelle.  
I would go like  
in the bathroom*



*tell my mom I couldn't talk.  
I didn't like it.  
I would have to either lie to Joelle  
or get my mom in trouble. (Youth D 11)*

As Drew speaks of her bio mom I began to hear some of the tensions and the negotiations that occurred. We hear of a mom reaching out to her daughter, while her teenage daughter is becoming otherwise (Greene, 1995). She is beginning to compose a life on a new landscape and tells the story of being too busy for a phone call. Each call becomes a renegotiation of who they are to each other in that moment, renegotiation that takes place within a forbidden phone call. We begin to see the ethic of care Drew works with as she tries to make the decision that causes the least amount of trouble for herself, for Joelle and for her mom. We see how tangled the web of families (Setterfield, 2006) becomes as they negotiate as Families in Care within the Child Welfare system.

### **Renegotiating Relationships**

*Kendra and I  
called her once  
our mom  
when we were not supposed to.  
I was worried.  
The call did not go well for me.  
I told her about the adoption  
and she wasn't happy.  
I felt guilty.  
My sister was happy.  
My grandma thought it was a good idea too.  
Joelle found out  
about that phone call.  
I needed to talk about it  
with her  
because I was feeling bad.  
I tried to explain to my mom.  
that I was working on  
things  
and needed time*

*without seeing her  
or talking to her  
to figure things out.  
My mom didn't understand  
at first.  
not during that phone call. (Youth D-14).*

I recall moments when my mom visited me at my grandma's house or at my auntie's house. I was always happy to see her but sometimes it was awkward. I think when I was about 12 years old I returned again to live with my mom and she bought me a Barbie doll for my birthday. I had always loved Barbies and would ask for them constantly. But that year I didn't want a Barbie. I felt I was too old. I can still remember the anxiety I felt when I told her that I loved the Barbie she bought me, especially because it had hair that I could curl with a tiny curling iron, but this would be the last birthday for Barbies and to not get me another one next year.

*Ya, my mom did that too  
She buys me outdated gifts  
or clothes that won't fit  
or that I don't like.  
Like always giving clothes  
that were too small for Kendra,  
so of course I couldn't wear them.  
And then just little dorky stuff,  
like a porcelain figurine,  
But stuff like that  
I used to keep everything that she gave me  
but I decided that I didn't need to  
she wasn't like going to find out or anything  
so I started like throwing away stuff  
or giving it away.*

Each time we reunited, my mom and I, I was older and I don't know if she realized how much I had changed. Now as I think back, I wonder if I ever noticed if my mom had changed in that time too. I can recall that 12<sup>th</sup> birthday when I yearned to be that little girl, satisfied with a Barbie, but I yearned also to be seen as the pre-teen that I was becoming. I wonder now what my mom yearned for in

that moment. I wonder what she thought as I curled my Barbie's hair while asking that this be the last one of my childhood.

*I wrote my mom a letter.  
To tell her about the adoption  
In the letter  
I said  
I am going to get adopted  
but you will still be my mom.  
She wrote back.  
She said that she is happy for me.  
Happy that I am happy.  
She said sorry  
for some of her comments  
in that phone call  
a call made  
from my grandma's house.  
She never meant to make me feel guilty.  
She suggested we go to family counselling.  
I thought that was good.  
We might go some day  
but not right now. (Youth D – 19).*

Because I have been alongside of Drew for 3 years I have been alongside long enough to hear of these negotiations and renegotiations. Through her stories I get a sense of temporality. I hear of home places like grandma's house and of her new home and she even shares with me some of her feelings about these negotiations. Because I have lived some of my life in care, I was already wondering about the way identity is constantly negotiated and shifting. It was evident as I revisited my early landscape stories and I recalled those bumping places where I reunited with my mom and I was different and she saw only the little the girl I used to be. Or was it that she thought I wanted to be the little girl I used to be. In this moment I see how the negotiations of a mother and her

daughter will continue to be shifting and changing for this family that is *in care*,<sup>28</sup> just as it is for families that are not.

### **Sustaining Relationships**

*A visit with my mom  
is scheduled.  
My program is over  
and  
I had some time to think.  
So it was time to see her again.  
My bio mom.  
My mom.  
I hadn't seen her  
For a long, long time.  
She looked so much thinner  
this time.  
Our visit was  
three and a half hours.  
Longer than most  
of our visits.  
The driver stays  
to supervise.  
A different driver  
almost every time  
now.  
It used to be the same one  
but not anymore.  
My mom, Kendra and I,  
my grandma too.  
Eating  
Chatting  
Having fun.  
Uncle Joseph forgot.  
But he called to say hi.  
(Youth D12 & 20)*

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<sup>28</sup> Often we separate just the child when speaking about “youth in care” but I intentionally chose to put “families in care” because that is how I see the experience of “in care” as negotiated by all the families involved.

As Drew shares stories of her experience of visits with her family. I think about how hard she, her foster mom and her social workers have worked to maintain these relationships. She also shares how confused she felt at the time, how busy her life was and how constantly scheduled it became.

*I just wanted to say  
how I just felt confused  
about always being busy and everything,  
like if sometimes  
I didn't want to go to Kendra's  
but I would feel bad  
if she wanted me over.  
Just like before when,  
we used to always fight ,  
and I don't want to go,  
but now it's like fun  
we're getting better at it  
like I'll tell her why I'm mad at her  
or what she's doing  
and then she'll tell me if I'm doing something.  
And it's better now.  
But sometimes I just get lazy.  
I just don't feel like  
going anywhere.  
Like the mental,  
like preparing myself.  
Just like with my grandma  
cause like Kendra doesn't really ask questions or anything  
so I found like I am mostly like talking  
telling Kendra to tell my grandma about  
what happened and everything.  
Like just trying to like keep the conversation going.  
Before it used to be my older sister,  
but now like she's not there anymore,  
so it's like me trying to have to do that.*

She talks about how sometimes she needed some space and time to herself without organized visits. How she would fight to stay home and to not go some days. To maintain the relationships took the efforts of all of them. I think even about the different drivers. I imagine being a child, or a teenager, in a car, with a

different driver alongside as I visit family. She told me once of how a driver that used to be the regular one remembered her from before. As she shares these stories I wonder how it is that despite the hard stories of things that happened that necessitate supervised visits, and a life in foster care, she still builds and maintains relationships with those who come into her life. I think about the ebb and flow of relationships and of how choreographed Drew's life became at times in the efforts to not have her lose connections to her bio family. I think about how difficult at times it must be to remain connected to so many while negotiating a life in a new family and imagining your future.

We see again how she is in relationship with time. She negotiates her time. Spends it waiting or scheduling appointments. We all live in time, but time seems to take on a larger space as youth and families in care as they negotiate the many relationships and navigate the policies. We see how Drew must also fight for time, and refuses to be scheduled and negotiates ways to maintain relationships on her own time. I wonder what it is to know time in this way. To have that sense of waiting to see what will happen next knowing that many things are open to discussion and negotiation but also knowing that many things are beyond your control.

### **Choices to be Made**

*Grandma visits  
planned  
but the  
phone disconnected.  
Waiting  
to hear from her  
again.  
(Youth D-14)*

Drew spoke of her grandma regularly because she visited her often. Her grandma raised her when her mom could no longer care for her at different moments in her life. There were sometimes problems within their relationship but

Drew rarely spoke of them. I heard about them as a side story to our main conversation. But they were there none-the-less. There were times when Drew had to decide how much or how little she visited. I recall being given the choice at age 8 to leave my grandma and go with my mom and my siblings back to the reserve. I chose to stay with my grandma but then I cried for hours until they came back for me. These memories were ones I visited once in a while but as I listened to Drew's story they returned bringing with them the sadness I felt as a little girl trying to decide who I would be, remain as grandma's favorite, or go with my mom and my siblings. When I think about Aboriginal youth and families in care I always felt there was a sense of lack of control and of one's destiny in the fate of the Child Welfare system. Drew says she did feel that way some times, although the social workers always gave a heads up as to what was happening and the plans being made. "Until I came here" Drew tells of her move to Joelle's home and how she began to feel that she could make more choices.

*Especially like my first foster home  
I felt like I was waiting,  
but then I most like remember my second one  
where I told Kendra  
not to put up posters or anything,  
we'll be leaving  
or going home  
or like going  
to a different foster home.  
Kendra kinda said maybe we'll go home.  
And then we left our first foster home  
and then I just felt  
we each won't stay in one  
for very long  
either.*

As I listen to her story I hear how some of these choices came with great responsibility. For Drew who is so considerate of other's feelings choosing to not visit or call her bio family must have come with some unease. I am not sure I was awake to the many moments of conflict that Drew had experienced and the

decisions needing to be made by children and youth, as they negotiate many relationships. And I am reminded how sometimes there is just a matter of waiting in relationships, waiting for her grandma to make contact again, waiting to see if plans will be approved, waiting for the next scheduled visit. Maybe it is not about control or lack of control, but there is a sense of agency in waiting, not being a part of anyone or anything in that moment. Just waiting.

### **Relational Responsibilities**

*My old report cards  
are in  
the social worker's file.  
She used to copy them  
and send them  
to my family.  
Now I keep them  
Once I copied them  
and I sent  
one to my bio mom  
and one to my grandma too.*

Drew told me the story of how one time she did the sharing of the artifacts with her bio family. How she learned to do that from the social workers and Joelle who usually take care of that for her. I could hear the shy pride in how she took on the responsibility of maintaining the relationship with her bio family in this way once. I didn't always think about the artifacts that tell the story of a life lived and how in the sharing of these artifacts you maintain threads of connection. I don't recall ever sending my mom a report card when we were not living together but maybe someone did. There seemed to always be someone connected to someone who would share news about my sibling and I with my mother's family regardless of where we were. I wonder if it is a yearning for coherence that Drew throws out little threads keeping her connected to so many? I wonder if it is the understanding of Joelle and the social workers that insists they maintain threads and help Drew negotiate these relationships knowing how important it is



to the negotiation of identity to have familial ties recognized. I wonder if it is my own yearning for coherence that needs to know that I too remained connected to my family regardless of where I lived and how long I was gone? Drew lives out her relational responsibility as she cares for her bio family, her foster family and as she negotiates relationships. She constructs a way of being, she creates a life, and seeks coherence in many ways, but I especially notice how she does so by living what she sees as relational responsibility as best she can while in the midst of the whirlwind that is the teenage years. Even as I hear stories of her anger, and her need to distance herself at times and her push back at those who are closest to her I also hear the thread of care and the attention she pays to the feelings of so many who are in her life.

### **Relationship Re-Negotiated Again**

*To visit my grandma  
We've gone to supervised  
again because  
we called our mom  
Kendra and I  
when we were not supposed to.  
My grandma said we should.  
So now  
we've gone  
back to  
supervised visits  
which is ok by me.*

*My social worker  
Also wants  
someone to watch our visits  
with my grandma  
Just to see if they are going ok.  
If we are having fun  
Or if we are bored.  
They want to help  
to make our visits better.*

*During supervised visits*

*We sit together at a table  
for about 2 hours.  
Sometimes  
that is better.  
but sometimes  
we get bored  
and wish for  
unsupervised visits  
again. (Youth D-14).*

I don't recall having supervised visits when I was in the care of others. Perhaps I did but I don't recall. I wonder what it would be like to be constantly negotiating who you are and what your relationship is and how it is you shall be together while under the watchful gaze of a social worker? I wonder how difficult it must be for those responsible for deciding if the visits are supervised or not. With Aboriginal youth and families so over representative in the system I wonder if decisions are made with a certain kind of Indian in mind, if the decisions are made in punitive ways seeking to discourage certain behaviors. As I am wondering Drew assures me that she understands how "It was never a punishment. There were always reasons for the supervised visits. Reasons for the rules". As Joelle speaks to me also of these moments I can hear how the decisions are made putting Drew and her sister's comfort and safety in mind. As I listen to the stories of negotiations I feel tugs of angst and anxiety as I imagine the tug of relationships that must pull at Drew being a person who lives an ethic of care, trying to think of others while negotiating the tsunami of emotions that must occur in the many familial relational negotiations. The web of families that is woven around Drew creates many ripples with Drew sitting in the center navigating every vibration.

### **Photographs and Memory Keepers**

*My grandma  
Keeps our old photos.  
of me as a little girl.*

*Many have been lost.  
In the moves.  
By my mom.  
So I ask my grandma.  
When I need a photo  
of when  
I was  
a little girl. (Youth D-15).*

I used to sit for hours in any home that I lived in looking at photos. I loved the oldest ones the best. I searched for myself in the photos and for my relatives. I marvelled at the old black and white ones. The ones that I recall the most vividly are the photos I looked at during the different times I lived or visited with my grandma up to the age of 10. I recall especially loving the wedding photos of my aunty Mayanne and dreaming of the day I could wear the same wedding dress at my own wedding. I never did. There is something for me that a photo captures that keeps me grounded and gives me a sense of who I am. It shows me in relation to others and I like that I sit in the midst of old black and white photos and of new ones. I like the sense of continuity and temporality. I wonder if this is what Drew seeks too? Joelle noticed that it was after her biological child Louis was born that Drew became very aware that she didn't have the same keepsakes and memorabilia that were being created as baby Louis grew. As I wondered if Drew returns to her grandma's seeking old photos to remain connected to her and to try keep a story of her and her life alive in her grandma's house, Joelle is also noticing how Drew is seeking out what her Kokôm has kept of her to create that same sense of a life history in photographs and keepsakes that Louis is building as he grows.

### **Stories of Sisters**

*Kendra comes for sleepovers  
Sometimes I braid her hair  
like they teach us  
in cosmetology class.*

*She's almost as tall as me now.  
She is starting to look  
more like me too.  
Her new foster family  
are Dutch.  
She likes it  
in this home.  
She is happy. (Youth D-12)*

Kendra and Drew have maintained the most constant connection throughout the 3 years that I have known Drew. They visit the most regularly, sometimes in each other's foster homes and sometimes with their grandma or mom. Drew speaks of the changes she notices during the different visits and we are reminded of the passage of time and of how each new visit happens with two slightly changed girls. They return to each other a little older, with new experiences, tied forever by a sister bond but composing new lives in different homes every single day. I think about how my siblings and I occasionally try to piece together who lived where and when drawing the lines to connect us when we were together and trying to fill the gaps and learn the stories of what happened to each other when we were apart. I wonder if it is the same for Drew and Kendra or have they stopped trying to fill in the gaps and have learned to just be together?

*My sister Sheila  
is 18 now.  
She is living with  
her boyfriend,  
back on the reserve.  
I don't know  
what she is doing  
right now  
actually.  
I think she has  
to finish school still  
Grade 11. (Youth D-11)*

Drew has an older sister Sheila. She showed up regularly in Drew's stories and in the photos in her photobox but during the 3 years I am not sure that

there was ever a visit in person. Some relationships it seems are harder to maintain than others. I think about the conflict that can occur when one sister lives with a non-Aboriginal foster family in the city, experiencing things the other sister deems “white” while the other lived most of her teenage years back on the reserve living what she would deem “Indian”. I wonder what would have happened to the relationship between my older sister, and my younger brother, and I had we not always been drawn back together again by our mom. Would we have been as close as we are now? I wonder if others look at us and see one or two of us as more Indian than the other?

### **Stories of a Dad**

*The last time I saw my dad.  
Was at least 7 years ago.  
A long time ago.  
I remember him  
as tall  
and skinny  
and funny.  
He left when I was 2.  
I met him again when I was 7.  
I haven't seen him since. (Youth D-20).*

When I think about youth in care it feels often as if the mother's stories are more present. In the stories I know the dad's story seemed to come secondary. I wonder why that is? I wonder if others think about Aboriginal youth in care and wonder where the fathers are? Drew used to tell stories of her dad as supportive and sending money and all the things a child could wish for in a dad who lived far away but eventually the stories stopped and it became this narrative; a narrative of leaving, returning and leaving again. If our identity is shaped by the cluster of stories told about us and to us (Anzaldua, 1999), within that cluster is a story of a dad. My dad died when I was 4 but he loomed large in my imagination and being “Inier's kid” was a story I carried with me for most of my life. It was how my siblings and I were introduced in certain circles. Drew did not speak to

me much about her dad. He showed up in only a few conversations, usually if I asked. But she too had a dad of her imagination where she filled in the blanks and created a relationship, an identity for him before coming to the story she tells now – “He left when I was 2. I met him when I was 7. I haven’t seen him since”.

### **Restorying the Families**

*An adoption celebration.  
planned just for me.  
It took place in August  
before baby Brie was born.  
So many people showed up.  
My old social worker.  
My new one too.  
My old foster family.  
James’s and Joelle’s  
friends and family  
Some from Joelle’s hometown too.  
My friends Lynn and Marie.  
Jennifer my mentor  
and her parents.  
So many people came.  
I had a cake.  
And some presents.  
It was a lot of fun.*

*I was going to  
also get a tattoo  
this summer?  
In honor of the adoption ceremony.  
I thought of it  
when I saw yours,  
the one you and  
your daughter share.  
The mother/daughter tattoo.  
But my social worker  
said we had to wait  
til I turn 17  
in March.*

*The tattoo*

*will have  
five little birds  
all in different positions  
of flight  
going down my shoulder.  
Each bird  
representing a member  
of my adopted family.  
and a quote  
in the middle.  
It will say something like  
Adoption is  
when a child  
grows in her parent's hearts  
and in her mother's belly.  
  
I will change my name then too.  
hyphenate  
keeping both family names.  
The bio family.  
& the adopted family. (Youth D-20)*

When I had asked Drew at the beginning of our relationship which family member she thought would want to participate in the research alongside of her she didn't think long at all before she suggested Joelle, her foster mom. At the time I accepted her choice as that was her main care-giver but now as I look back I realize how the timing of my asking was relatively close to the beginning of this newest foster arrangement. I wonder what Drew was thinking as she chose her new foster mom to be representative of her family. I wonder if she was already negotiating a longer term relationship with this newest family. I recall once when she showed me photos of a trip they took to clean up a rental property that Joelle owned. Drew said "that was when I thought they were still cool". Now she sees them as parents, perhaps not as cool as they were in those early days. Only now do I realize why Joelle had seemed surprised because their relationship was still in its early stages and Drew had chosen her to be the 'family' represented in the research.

The story of the tattoo also includes a story of the ever-changing quote. The tattoo was originally going to be a mom/daughter one like the one I have on my foot identical to the one on my daughters foot. But then Drew thought she should include James and if she included James then she wanted to include the now two younger children. Once the quote was found that seemed to articulate her feelings towards her adoptive family, I thought about how the tattoo might be read by the mom and so Drew changed the quote once more. The final quote includes 5 birds, each bird represented her new adopted family while still honoring her bio family.

*Adoption is when a child  
grows in one mother's belly  
and then the other  
parent's hearts.*

The negotiation of this tattoo is an example of Drew trying to accommodate everyone and the relational way she lives in the world, an ethic of care that insists she think about how her actions impact those around her. It also represents the negotiations that must occur as Drew and her families learn to live alongside of each other as Aboriginal youth and families in care.

### **Families in Care**

The story of Aboriginal youth in care, overrepresented in non-Aboriginal foster homes, would not be complete without the story of the caregiver. Joelle, as Drew's foster mom, her husband and biological children also become part of the families in care when they agreed to invite Drew into their family. I was interested in the stories Joelle told of herself and the stories of how she came alongside Drew. I was interested in how Joelle and Drew learned to live together. I wanted to hear the stories of how they learned to live as families in care, constantly negotiating relationships between bio families, and foster families, youth and social workers and all the humans who become a part of the in care system. Usually when I think about Aboriginal youth in care my focus is on the



child. Until I entered into this research project along side of Drew and her families I wasn't aware of how much the families, biological and foster, also become families in care. Through Drew we heard stories of the biological family and now through the words of Joelle, Drew's foster mom we hear stories of the other family that is in care.

### **The Other Family in Care: Joelle's Story**

#### **Intergenerational stories.**

I was a really strong student.  
School was one big positive for me.  
They moved me up a grade  
from Grade 2 to Grade 3.  
I was pretty much a goody goody.  
I got honours all through.  
School was a big bonus for me.  
I didn't always have to work hard at times  
but less than A wasn't acceptable.

My brother and I  
We are both adopted.  
We both lived in the same home  
and yet  
we were both so different.  
He was bright  
but didn't do well in school.  
Not overly popular.  
He was very different.  
He was a skateboarder.  
He just didn't fit in.  
He went into automotives  
even though that wasn't his thing.  
Maybe to impress our dad.  
Maybe to try to connect with him.  
While he played the role  
of the misfit  
I knew the roll to fill  
to be the perfect little girl.  
My dad left  
in high school.

When I was in Grade 12.  
He was very abusive  
and there was  
this big blow out.  
After that  
My brother and I.  
We didn't keep in touch.  
I don't know what happened  
to him  
but isn't it funny  
how two people  
raised in the same home  
dealing with the same abuse  
and trauma  
could turn out so  
differently?

**Joelle's educational story.**

I always knew  
I would go to post-secondary.  
I wanted to be a veterinarian  
or a teacher  
or a psychologist.  
Then I realized  
I could do both  
A bachelors degree to teach  
and a Master's in counselling.

My first year of post-secondary  
was kind of lonely.  
I wasn't really  
part of university life.  
I started a year later  
than my friends.  
I had stayed back  
because my best friend's mom  
was sick.  
She was like  
my own mom  
because I spent  
so much  
time there  
as a

teen.  
It was a bit isolating.  
Eventually I met  
a little group of people.  
We had classes together.  
Then I began to really like university.  
When I finished,  
I taught for 2 years.  
Then due to cut backs  
Had to move.  
I taught for two more  
Then due to more cut backs  
I had to move again.  
So I went to do my masters.  
It was always my plan.  
I subbed  
And I took classes.  
My Master's was great too.

### **Restorying and relationships.**

I look at Drew.  
It is so different.  
I always had to have an A  
For her  
For a long time  
as long as she got C's  
she was content.  
She didn't have a work ethic.  
Not in the way that I knew  
as a child  
and as a teacher.  
There is the big  
philosophical debate  
not to reward kids to work.  
But she didn't have a work ethic  
in the way that I knew.  
We don't give her 20 bucks  
for each A  
but we do give her praise.  
It doesn't come intrinsically  
to her.  
To a lot of kids it doesn't.  
So we give her praise.

We help her to maintain order  
and teach something  
along the way.  
Both Drew and I are adopted  
both came from homes  
with abuse  
and yet  
we are  
so different.  
She will work really hard  
if she likes her teacher  
if she feels a connection  
if there is a relationship.

**Joelle and Drew – Lives connected.**

She didn't do well in Grade 7.  
She just didn't hand in her work.  
It wasn't that she wasn't capable.  
She presented as if she didn't care.  
Like she didn't understand why she should care.  
But now  
she cares more.  
She knows that I will find out.  
That is a big motivator for her to do well.  
We helped instilled that in her.  
We taught her to do her homework,  
to use her agenda.  
It was her ticket.  
It helps her be organized.  
She knows I'll nail her  
but she is also  
really proud of herself  
for doing well in things.

**Shifting stories to live by.**

Her math teacher  
called me once.  
I missed the call  
but Drew insisted I call him back.  
He told me how  
she had matured  
in those last few weeks

of Grade 9.  
He told me  
he really thinks  
she is ready for high school.  
She wasn't even passing math  
in Grade 7.  
and now she is getting 70s.  
That is great.  
It is funny  
how you can do little things  
to sway her.  
She thought she was so bad  
at word problems.  
But then I said  
you're such a strong reader.  
You are actually  
better than some kids  
because you are better with words.  
She was all pumped up.  
3 weeks later  
Drew said  
I'm so good at word problems now.  
I said  
Yeah you are.

#### **Stories of Drew – The artist.**

Drew is an artist.  
She loves art.  
Just like her bio-mom  
The bio-mom,  
could take any picture  
and redraw it.  
It's phenomenal.

#### **Carrying Drew's stories – Lost Teddy bears.**

She was in her first foster home  
from March of Grade 5  
to March of Grade 6.  
She took very little to that home  
just two favorite teddy bears.  
They made her get rid of them.  
They were so dirty.

It is a bit sad.  
They could have washed them.

### **Carrying Drew's stories – Being Mormon.**

Drew was Mormon.  
The church was important to her.  
It was a comfort.  
One of her foster families  
was Mormon.  
so she became one too.  
She stopped wanting to go now.  
But it certainly  
must have  
given her some feeling of security  
and comfort.

### **Carrying Drew's stories – Stories of school.**

We went through all her stuff  
when she moved in.  
Not all at once  
but I would get her  
to tell me about stuff.  
We revisit it along the way.  
She does a big purge  
every once in a while.  
When she does that  
she will reminisce.  
At one point.  
she laughed  
and said  
Isn't that funny  
that in elementary  
I got all these awards  
then  
I couldn't pass  
junior high.

She was trying to say  
that in elementary school  
an inner city school  
the focus was just  
on getting the kids there.

Awards seemed to be given  
just for being nice.  
She didn't have good marks.  
Didn't do homework.  
And yet still got awards.  
She thinks that is funny.

Drew thought  
it was good.  
Those awards were  
helpful  
but it was so different  
in junior high.  
She wishes someone  
would have talked to her  
about what she could do  
about her future  
while she was  
in elementary  
school too.

She did like school  
even though she'd skip'  
sometimes  
stay home  
watch tv  
or leave the house  
before she went to  
foster care.  
But school  
for Drew  
was sometimes  
the only time  
she would be fed.  
Crystal Kids Program<sup>29</sup>  
would feed her at night.  
They would drive her  
to her home after.  
Drew told stories of how  
she wouldn't have food at home.

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<sup>29</sup> An integrated community support centre focused on building resilience, providing opportunities, and encouraging lifelong learning through its partnerships and programs. Retrieved from: <http://www.crystalkids.org/>

Crystal kids would help her cook,  
teach her everything,  
then eat together.  
She remembers  
how most of her time  
was spent  
there.  
She did like school.

**Joelle and Drew – Telling, re-telling and re-storying.**

As she revisits her stories now  
Drew has noticed things.  
Drew thinks that sometimes  
her Kokôm  
in some ways  
has been more of a mom  
than her own mom was.  
Drew has noticed  
that sometimes  
she herself,  
has been more of a mom  
to her own mom  
than her mom  
has ever been to her.

In Grade 8  
She had to write  
About who she admired  
Who had really been there  
for her.  
She wrote about her Kokôm.  
That surprised me.  
She talked about  
how her Kokôm  
helped her  
whenever her mom couldn't.  
It was more a fairy tale.  
It wasn't really accurate.  
I think  
if she were to read it now  
she would think  
Oh that wasn't true.  
At the time



she wasn't ready to let go  
of that  
or face  
that part of things.  
She left out the hard stories.  
The stories  
of when  
they were taken  
from grandma's care.  
She wouldn't tell  
this story  
in the same way  
now.

### **She Wouldn't Tell this Story in the Same Way Now**

These stories of Drew were told to me early in their lives together. Joelle and I also developed a relationship over the years, through our conversations and through the regular contact we had while organizing Drew's schedule to meet up with me. I was able to see glimpses into their lives as they negotiated who they would become to each other. I tried to capture the care, and the hope and the visions of the future that Joelle holds for Drew. I didn't write about the many stories of family camp outs, and gatherings with friends, and of the many ways Joelle, James, little Louis, and now baby Brie have become a family. I didn't describe the bedroom that was planned together, painted and organized to give Drew a space in her new home. Nor did I describe in the narrative the photographs of Drew that are around the house. The beautiful one taken that sits in the living room, capturing her grace, her beauty and her inner happiness. Neither did I write a lot about the tensions that arise between teenagers and their parents, the teenager's urge to pull away while still longing to be held that also happened in family homes. I know I left out tensions, and argument and family negotiations of rules and roles and responsibilities. This is not to say they didn't exist, or that they are not worth mentioning but they were left out because there was so much more to the story that was wanting to be told.

What is left, is a story of how everything always happens in the midst of living a life. A story, that if we ask Drew at different moments in her life, just might not be told in the same way again. It is written knowing that all the while the written story is one step behind Drew and her families. Drew has moved on. Even if I share memories of the negotiations needed for Drew, her bio family and her Foster families to learn who they will become to each other and how they will live in each other's lives, they are living new experiences and Drew continues to find her way. Drew, Joelle and I had to chose just pieces of the story to tell. From inside of our friendships, inside of our conversations we have collected mere fragments (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of who Drew and her families are, as they live with the story of being Aboriginal youth and Families in Care.

[We] aim to take responsibility  
for knitting together and rendering coherent  
some of the loose strands of [our lives].

(Carr, 1986, p. 94).

## Chapter 4:

### Jayanna's Story: The Chill of Dismissal

Trudy:

The day had been cold, colder than I had expected. It had been overcast and yet still somehow too bright for my eyes. I recall shivering as the wind bit through my thin jacket and my hair whipped around my face blocking my vision. I had to brush it aside as I looked down the parking lot searching for Jayanna. When I finally spotted her she looked small standing at the edge of the school property.

*Jayanna:*

*I was standing by the park, talking to my cousin.*

*I looked up and saw you standing there with the principal.*

*I forgot we were going to meet.*

*I wondered if the principal was mad.*

*I wondered what you guys were feeling.*

Trudy:

I saw Jayanna standing there, at the edge of the school property, looking small from the distance I stood. I watched her say goodbye to the girl and the two dogs at her side. I was feeling tense from the conversation that had just taken place inside the school. Just minutes before I had been sitting in the front office waiting and listening to the secretary. Exasperation was evident in her every word, as she told me: "Jayanna is not here. She has missed a lot of school. She comes late very often. She is not here today." I remember feeling so confused because I had just been texting Jayanna and we planned to have lunch. She knew I was coming and she told me she would meet me. I recall standing there in the school office, perplexed, clutching the Subway sandwiches in one hand and my phone in the other not knowing what to do. When the administrators came out of their office, I tried once again to explain how I wanted to continue to work with Jayanna as I had at her old school. I can still feel the breeze of dismissal as the administrators

had listened, and without much of a response, headed out to their lunch plans leaving me once again to the secretary. I told her that I wanted to wait even as she assured me that Jayanna wasn't there. Feeling uncomfortable under her watchful gaze I left to wait outside and that was when I saw Jayanna. I remember how small she looked that day in a sweater that appeared too thin for the cold and with her hair slightly disheveled from the wind. She had a small thin bag over her shoulder that hardly seeming capable of carrying the books I imagined she needed for that Grade 8 year. I wondered what it did hold. What supplies would Jayanna need to cross the threshold onto the school landscape? As I smiled at her, relief evident in my grin, I found myself wondering what she was feeling?

*Jayanna:*

*I remember being cold.*

*I didn't have a jacket yet.*

*My bag was filled with things given to me by the school.*

Trudy:

Knowing that the administration was watching us, I asked quickly for the note from her dad giving her permission to speak to me. She nodded and handed it over.

*Jayanna:*

*I was feeling happy to meet again.*

*I thought that since I had moved schools we might not be meeting anymore.*

*I remember asking my dad to write the note.*

*He had easily agreed.*

Trudy:

I quickly read the note giving us permission to continue our meetings. I glossed over the "time-permitting" phrase knowing that we usually met only over lunch break. When I finished reading we both turned towards the school, our steps

slowing as we got closer. I recall feeling my anxiety build again as we face the firing squad of school administrators blocking our entrance into the school as they waited for a ride to their lunch event. I forced a smile and gave the principal the note granting us permission to continue our relationship. This administrator was not new to Jayanna, because Jayanna had returned to her childhood school once again, but she was new to me and I didn't know what to expect. I wasn't sure how best to behave.

*Jayanna:*

*I was worried that the principal would say no.*

*I worried that maybe this school didn't allow these kinds of meetings.*

Trudy:

The principal read the note, turned to Jayanna and said, "time-permitting. Do you hear that Jayanna? Only if you have time. Only if your work is done". Then she looked at me. I remember straightening up and standing at attention. I kept my eyes forward, and my back straight as she said, "We will have to talk about what time is best, which class to take her out of?" I remember quickly assuring her that it would only be during lunch hour so she would not miss any classes. But then, I glanced at the time displayed on my phone and with a sinking heart I realized that we were 45 minutes too early. Lunch had not even started yet. We were indeed taking her out of a class that she had arrived late for.

*Jayanna:*

*I didn't like the way the principal was talking.*

*She could have said it more welcoming.*

*She could have been nicer because you were a guest to the school.*

Trudy:

The principal handed the note back, and once again sent us to the secretary. We turned to go inside and I worried at what greeting awaited Jayanna as we headed

back to the secretary who moments before was certain that Jayanna was not in; certain that Jayanna was hardly ever in.

*Jayanna:*

*The secretary would always stop me when I was walking to class.*

*She would say “Why are you late?”*

*I never used to be late.*

*Now I am always late.*

*Her attitude has changed.*

*She is less nice.*

*I would try to get by without her noticing.*

*I hate to be stopped by her.*

Trudy:

Our re-entry proved to be uneventful. We just gave the secretary the note and she led us to an empty office. Jayanna sat across from me at the tiny table and we prepared to eat the Subway sandwiches. I started the conversation by asking her to show me what was in her bag. Carefully, one item at a time, she pulled out her brand new school supplies. Despite being at the school for over a week the supplies remained untouched, unmarred. There was nothing to show their owner. I wondered what stories they told, the blank and untouched school supplies. I wondered how Jayanna lived this return to school. Did it feel as cold to her as my entry into this school had felt to me?

### **Foreshadowing Relationships with School**

Every time I re-read this beginning story in Jayanna’s narrative account I recall the moment when I saw her standing small at the edge of the school property. The tug of her stories drew me in that day; stories of cold autumn days where she would walk the distance from her home to meet me on the landscape of a school where the chill in the air could still be felt even on the inside. There is

something in that moment that takes me back to my own childhood. When I saw Jayanna standing there, at the edge of the school property, she could so easily have been my sister or me during one of our many moves back to my mom's home community. We had the same long dark hair and, depending on our life circumstances, the same tendency to be wearing clothes that were a little too thin for the cold. Sometimes it was for fashion reasons and sometimes it was just because the weather grew cold before our family was able to upgrade to a winter wardrobe. As I looked at her that day, and as recall this story now, I still feel within my own body the tensions of my childhood when I too would walk the long distance, down the country road to renegotiate my way back into a school I had left not so very long ago. There is something in this first story, Jayanna and my experiences as we stood together at the school that fall day, that foreshadowed the future, and Jayanna's relationship with school. As I stayed alongside of Jayanna, as she lived her life, I was able to live, even if for just moments, inside of her stories. I became a part of Jayanna's stories in ways that I couldn't possibly have imagined in the planning of the research project. As I stood beside her, facing the blockade of administrators that day, we drew closer and I was given an opportunity to witness a story of Jayanna, deepening my understanding of the stories I would hear her tell.

### **Negotiations Ebb and Flow**

My own story of Jayanna began many months before this blustery fall day. It began in an afterschool arts club at another school. Because both our attendance in the afterschool arts club, in that first year, was sporadic, the field text contained only glimpses of her story; only glimpses of the Jayanna I would come to know. The field text contained what we, the researchers, saw and heard more than it contained Jayanna's words. The story that emerged, of Jayanna came from mere glimpses, and snapshots of moments that left a lasting impression.

It was late January 2011 when Jayanna, then a Grade 7 student, arrived in the school, and attended the afterschool arts club. She was one of the five girls who attended that day, having come in with a friend, who had been there since the beginning of the club. As I write about that first meeting I picture the younger Jayanna with her dark eyes inside of her pale face, gently dotted with the lightest touch of freckles, framed by her long, thick dark hair. In the field text I begin to find pieces of Jayanna's story. She would show up sporadically. I would read of a moment and recall Jayanna beading, and then going silent when researchers came by with questions or there would be a story of large beads and bracelets, the craft choice of the day, never to be seen on her wrist but engaging her in that moment. Moments would be written about where she would pop in, keeping backpacks on, hovering near the food with her friend. Moments where I wondered if they would stay, moments filled with relief when I would see them finally sit down and make a dream catcher. Then it would go silent again in the field text. There would be long spaces of absence before she would be mentioned again. There would be a photo or a small note and we would know, from the field text that she had come again, and painted a memory box. We would see the beginnings of her collage, a tiny piece of her artwork. And from these glimpses, these moments, these little snapshots of a girl's life we slowly began to know more about Jayanna. Within the club space I had become a part of the lives, the tensions, the excitement of Jayanna and the other junior high students as they were navigating and negotiating who they were, who they were becoming and who they would be to each other. Slowly, I began to get to know Jayanna. One story at a time Jayanna's narrative began to take shape.

### **Quiet and Sad**

There is a story of in the field text on May 25, 2011 involving a Grade 8 boy who had been a large presence throughout the field text but up until this day, had never been associated directly with Jayanna. On this day I overheard him say



to Jayanna “You used to walk around so quiet and sad but then you changed”. I remember turning to look at Jayanna when he said this but I couldn’t see her reaction and she had no verbal reply. The Grade 8 boy continued talking and asked her about someone he saw her with and asked if that had been her brother. To this she responded by saying “No, he is my cousin”. In the field text I don’t record how the conversation ends. I don’t know who walked away first. I only know that I began to look again at Jayanna to see if I too could see the quiet, sad girl. I chose to write the following section in a word image poem to capture the wonders evoked as I reflected on this moment in Jayanna’s life.

Quiet and sad  
What does that look like?  
What did they see  
when they looked at Jayanna  
and saw  
quiet and sad?

In my mind flashes an image  
of me walking as a teenager.  
With my head down  
I walk in a slow shuffle.

I am thinking about nothing and everything.

I remember  
how I walked that day  
around and around  
our little trailer  
in the trailer park.  
I might have looked,  
I might have even felt  
quiet and sad  
but I think I might have been  
just thinking  
or maybe even  
just dreaming.  
I wonder what he thought,  
when he saw her,  
this tough Grade 8 boy who noticed her.

I wonder if she was sad  
or if she too  
was just thinking  
and dreaming  
and wondering  
about everything  
and nothing.

My research wonders centre around the stories Aboriginal youth and families hear and tell of themselves and so I was curious about this story of being quiet and sad. I was drawn to the moment, also because it pulled me back to my own years as a teenager at that age. I wondered that day if a story of Jayanna might have been changed, or maybe it had been created when we all (the boy, Jayanna and I), walked out of the afterschool arts club that day with a story of quiet and sad.

### **Unfulfilled Plans – The Year Ends**

Another month passes in the field text before I see her name again. It is June 15, 2011 and we are making Indian Tacos. There are photographs of her making bannock, pictures of friendships rekindled and even if just for a moment, friends who once were at odds, now bonded in feast preparations. The field text reminds me that at this point, one of the last club days, Jayanna and I still have not had our lunchtime conversation. We had tried three or four times and each meeting had not been realized. I had kept asking and she had always agreed but any tentative date planned had not worked out. Jayanna had not been able to make it. I can recall wondering on that day if she had told me no through her actions, by not showing up on the days that I had planned a lunch, and that maybe I was not hearing her. But something inside of me kept insisting that I ask again; something in the other researchers was also unable to let this go. In the field text, there is the story of Simmee, another researcher, pulling Jayanna into the dark kitchen, and asking her again, “Do you want to have lunches with Trudy?” to which Jayanna agrees, again. Then Simmee brings me in too and this time

Simme orchestrates the plan. Jayanna still does not have a phone for me to call her and so we agree to meet for lunch the following Monday.

We never do meet up while she is a Grade 7 student. The field text ends for that school year with my wonders and with an understanding that negotiation of entry into relationships does not always follow my predetermined planned schedule. It has its own ebb and flow. I also think about how we only get to see fragments of who Jayanna is and how Jayanna, through the stories she chooses to share and to not share, can control these fragments. As I wonder about the stories Aboriginal youth tell about who they are and are becoming I am increasingly awake to how stories are created of them by those who observe or live along side of them. I wonder if these stories are ones Jayanna is aware of. I wonder if somewhere in the stories she tells of herself there is the story of missing a planned lunch or is that only a story I tell. I wondered at the end of that year if perhaps Jayanna would not be my participant. I wondered how it is that we choose participants and how it is that they choose, or don't choose, us.

### **New Beginnings**

The next year begins, and Jayanna returns to the club. She shows up to the club alongside her friend. In the field notes I recorded how I happily went up to her again and how I eagerly asked her how the start of her school year was going. She told me that first club day that it was not going well. Her friend agreed with her. I asked them why, and I urged them to tell me more but they were busy chatting and did not reply to my request. I remember that conversation, that moment where they had shared a tension but pulled back at my overeager response. And I remember how before I walked away, I took a deep breath and asked if Jayanna still wanted to have lunch conversations. I wasn't ready to give up on the youth who had agreed to be a participant with me. And once again she assured me that "Yes" she did want to have conversations. This time she had a phone. I gave her my cell number again and I awaited her text.

Looking back now at the slow negotiation of entry into our conversations I realize that it was true that I was not listening carefully and I was not hearing what she was saying. She had told us yes repeatedly and she steadily repeated her affirmation when asked. Now, I wonder what she thought as we repeatedly asked if she wanted to be a research participant when she had clearly told us she did. What I was becoming aware of was how there would be life circumstances beyond her control, beyond our control that would make scheduled meetings difficult. Eventually, and slowly, I learned to trust that she wanted to be involved in this research and that being unable to attend a planned meeting had little to do with her desire to be, or not be, a participant. As I look back and reflect I see how gently it was that Jayanna stayed alongside of me as I worked out my tensions with being unable to control the time and place of our meetings. Having taught in an elementary classroom for over 13 years, at the beginning of this research, I was drawn to, and almost yearned to hold the same rhythms of a typical school week, of each activity measured by the passage of regulated time. Jayanna didn't live her life according to this routinized school cycle. Instead of me drawing Jayanna into my world of schedules, she slowly began to teach me to think differently about what it means to negotiate entry into a relationship, about how an ability to be flexible and to live in more fluid ways was going to be needed.

### **Big Sister**

Jayanna and I met a few times that September and, while I remember the conversations as me talking more than Jayanna, I realize now, re-reading the field notes, that she had been willingly sharing stories since our first conversations. As I asked about her family she told me all about the places that she lived, often moving between her mom, her dad, and her grandparent's homes. She explained the complex relationships that existed as she navigated her way between the two

blended families<sup>30</sup> in her separate family homes. I could hear the love she had for her siblings in both home places as she would carefully tell me their names and who belonged to who as I tried to make sense of who she was in the midst of all these family members. As I sought out stories that she would choose to tell about who she was, about how she was negotiating her identity as an Aboriginal youth, I was always drawn to her stories of family; of who she was in these families. I quickly came to understand the great sense of responsibility she felt for her siblings; of the role she felt she played as their older sister. Having an older sister and a younger brother myself I understood to some degree this responsibility but I also began to reflect on how much my big sister has this same ethic of care for her younger siblings. How she too has that sense of responsibility that never left. I began to wonder how living a story of big sister also shapes who Jayanna is and is becoming.

### **Transitions Between Schools and Communities**

And then just when we seemed as if we were on our way, just as we seemed to be moving smoothly into a relationship, I sent her a text message to confirm our next meeting scheduled, October 12, 2011. I was startled by her prompt reply. She said, “I cannot have lunch. I moved schools. I am back in my dad’s home community. We can’t meet any more”. There had not even been a hint that this move was an imminent possibility. As a project team we had discussed how we would follow the youth to wherever they took us. We had imagined it would be following them from Grade 9 to a new high school but Jayanna was one of the first youth who showed us that many transitions happen in the midst of lives and not on the regulated, grade to grade progression that we had

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<sup>30</sup> Jayanna’s family can be described as complex stepfamilies. “[T]hose with children of both parents as well as children of only one parent account[ing] for 149,365 of the total. [In the 2011 census] there were 35,765 complex stepfamilies with children from each parent only while there were 7,275 families with children of both parents as well as children of each parent individually. Jayanna and her family can be described by the latter, blending in multiple ways. (National Post, 2012) <http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/09/19/step-families-becoming-the-new-normal-in-canada-2011-census/>

imagined. I reassured her that we could still meet if she wanted to as we were already in conversation. She agreed and that was when we met on the landscape of her childhood school and where together we faced the firing squad of administration, the story that began this narrative account of Jayanna and my experiences together. That was where I began to live Jayanna's story as much as I began to hear it. That was the moment where I began to be aware of the ebb and flow that seemed to also take place as Jayanna negotiated her way into and out of her schools and negotiated who she was on each of the different landscapes of school.

One of the stories that resonated deeply and troubled me was how Jayanna seemed to be becoming increasingly disengaged with school, a story foreshadowed in that cold fall day when I saw her standing at the edge of the school property. As Jayanna and her parents worked to find ways to support Jayanna and to negotiate their relationships having been apart for years with their own separate families, there were many transitions for Jayanna between homes and between schools that took place. I think about how often they all had to renegotiate relationships and who they would be on the different landscapes.

As I began to deepen my understanding of the stories Jayanna told of her life as an Aboriginal youth I wanted to also hear the stories her dad told about his own educational experiences and how it was he was experiencing living alongside of Jayanna as she navigated her way through hers. I wanted to see if I could get a sense of the who Jayanna was as I began to think about who they were as a family. Because Jayanna, at that moment, was living with her dad, he was the first parent I would have a conversation with.

### **A Dad's Story**

He walked in the door to the Tim Horton's, that October of 2011, where I was waiting. He was tall and wore a baseball cap. He looked youthful and relaxed. He walked immediately over, recognizing me from the description I

gave. We shook hands and I introduced myself. Rob was one side of the two blended families that Jayanna belongs to. In that home she lived with her dad, his second wife and their children, having moved recently from her mom's where she lived with her mom's boyfriend and her younger siblings. She had just moved to go to school in the community instead of catching the bus to the city school where I had first met her. As I turned to look at Rob sitting at the table I thought about how quiet Jayanna was in our conversations. I thought about how slow and gentle our conversations were and how stories were revealed a tiny bit at a time. I wondered how this conversation would go. Would he be just as quiet? Would I gently coax the stories out of him as I did with Jayanna? Coffee in hand I headed towards the table fully aware in this moment of how as Setterfield (2006) describes: "Families are webs" and it is "[i]mpossible to understand one part without having a sense of the whole". In seeking out her dad I attempt to begin to gain this deeper sense of what stories Jayanna told me about who she is as an Aboriginal youth and about her schooling experiences.

As soon as he begins to speak it becomes evident that he has been thinking very deeply about Jayanna's schooling experiences, as well as about his own, and the story flows smoothly. I speak minimally, just to clarify or to ask small questions. I just engage in the conversation as listener. The conversation starts with my asking him to tell me what prompted the move for Jayanna from Willowbend School to Riverview School. I was trying to make sense of how one day Jayanna was there and the next, leaving everything behind, she was gone. The following is a word image poem where I share in his own the words the story he chose to tell.

### **Transportation issues.**

*In the beginning,  
the bussing transportation system  
wasn't set up.  
There are five busses*

*that come through our neighbourhood  
in the town site.  
She didn't know  
which bus was hers.  
I called the transportation line.  
They told me  
which bus was hers.  
She tried to get on that bus  
but she wasn't on the list.  
There was a miscommunication.  
She couldn't get the right bus.  
I sent her to my sister's  
at the town site  
to go with her cousin.  
For a while  
she was catching the bus  
from there  
but  
she'd have to walk there  
each morning.*

*Transportation was a big issue  
at the beginning.  
That kinda got straightened out.  
Then once she started getting picked  
up at our house  
regularly from the home,  
she'd go to school for a while.  
But after a while  
She'd start,  
for whatever reason  
not wanting to go,  
not wanting to get up in the morning,  
being difficult.  
As a parent  
I tried to sit with her  
talk with her  
find out  
what exactly is going on  
with her.  
I would ask her,  
Any issues at school  
that are preventing you from going*



*making you not want to be there?  
She said  
nothing really  
she said  
she just doesn't like it.  
I said  
unless you give me details  
or specifics  
I can't really do anything about it.  
She's always kinda been that way,  
kind of quiet and shy.  
She's like that with me even  
quite a bit.  
It's hard sometimes  
to get her to open up.*

**She's at that age.**

*The year before,  
not this past year,  
but the year before,  
right up until then  
she's always good in school  
her attendance  
used to be good.  
I think she's at that age.  
Jayanna came to Riverview School  
for a while  
Then back to the city school  
She used to go to a different school  
right beside her mom's place  
when she lived with her mom.  
She used to do really good there.  
She's always had good marks,  
good attendance.  
Then she went to the school for  
Aboriginal people in the city.  
She was doing good there.  
Then came Junior High.  
Willowbend School.  
I think the adjustment  
might have been a lot for her.*

*I don't know.  
I think I attribute  
some of it  
to her age too.  
Before that  
she was always  
really outgoing and bubbly  
and looked forward to going to school.  
I have other kids too.  
That's how they are right now  
at that younger age.  
They look forward  
to getting up  
and going to school.  
But once you hit Junior High,  
Like our other daughter,  
it was the same thing.  
When she hit Grade 7,  
half way through the year  
she just went downhill.  
I think it's just  
the drama  
between Junior High girls  
in their little circles.  
Social media  
and all that stuff,  
doesn't help.  
I know that's a part of the reason  
why she is reluctant  
to go to school  
every day.  
She said  
girls don't talk to her sometimes  
for whatever reason.  
I just told her  
just remember  
you're there for school  
not for those other people,  
try not to worry about them.  
There's only so much I can do.  
She doesn't want to go to school.  
She won't go.  
She'll be stubborn.*

*She won't get up.  
Finally I'll just say,  
Ok,  
get up  
clean the house,  
do chores,  
help out  
if you're not going  
to go to school".  
I don't just let her sleep all day.  
It's just this past year  
I've noticed the schooling  
as far as her attendance  
and her efforts  
really inconsistent.  
For whatever reason  
she just won't try,  
she doesn't want to go.*

#### **Blended families' tensions.**

*Her mother and I aren't together  
we haven't been  
for about 10 years  
her mother and I  
we have three kids together  
Jayanna's the middle child of those three  
The other two boys  
I've had them pretty much  
8 or 9 years.  
After we split  
she had them for a year or so.  
Then I took the boys  
They've been with me ever since.  
She has kinda  
always kept Jayanna  
Up until 4, 5 years ago  
2007.  
Then Jayanna came to stay with me  
Then she went back over there  
for a few years.  
But there were issues*

*So I took her  
she's been with me since  
There are a few times  
where she wanted to go back and visit  
She really misses her younger sister,  
she's always worrying about her.  
So she always wants to go  
and check on her,  
I let her.*

*She comes from a very large family  
on both sides  
on her mom's side  
and my side.  
my wife and I  
we've been together for 10 years,  
we're married  
Altogether we have 10 kids,  
I have 10 kids,  
we all live together,  
we're all in the same house.  
we're happy  
we have each other.  
It's quite a bit  
but I came from a big family myself  
so did my wife,  
we're used to it.  
It's nothing out of the ordinary.  
Jayanna has so many siblings on both sides,  
I always tell her  
this is how it used to be,  
how my Kokôm and Mosôm grew up  
They came from big families too.  
So you're really fortunate  
because there's a lot of kids,  
There are single families  
That wish they had more brothers or sisters.*

### **Importance of culture.**

*We're home all the time*

*we like to do things  
with our kids,  
take them out to movies,  
take them swimming,  
we do all kinds of things with them.  
If I was a child in my family  
I think overall  
it's a really good childhood.  
They have everything they need.  
We don't have any of the negative elements  
around them  
at all.  
We're very cultural.  
We all sweat<sup>31</sup> together.  
We go to ceremonies together.  
That's a big part  
of our family unit.*

**Too shy to dance.**

*I'm pretty positive  
that my kids are all very happy.  
They're healthy.  
We give them everything.  
We give them a really good environment  
to grow up in.  
We don't drink or do drugs  
or smoke or gamble,  
or any of that.  
They all dance Pow-wow  
and I sing.  
I've got a drum group.  
We travel together.  
Jayanna outgrew her last dance regalia.  
It was kinda short on her.  
She couldn't dance last summer.  
There was a few times  
where she did have the opportunity  
to dance  
then last minute  
she kinda got shy.*

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<sup>31</sup> Traditional Cree Ceremony.

*She struggles with that still,  
her shyness.  
I always tell her,  
it's OK.  
You don't have to be really talkative  
and outgoing  
and social.  
It's not a bad thing  
that you're shy.  
Her mom is the exact same way.  
I see so much of her mom  
in her,  
which is good.  
I tell her  
it's good.  
Even myself,  
I'm that way too  
growing up,  
I kinda kept to myself  
a lot of times.  
I didn't have  
a lot of friends.  
I wasn't Mr. Popular.  
I said  
I know how important  
it is to go to school  
and have friends.  
It's really important to have that.*

### **Schools of choice.**

*I went to school at Riverview School  
right from daycare,  
playschool,  
kindergarten.  
It only goes to Grade 9.  
Once I got to Grade 9  
we had to go the city,  
to a High School.  
That was such an adjustment  
going from the reserve setting.  
At the time*

*Riverview had a different education authority,  
the county school board,  
so we had a lot of non-Aboriginal administrators,  
teachers,  
and students.  
It was a really good school.  
The level of learning  
was really good.  
That lease expired  
and the Band took over the education.  
As a result  
it's pretty much  
an all Aboriginal school.  
A lot of the teachers  
for the most part  
are all Aboriginal.  
What I'm finding  
just from seeing my kids' work  
and where they're at  
is their level of education  
is somewhat lower  
than what I went through  
at that age.*

*Jayanna  
wanted to stay  
with the people she knew,  
her friends  
that she went to school with,  
that is how she picked Willowbend School.  
A couple of her really good friends  
were going,  
That was pretty much  
her only choice.  
Some of them  
are still friends,  
but there was a falling out.  
A lot of stuff goes on  
with these young adolescent girls  
at that age.  
But I tell her first and foremost  
your education  
is what I'm*

*going to really push.  
You need to go to school.*

**Wants to do her own thing.**

*Jayanna's always asking me,  
well not always,  
probably once every couple of weeks  
if she could move out  
to so and so's place.  
At one time  
she wanted to move,  
and she did,  
to her Kokôm's place,  
my mom's.  
She stayed there for a while  
but then  
being there  
she had a hard time  
getting to school.  
My mom's getting older  
so I told her  
it's not really working out.  
So she moved back home.  
Then she asked again  
if she could move to her cousin's.  
She goes to a city school.  
She lives in the apartments  
in the town site.  
So they're always close  
growing up,  
since they were little babies,  
same age just about.  
She wanted to move there.  
I talked to my sister,  
If she stays for a while,  
she said OK.  
It was working good  
for a while,  
she was going to school  
every day.  
But then*



*the two of them  
had a falling out.  
So I picked her up,  
brought all her stuff home.  
I told her,  
I said,  
you know  
this isn't really working  
with you going places,  
I think you just gotta stay here.  
That's kinda  
what's going on right now  
with Jayanna.  
She wants to be out of the house  
and go and do her own thing  
Jayanna's at that age,  
that teenage girls get to  
I don't know  
if she wants freedom  
or maybe for attention.  
I do talk with her  
and communicate with her  
and tell her,  
I really care about you  
I'm proud of you.*

### **Moving to the city school.**

*I went all the way to High School  
at Riverview School.  
Coming to the city  
was such an adjustment.  
I went to a Catholic school  
for Grade 10.  
I wanted to go a different one,  
but my dad went to this one  
I kinda wanted to do that  
for him.  
My mom went to the other school  
the one I wanted to go to.  
It wasn't working out there,  
At the school my dad went to*

*the school I went to for him.  
There's a lot of racism.  
It was really, really bad.  
We had a school counsellor  
at that time,  
an Aboriginal liaison  
but he wasn't too effective  
I guess.  
I would try to tell him  
one-on-one  
what was happening and  
he tried to downplay it.  
I felt like I wasn't being heard.  
They would just say stuff  
like  
dirty Indian,  
stupid Indian,  
that kind of stuff.  
It was outright,  
but a lot of it  
was subtle.  
The teachers wouldn't hear it.  
As a student  
you don't wanna look  
like you're a big cry baby  
or tattler  
so  
you pretty much  
gotta brush it off,  
deal with it.  
I wouldn't even tell my parents  
for the most part  
even though it was very damaging  
in terms of my self-esteem.  
I just hated Grade 10  
after the first few months.  
My two older sisters  
were both in Grade 11 and 12  
at the school my mom had gone to,  
a very multi-cultural school.  
They had a very large Aboriginal population  
so they'd go on and on,  
and talk about their stories.*

*I'd listen,  
about having the Pow-wow club,  
the Cree class.  
I was like . . .  
I should be there,  
I should be a part of that.  
So I told my dad,  
I'll finish Grade 10 at my dad's old school  
next year I'm going to go to where my sister's were  
my mom's old school  
Those were two of the finest years of my life  
Grade 11 and 12.*

*My marks were always good.  
Getting to Grade 12  
I dwindled off a bit.*

*At the time  
I was always big  
on having my parents  
praise me for my marks.  
I always wanted  
to make them proud  
in that way,  
That just kept me going  
in school  
I didn't want to disappoint them.  
That was one of the driving factors.*

### **Life changing.**

*Grade 10 was  
I wouldn't say traumatic,  
but such a life changing experience  
for me.  
I never, ever experienced that.  
Even going to Riverview School  
for all those years  
so many non-Aboriginal kids  
were really good friends of mine.  
Then came Grade 10  
it was a whole new school,*

*a different environment,  
even the teachers,  
I could tell  
some of them  
had the same kind of attitudes  
towards Aboriginal students.  
The receptionist especially,  
very snooty.  
I could see  
how she'd treat the white kids  
when they come in,  
when I come in late or whatever,  
she'd single me out  
try to belittle me  
degrade me,  
stuff like that.  
At a young age  
you already know  
the way people are treating you.  
It was a really learning experience.*

*I look back on it now.  
If it wasn't for going through that  
I wouldn't be where I am today.  
It helped to make me  
the kind of person that I am.  
I learned that  
the way you treat people  
it's going to come back to you  
either way.  
I always make sure  
not to treat people that way.  
I know how I felt.  
I don't have any resentment  
or anything towards that.  
There was a time where I did,  
I guess the older you get  
you start to realize things.  
Looking back on it,  
you know  
this a part of my journey  
that I had to go through.*

**Do you know what racism is?**

*Well I asked Jayanna,  
Is there a lot of native students  
in Willowbend School?  
She said  
yeah there kind of is.  
I said  
Have you ever experienced anything?  
I asked  
Do you know what racism is?  
She said  
yeah I knows what it is.  
I said  
Have you experienced anything like that  
from other students  
or even teachers?  
She didn't say anything.  
After a while  
she said,  
I don't know.  
I think she's being honest.  
She's really not sure.  
I said  
kind of  
keep an eye out for that.  
If you ever feel  
like you're being degraded  
or humiliated  
or belittled  
for whatever reason,  
and if you think  
it's because you're Aboriginal,  
then you got to let me know  
because . . .  
I'm not going to lie to her,  
I went through it.  
I know what it feels like.  
I wish I would have told my parents.  
Looking back today  
in hindsight.  
if I would have told them*

*maybe  
they could have went to bat for me.*

*They tried  
to get  
an Aboriginal students' group going  
at my school in grade 10.  
I remember  
they posted it.  
They announced it  
over the PA system.  
I was at my locker.  
I remember hearing some people  
snickering and laughing about it,  
making gestures.  
Right away  
I felt so embarrassed.  
I remember going to the group.  
I didn't want to go,  
but I had to check it out.  
There was about  
seven or eight of us in there.  
I was surprised  
that there were that many students.  
I had only seen a few.  
The older ones  
in Grade 12,  
three of them,  
They talked about  
doing more cultural stuff,  
but  
nothing ever came out of it.  
They had two or three meetings  
that was it.*

### **Post secondary schooling.**

*After Grade 12  
that's the big mistake  
that I made  
going to a tribal college<sup>32</sup>.*

---

<sup>32</sup> A college in the city that served an Aboriginal population.

*They have a building,  
in the west end.  
They offer  
University,  
from bigger universities  
that kind of thing.  
It was the same thing  
going to Riverview School,  
not when I was there,  
but current times,  
the level of learning's  
a lot lower  
and there's not really an initiative  
to push the students  
to try harder.  
So the tribal college  
it was a cake walk,  
I really regret  
not going to U of A  
right after Grade 12.  
I went on an open house  
half way through Grade 12  
and my plan was to go there,  
take the combined education and native studies,  
that was my whole plan.  
But then  
the latter part of Grade 12  
I kinda got in with the wrong crowd  
I started missing classes,  
my marks dwindled a bit.  
I still passed,  
got my diploma  
but my marks weren't good enough  
in some of them  
to meet the requirements.  
I would have had to upgrade.  
But at the time,  
U of A said,  
we'll still take you in  
because looking at the rest of your marks  
you're a really good student.  
But then my mom advised me,  
she's said*

*just go to the tribal college for a year,  
lift your marks up.  
Because she was going there  
she said it's a really good school.  
At the time  
it was new.  
It was in her first year.  
So she's said  
yeah if you want to come  
it's a really good environment.  
So I went  
and it was so easy,  
I got good marks  
in all the classes.  
After that year  
I went to the U of A  
for 1 full year.  
I took some of the courses,  
native studies,  
political science,  
law.  
Then after that,  
for whatever reason,  
I still can't really figure it out,  
but I lost an interest in education.  
I remember  
my brother-in-law's telling me,  
you've been going to school  
how many years straight,  
like 14 years straight.  
Aren't you tired of it?  
This was coming from him  
because he only went to  
Grade 8 or Grade 9.  
He was done.  
Since then  
he's kinda just been doing odd jobs,  
a lot of labour.  
I remember  
he used to  
always have money.  
He used to have a car.  
And as a student*



*I'm broke and struggling.  
He's said  
you should just go out  
get a job  
go firefighting,  
go do some construction.  
You'll have money.  
You don't have to  
go through all this.*

*I didn't have kids until I was 20.  
Once I turned 19,  
finishing that year  
at the U of A.  
I didn't go back.  
I didn't register  
for the fall session.  
I was telling my mom,  
I'm gonna take a year off.  
At the time  
I was really hard core  
into Powwows,  
travelling everywhere.  
Since I was 17  
I was travelling  
with my cousin's group  
all over Canada  
and the US.  
So once I turned 19  
I decided  
I'm just going to do that  
for a year  
because it's really fun.  
I really loved it,  
being a part of that.  
I did that all year  
and kinda just forgot  
about my education.  
I put it on the back burner  
and said  
well I'll just come back to it.  
My mom said  
don't put it off too long*

*because education's  
only going to be free  
for so long.  
At the time I was funded.  
So yeah,  
then that was it.  
That was the end of school for me.  
I never ended up going back.  
Then I turned 20,  
became a father,  
started doing some work  
and you know  
providing.  
Ever since then  
I was always working,  
always had a job,  
I was never really out of work.  
I've always wanted  
to go back to school  
just to finish  
just because  
I need to do that.  
I guess not only for myself  
but for my kids.  
They always ask me  
How come you didn't finish university?  
I'm always telling them  
how important  
school is.  
But then my kids ask me  
When I get to university  
can I quit after one year?  
Because that is what I did.  
So that's what I want to do,  
go back and finish  
eventually.*

*I always liked school  
ever since grade School.  
I liked it.  
I enjoyed going to school.  
I enjoyed learning.  
I enjoyed the challenges*

*and friends.  
I think every student  
should have that opportunity  
to experience school  
that way.  
I know  
from working  
with some students  
they  
just  
hate  
school.*

*They  
Just  
Despise  
It.*

*They don't take a liking to it.  
Well a lot of them,  
it's the lack of support  
from home,  
from parents.  
Because I always had the support,  
I was fortunate  
in that way.  
They both were good at school.  
My dad ended up choosing to go into politics  
but he never lost his desire for an education.  
My mom too  
showed us the importance of school  
so that was passed onto me.  
That's why I support my kids  
the way I do now.*

### **Education.**

*I've actually  
earned the right  
to put on sweats now,  
I've been doing that for the last few years.  
My mom's brother,*

*my uncle,  
he taught us a lot of that  
because  
he grew up that way  
and lived that way  
and is  
gifted in that way.  
He pretty much led us  
along that path.  
Helped us all these years  
to know  
what we know now.  
Jayanna's Mosom.  
my mom's adopted brother  
he kinda helped us  
all these years,  
trained us  
and always told us  
he's not going to be around forever  
and encouraged us  
to do this  
on our own.  
Which is what we've been doing  
these last couple years.*

*My mom  
just recently earned her right  
to do that  
within this last year.  
We helped her build a lodge.  
She's getting ready  
to start on that.  
There are  
about four or five of us  
in the community  
that do it.  
In our community  
a lot follow the church  
but there is like an uprising,  
not really an uprising,  
but an interest  
for younger people now.  
They want to learn the language.*

*They want to learn their roots.  
They're hungry  
for that knowledge.*

*Jayanna  
and all my other kids,  
since they were little babies  
we brought them to the sweat  
I guess  
that's our way  
of baptizing them  
in our ways.  
They've always grown up  
being around that,  
going to sweats,  
going to Powwows  
dancing,  
all kinds of ceremonies.  
Smudging.  
I really tried to support them.  
I always tell them  
one day it's really going to help you,  
especially  
when hard times come.  
It's what's going to  
really help you  
get through it all*

I think about how important education has been in this family. How Jayanna was the third generation, coming from a line of Aboriginal men and women, who valued schooling, as well as the importance of learning their Cree culture. I think about the way he articulated what was important to him for his family, a large part being education but education that included spirituality, cultural teachings, and formal schooling. I think about the stories of Jayanna I heard through the words of her dad and I began to see sides of Jayanna that were not evident in school. Where was the space in school for the knowing that Jayanna carried from her Cree family? Where was the space for the learning that was taking place in the familial landscape?

After the meeting with Jayanna's dad it was a long time before I saw Jayanna again. She wasn't available to meet on the days that we would plan. Our schedules were not connecting. The next time we connected was in December of 2011, almost two months later, she was back living at her mom's house in the city. We arranged to meet up again.

### **Jayanna Returns to her Mom's House**

I remember how I knocked on the door and peeked in the open window. It was December 2011, a winter late afternoon, but the window was open and the house warm and cozy. Jayanna was sitting on a couch and in her arms was a sobbing little girl. She didn't want Jayanna to leave. I watched as Jayanna gently put her down and got her coat on. The little girl went to her mom and we left the house to head to KFC. She told me that the little girl was her little sister Rayne. I asked her what was going on with school and if she was still at Riverview School as she had been when we last spoke. I asked her how school was going. She told me she would probably be homeschooled. She told me she doesn't like school and she didn't make the bus. She missed too many days. Her mom finally told her "maybe you should just be home schooled if you don't want to go". Jayanna said she really liked this idea. I later learned that her step-sister had tried homeschooling for a while and that it must have seemed like a possibility for Jayanna, a way for her to continue with school, on a landscape where she felt more at ease.

I think about how Mair (1988) speaks about stories conjuring worlds and inform life when he says:

Stories are inhabitations. We live in and through stories. They conjure worlds. We do not know the world other than as story world. Stories inform life . . . We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are 'lived' by the stories of our race and place. . . . We are,

each of us, locations where the stories of our place and time become partially tellable. (Mair, 1988, p. 127)

As I got to know Jayanna and her parents and was given the stories of their own educational dreams as well as how they were trying to understand Jayanna's experiences of school I listened carefully to the stories Jayanna was told, and to the stories that were told of Jayanna by the school staff, and by her dad Rob. There are many stories of Aboriginal parents' engagement or lack of engagement with school and yet the stories I heard from Jayanna's dad were very different. It was so much more rich and diverse than those told of Aboriginal parents who are disengaged with the education of their children as told in the grand narratives of Aboriginal parents. As I think about the story of homeschooling that I learned of Jayanna, and that I lived along side of, I think it is best told through the words of Jayanna's mom. Through her words we are given another little piece of the family web (Setterfield, 2006).

### **A Mother's Story:**

#### **To Home School a Child**

Trudy:  
Jayanna's mom and I meet at Dairy Queen.  
She seems gentle in nature.  
Soft spoken.  
At first I am distracted  
by how much she looks like  
Jayanna  
by how much I see  
of Jayanna, the child.  
in Larissa, the mom.  
The way she smiles.  
The way she moves.  
The words she says.

Larissa and I begin our talk about  
homeschooling  
and how one of her children,  
Jayanna,

went that route,  
and of how they made  
that decision.

These are the words she says.  
This is the story she tells.

Larissa:

*Jayanna was not comfortable  
at her community school.  
When I would wake her up  
she would not go.  
The other kids were happy to go  
to their schools.  
But Jayanna would not go.  
I would try to talk to her  
and tell her to go.  
But some days  
she would just cry.  
So she was missing school.  
I wanted her to do work at home.  
I didn't want her to miss everything.  
So I started to call the school.  
I called a lot.  
Jayanna had been asking for awhile  
to be homeschooled.  
So I thought we would  
talk to the school about what we could do.  
The secretary would tell me  
to talk to the school counselor.  
I called the counselor.  
He was not in.  
I left a message.  
He did not call back.  
I did this many times.  
Finally I called the principal.  
She started to get things done.  
He, the counselor, called that very afternoon.  
He made an appointment  
for the next day.  
My van was still not working.  
So I got a ride to the school.  
Jayanna came with me.  
I found someone to watch the other children*



*and we went in for our appointment.  
I arrived at the school.  
I talked to the secretary.  
He was not even in.  
There was no discussion.  
No meeting.  
No space to talk about my daughter  
and what we can do to help her.  
Instead  
the secretary handed over  
a science text book  
with science worksheets.  
We took that  
and began to home school.*

Trudy:  
I think about what she tells me.  
I think about my teacher days.  
I recall making up such packages.  
Of worksheets and readers.  
Of textbooks and little instructions.  
I used to make it personal  
with a little note.  
I carefully thought of the child  
and how to give work they could do  
on their own.  
But then it would not get done.  
They would lose it.  
It would not be returned.  
So slowly the personal notes  
stopped.  
Eventually the careful plan  
was discarded.  
Slowly I gave up hope  
of the work getting done.  
Eventually it became a textbook  
and worksheets.  
Had the teachers at Riverview School given up on Jayanna?  
Had they too lost hope of the work getting done?  
Is that why there was no personal note?  
I had never heard this kind of story  
from the parent's perspective before.  
I ask to hear more.

Larissa:

*I get Jayanna up in the morning  
with the other kids.  
It is not fair to the others  
if Jayanna does not have to get up too.  
Jayanna does the work on her own.  
I help her only if she gets stuck.  
I am most worried about her math skills.  
When she is done the science.  
I will go back  
and talk to the school again.*

Trudy:

I wonder  
what it means to home school a child.  
To watch as they hurt.  
To see them with tears in their eyes  
in the ways Larissa had to see  
tears in the eyes of Jayanna  
at the thought of going to school.  
Then to choose for them  
To choose with them  
to home school.  
I wonder what it is to decide  
that school is not  
a safe place  
for this moment  
for this child.

I then ask her to tell me about her own schooling  
to go back to her early years.  
before she was a mom.

Larissa:

*I attended the same school as Jayanna.  
Riverview School.  
It was different then.  
Back then they allowed all races  
in the school.  
It was better.  
I was involved in sports.  
I got awards.*

*I had great attendance.  
My aunty has it all now.  
The trophies  
The attendance awards  
Report cards  
And medals.*

Trudy:

I wondered again  
At the stories Larissa told.  
So different was her experience.  
So unlike Jayanna's.  
What must it be  
to have had such success  
such joy in school  
then to have to watch  
one of your own.  
cry to stay home.

I wonder how the rest of school went.  
Did things shift for her in junior high  
as it had for Jayanna?

Larissa:

*But then it changed.  
They began to allow  
only children from the community,  
only Aboriginal youth.  
So in junior high I moved  
to the other school  
Jayanna has attended,  
to Willowbend School.  
Back then  
the school was good,  
the principal was good.  
Then I did high school  
at a city high school.  
Then I went to a community college  
to upgrade.  
The college was good.  
It had tutors and stuff.  
I didn't finish.  
I still have to upgrade my math.  
I registered for school this year.*

*But I couldn't continue.  
I had things going on at home  
to deal with first.*

*I have never wanted to go to  
the tribal college  
It is different.  
Only natives go there.  
I like when there are  
many races.  
But I may have no choice.  
The funding rules from my band  
have changed.  
They might only fund  
if I go there,  
to the all native school.*

Trudy:  
I wondered if the awards  
kept coming.  
I wondered if the attendance  
continued to be good.  
Because she slowly seemed  
to leave school.  
She didn't quite finish.  
Didn't yet attain her  
dreams and goals.

*I am thinking of going back to get my social work.  
To help families on the reserve,  
especially those on my own reserve.  
I heard a story recently  
of a little girl.  
who got on the school bus.  
It was noticeable  
that something had happened in the home  
someone had been sick.  
She got on the bus anyway  
and needed clean clothes.  
The bus driver noticed  
but no one helped her at school.  
No one helped her in the community.  
She wore those stained clothes all day*

*and no one noticed.  
It is stories like this.  
that make me want to  
get my social work degree.  
But right now schooling is difficult.  
The funding policies are not helpful.  
The funding is just not there.*

Trudy:  
As she tells these stories of her own schooling  
I think of Jayanna's experience.  
I wonder at their different stories,  
one so successful  
and one so disengaged.  
Then I wonder  
Are there similarities?  
Both slowly, very slowly  
leave school  
dreams in hand  
but not yet attained.

Larissa:  
*I grew up living with my aunty and uncle.  
They had many children.  
My sister and I,  
my aunty's 2 daughters,  
2 more adopted boys,  
and the cousins.  
Aunty was always babysitting.  
We always attended sweat lodges.  
I learned from my aunty.  
Jayanna used to go with her dad's family too,  
to sweats.  
Neither of us go now.  
Neither of us attend many powwows  
or round dances anymore.  
I will start to take the little ones again.*

Trudy:  
I ask her if she is worried  
about Jayanna's schooling.

*I plan to go back to Jayanna's school*

*to talk to them some more.  
Maybe Jayanna  
will have to redo  
Grade 8  
at another school.  
But I will go back  
and talk to Jayanna's school again.*

Trudy:  
Whenever I go to Jayanna's house  
Her mom's house  
to see her  
her little sister Rayne  
runs to the door.  
She chatters away  
telling me stories  
naming her family  
in the photos by the door.  
She entertains me  
the whole time I wait.  
Then Jayanna comes  
and  
Jayanna is so quiet  
in comparison.

Larissa:  
*Jayanna wasn't always so quiet.  
She used to be just like Rayne  
but then she moved  
for the first time  
to her dad's.  
Her brothers moved too.  
When they came back,  
they came back so quiet.  
So quiet sometimes  
I have to ask them  
to repeat themselves.  
Jayanna was not like that  
when she was a little girl.*

Trudy:  
Together we wonder  
at when they became silenced

at who told them to be so quiet  
at who they listened to  
so very well.

As we talked  
we wondered  
what is happening at school for Jayanna  
that makes her not want to go.

Larissa:

*Jayanna started out the year happy  
in Grade 7.  
A girl who had been giving her problems  
had moved  
so things were good.  
Then the girl moved back  
Jayanna stopped liking school  
Jayanna didn't want to speak up  
about this girl.  
She just stopped going.  
She was living with her dad again  
so she moved back to Riverview.  
Things were not good there either.  
Problems with some of her school friends.  
Nothing was being done about it.  
Jayanna stopped going to school again.  
She moved back home to me.  
Moved back  
and began homeschooling.*

Trudy:

I wonder what it is to home school your child,  
to know that school  
is not a safe place  
for them.

### **Single Stories of Parents Interrupted**

Hearing about Jayanna through the words of her parents was a very moving experience for me. I could hear of the love and the worry that was in their stories. But above all I could hear the hope and their desire that Jayanna

continue in school and their willingness to support her in any way they could. I think about how confusing and how difficult the decision to home school must be. Especially as both parents had really good early school experiences. But then I think about how their urge to protect their child from some of the later experiences, the moments where school became difficult, must have also influenced how they responded to Jayanna's desire to not attend public school as they understood it. I think about how for both of them there were many familial stories of curriculum making and education that were so important to their lives, and the lives they imagine for their children. I think about how no one seems to know of that side of Jayanna or her family. I wonder at the stories told by the schools, of never attending, and moving between homes, and how somehow I am not sure if the love and care that these decisions are made, may not always make it into the school stories.

Many of our next conversations, those between Jayanna and I, became about her home school experiences and how she was making sense of receiving schooling in this way. I too need time and stories to help me understand and think about ways this might become educative for Jayanna and her family (Dewey, 1938). In Jayanna's words we see another piece of the web of her story. We see the vibrations reverberate between the stories of her parents, and her own experiences.

### **Jayanna's Story of Homeschooling**

I've been going to this library again.  
I just try to find some textbooks  
'cause they don't give you  
any text books  
and they're supposed to.  
I look for  
a biography  
of the Aztecs.  
I didn't find  
it.



I forgot  
what I am supposed  
to do in  
Language arts.  
It got ruined  
'cause someone spilled  
some kind of juice  
on it.  
I just threw it away  
'cause it got  
all over.  
So I'm just working  
on my social.  
I do homework  
whenever.  
I don't have a  
set time.  
For Math  
I was given  
stuff about  
patterns and algebra.  
They didn't  
give me a text book  
just one for science.  
They didn't tell me  
when anything was due  
I think  
I will go back  
to public school  
next year  
for Grade 9.

The home schooling experience, for the majority of her Grade 8 year, had that same feel. There seemed to always be some communication that was lost between the school and home. Jayanna seemed always to be seeking to ways to attend to her school work that didn't involve the school that she had chosen to leave. I asked for stories of the school's response to her work, the way they supported her, the marks she received but this seemed to be a time where Jayanna had distanced her self from those artifacts of school, and those relationships. Those stories were very short and mostly answered with a future plan to contact

them and discussion around the work, the paper and the books, that had been sent home. Because of my experience in the school system for 13 years I felt anxious for Jayanna and her family at this time. I worried about how educative it was for Jayanna to be searching the public library for the books and information that would have been easily accessible in the school setting. I worried about how difficult school must be for Jayanna if she was to choose this way instead. Yet, again, always there was a thread of hope, of seeing a future in school, of plans to continue and to finish. Jayanna and her family always had hope that things would get better, and that they would find a place, and a way for Jayanna to renegotiate entry back into the public school system and to finish her education. Dreams that the parents, too hold for their own future.

Grade 9 proved to be such a fresh start. As I stayed alongside of Jayanna, she began Grade 9 at a junior high school in her catchment area<sup>33</sup>. The following is how Jayanna described to me this new beginning back inside the doors of a public school as I asked her numerous questions about what life was like for her now.

### **A Fresh Start**

Today I went home for lunch.  
Tomorrow I plan to stay at school  
with my new friends.  
We can stay at school  
or go to the nearby store.  
I walk to school  
but sometimes my mom drives.  
Maybe I will ride my bike.  
In this school there are only a couple  
of Aboriginal kids.  
They don't know I am Aboriginal  
cuz everybody says I am pale.

---

<sup>33</sup> The community area school which is designated for the children of that zone. The school has to take all children who reside in those boundaries, but have the right to refuse anyone from outside. Jayanna was within the boundaries.

I like this school.  
I like how it's big  
and there's more space  
from the other schools  
I've been to.  
Except there's lots of kids there,  
and so lots of space.  
Sometimes that is good  
but sometimes I can't handle it  
being by a lot of other kids.

### **Slowly Drifting Away**

When I arrived at Jayanna's new school, the second time that September of 2012, to pick her up I went inside. No one was at the desk and the halls were quiet but there was a sign that said, "ring bell." With no one in sight I chose not to ring the bell. I looked around and I saw metal picnic tables, at a lower level eating place. It seemed like it would be a nice place to eat with the windows letting the sunlight stream in. As I walked further into the school I could hear the sound of children behind closed doors, a muffle of voices, and the flurry of movement. It sounded like a physical education class. The rest of the doors were quieter. Everything was orderly and quiet. There were photos of students on the walls, usually groups of children but sometimes just a portrait of one. I wondered who they were and why they were on the wall in this way.

Eventually I stopped my wandering and headed back outside. Not one human entered the halls in that time. I was essentially alone with just glimpses of life behind thick windows. I tried to imagine what Jayanna felt inside this school. Where did she find those places to sit and make her them her own?

As I waited outside I expected Jayanna to come out with the rush of students like last time. But instead, the doors opened and just one person left. She walked briskly with ear buds in her ear. It took a minute for me to react when

I saw that she was the first one out. I had not expected her to be the first one to walk out, nor for some reason did I expect her to walk out alone.

Over our lunch conversations she shows me her scrap book. It is a giant scrapbook with only one page written “Art is . . .” and now she is to fill it in. She has to do it for homework. Cut up magazines. Tell what art is to her. As I look at that homework, that scrapbook, I could still recall the excitement of that scrap book purchase when we had met the first time this September, a few short weeks ago. There had been such a sparkle in her eyes as she told me about it. The thrill of taking art classes again, back at school, had been evident in that first conversation we had after she had begun Grade 9. But today, somehow it had just become an unfinished assignment, another collage, reminiscent of the unfinished collages of other schools, of other years. The shiny newness of an art class seems to have dulled just a little bit.

She also told me the principal called her and her brother into his office. He wanted to talk to them about being late all the time. I asked her what he said to her. She described what the talk was about.

*He said, “I care about you being at school.” If not he would just let us walk by.*

*He said, “don’t be late. I have been calling the house all morning. I am going to talk to your mom”. He said “it will be hard on your family. If you miss school, you will not get a good job, you will stay at home and not be helpful to your mom. You will make it harder on your mom.” He asked us what school we had been to. I said I was home schooled and my brother told him he was at a city school.*

Jayanna’s brother didn’t say he had been at a school on the reserve but Jayanna, this time, did say that the school that homeschooled her was one out in at their dad’s home community. This story of reserve schools, seemed to be a story they were trying to keep quiet about on this new landscape. I asked her what she said to him as the principal said all of these things to her. She told me she didn’t say anything because he kept talking. So then I asked what she was thinking as

this was going on. I asked her to tell me what thoughts came as she sat there listening to him.

*I already know all that.  
He thinks we are skipping and that is why we are late.  
Or that we are late for no reason.  
He doesn't get why we are late.  
That what he thinks  
is not how it is.*

Then I asked her what she would have said to him if she had had the chance. What did she wish he would know?

*I was late because I was sick.  
I was meaning to call but I was busy with the kids.  
Two of the younger kids never want to go to daycare or to school.  
I have to help them.  
Mom gets one of the older ones ready while I help with the others.  
Sometimes my sister Crystal asks me to help with her hair.  
I don't tell him these things because maybe he will not believe me.  
He will think they are excuses, like all kids make.*

I asked her to think about what he looked like as he said these things to her. I asked do you think he genuinely cared in the way he said he did? She is quiet for a while. We eat a few bites and then she adds.

*Yes, I think he did because he said kids from this school aren't really late  
so it is easy for him to keep track of those that are, which would be me and  
my brother.*

We laughed at that. There was something in the way she said that made us laugh. The laugh was a bit at the school itself, a bit at the principal and a bit at the tensions of being the only two students in the whole school who come late regularly. The laugh brought us back to the table, and our food, and pulled us away from the story of them sitting in the principal's office.

I ended this conversation by asking one last question. I said, "Do you think that talk helped? Will it make you stop coming late?" She replied.

*It made me want to try harder  
but I will still be late sometimes.*

As she tells me these stories

I get tense.

I imagine what is like to be sitting there

To be told that

you are

going to be

a hardship

on your family.

I remember going silent sometimes.

When I was given these kinds of talks.

But I listened and I heard.

I wonder what stories she takes away in moments like these.

As she is helping with the kids

and then being told she might make life hard for her mom.

I can still feel the change in energy from the first conversations we had the first week of September 2012, the hope filled conversation about new schools and new friends to the one we had that day, two weeks later, as we talked about the principal and the words he said to her. I can still feel the angst of her helping her family, while navigating the life of a teenager and all of the turmoil that may or may not bring. As I think about the principal telling her and her brother that they make life hard for her mom, I wonder how they carry that story. I wonder what story is being told to them, about them that day and how they must try to make sense of it. How they must decide to accept it, or reject it. How they must begin to negotiate who they are around it or in resistance to it. I recall looking at her agenda and seeing the LATE stamps all over it. I understood from my years as a teacher the intent, to communicate to parents, to the youth, that attendance was important. But as I sat there, watching the excitement, dissipate, my story of agenda's and late stamps shifted. They no longer seemed to be serving the purpose the teacher intended. They seemed instead to push Jayanna, and her brother, just a little further adrift, a little further away from school.

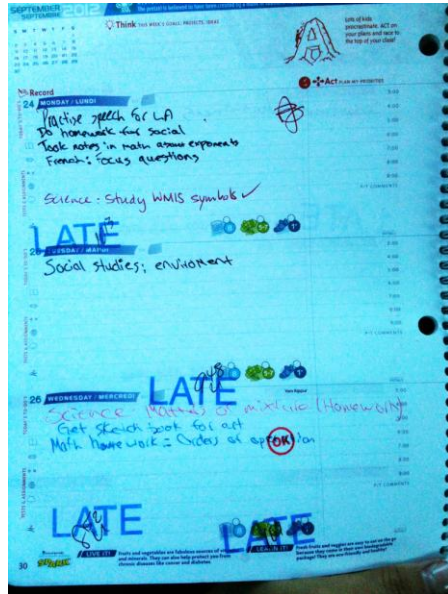


Figure 4-1. LATE stamps.

## L - A - T - E

I think about the Boston Pizza  
     the one close to her house  
         where we go now  
             for our conversations  
                 as we begin the next school year.  
                     Her Grade 9 school year.

I am comfortable there.  
     I love the larger tables  
         and the cozy feel of the booth.  
 A safe cocoon  
     for me and for her.

I randomly jot notes as she speaks.  
     I don't want to record right now.  
         I want us to just be.

She is still at her new school.  
     Her brother Stewart goes there too now.  
         He started late  
             Coming to start his  
                 Grade 7 year.  
 He just moved back from his dad's house.

He was in Riverview School  
for the first couple of weeks  
of this new school year.

She doesn't really say  
why he chose to come back.  
I try to ask but  
she doesn't really say.

Jayanna has been late a lot  
in these first weeks of school.  
I see the stamps in her agenda.

L A T E  
with a little initial  
and the time written in.  
Some days have two L A T E s  
one in the morning  
and one after lunch.

Why were you late so many times I ask?  
*"It's farther than I thought it would be." She replies.*

I think about the distance  
I recall the first time I tried to find the school  
It felt farther than I thought for me too  
nestled in the midst of the big houses  
in the nicest of neighborhoods.

"Tell me more about your friends" I ask.  
*Ocean likes reading  
She has dyed dark brown hair, that is usually a dirty blond  
Green eyes & talks really fast & moves her hands a lot*

*Carrie is in my art class.  
Very artistic  
Dresses fancy  
Kind of quiet  
She wears big glasses*

*Lisa is Ocean's best friend.  
She is good at sports.*

*Ally is weird. Good weird.  
She skateboards.  
Her house is close to the school.*



“What kinds of things do you do there?” I ask.

She tells me about Library club  
that she has joined  
with Ocean and Ally.

*I just signed up.*

*You just choose a day to go.*

*I don't know yet what we will do there.*

Jayanna wanted to tell me about her friends  
from her old school too.

*I met up with Tina and Cheryl.*

*They are friends now.*

*We Googled “Slenderman”.*

*It is scary.*

I asked if it felt good to have a brother at her school.

I always felt much safer  
and more contented  
at school  
if my brother or sister  
attended with me.

I thought maybe Jayanna  
would feel that same sense  
of belonging when having family there.  
She didn't articulate it in the same way.  
She kind of shrugged and said,  
*I don't think anyone knows he is my brother.*

I asked what she did at lunch time.

Where she went  
and who she sat with.  
*I walk home for lunch.*  
*When I walked home today*  
*my brother was sitting there*  
*on the church steps.*

As she said this to me, I pictured that scene.

One lone Grade 7 boy sitting on the steps of a church,  
half way between home and school.

Watching as his sister walked down the road towards him.

One brother.

One sister.

A new school.  
It brought me right back to my own past  
    and how many times I was with my brother,  
        or my sister  
            and we were walking to or from a new school.  
I wonder now how much time we spent together.  
    I don't think I joined them at lunch either.

As happens often the life Jayanna lives now,  
    sometimes seem like an echo of my own life.  
        It is different, time has changed it,  
            but still there is that sense of connection and temporality  
            where the past memories surface  
            then as I listen to this present day story  
                I begin to imagine  
                    where one girl and her brother  
                        will be  
                            in 20 years.

I also think about the times my brother,  
my sister  
and I  
were late for school.  
About all the times we got ourselves up on our own  
    and headed off to the school  
        walking down the dusty road.  
    I loved school.  
    Someone there made me feel welcome.  
    The building,  
    the papers,  
    the books,  
    everything about school  
    welcomed me.  
That is not the same always for my brother and my sister.  
I wonder what that building, and the people in it  
represent to Jayanna.

What emotions are evoked as she looks upon her school building.  
I never lost my love of school.

So I asked her.  
    I wondered about the LATE stamps  
        that cover a number of days in her agenda.

Red stamps throughout the agenda.

I asked her, “what do they say when you arrive?”

“How do they respond when they see you?”

She responds to my questions. Trying to imitate the principal’s voice.

*He says “Why are you late?”*

*And says:*

*If you continue to be late we will have to meet afterschool.*

*My GSG teacher, Ms. A says “Why are you late?”*

*And says:*

*If you continue to be late I will have to call your mother.*

I ask her “What is going on in your mind when they ask you that?”

What are you thinking?”

She says that she is thinking:

*Why do I have to spend so much time in school?*

*Why is there such a thing as time?*

Then I ask her the same question.

“Jayanna, why *are* you late?”

She replies with a gentle shrug

and a small smile and says:

*It’s hard to get up.*

*I’m not used to getting up so early.*

*The school is farther away than I thought it would be.*

*Sometimes, my mom drops me off late.*

I think about myself at Grade 8.

It was a tumultuous time for a teenager.

I too moved from home to home.

Sometimes with my mother.

Sometimes not.

Sometimes my choice

and sometimes not.

Sometimes with my siblings

and sometimes not.

As I see her, my participant Jayanna,

I see some of who I was in the past.

Is that bad I wonder?

For a researcher to see a co-researcher participant

and hear the whispers of her own past?

I think about why I would have been late for school.

Maybe my mom worked really late,

a single mom,

making a living for herself

and for her kids.  
Maybe my mom wasn't there  
and we woke up alone.  
Maybe my mom made us breakfast  
and we took too long  
or maybe  
it had nothing  
to do  
with my mom  
at all.  
Maybe I missed the bus.  
Maybe I was living with my mom  
and we didn't have electricity.  
Or maybe I stayed at a friend's,  
without permission  
and maybe we got up late.  
Whatever the reason  
it wasn't something easily solved.  
And it wasn't necessarily a 'choice'  
I always thought it was a choice  
when I looked at late students  
through my "school teacher" lens  
And so that question is really such a rhetoric question,  
"Why were you late?"  
I wonder what we could ask instead.  
I change the topic.  
I ask what she did in the evenings.  
She said  
*I am sometimes out on my bike.*  
I wondered aloud why she didn't ride that bike to school.  
With a grin she said:  
*It makes weird noises.*  
I saw the bike then when I dropped her off.  
It is a great bike.  
But probably not one you would ride  
to a brand new junior high  
when you were still deciding  
who you would be  
and who your friends  
would be.

As I left her at her house at the end of this day  
I thought about the book she was reading  
    "Street Kid".  
Jayanna describes the book as about a girl.  
    Who was left alone  
        in her house  
            with her two sisters  
                for about 7 weeks.  
She wasn't taken care of.  
    She was beaten.  
        She wasn't allowed food.  
            She was sent outside all day.  
                To stay where they could see her.  
                    The book  
                        It is about her life.  
                            That girl's life

I think about that book.  
I think about Jayanna's life.  
I think about mine.  
I wonder what it is about all three  
    The book,  
        Jayanna's life  
            And mine  
                that has echoes of each other.  
I wonder about the power of story  
    and how it feels as if somehow,  
        none of us are completely alone.  
Because it is through these stories,  
    these memories,  
        these imaginings  
            of a future,  
                that we are connected.

The tug of her stories is strong.  
The quiet way she comes alongside when I ask.  
The quiet way she stays,  
usually at my request  
but now sometimes on her own  
This is a story too.

The next story she tells me

speaks to me about the tensions  
of a life lived  
between two families.  
In the midst of the end of a childhood  
and the stretching towards adulthood  
she had told me  
that she wasn't getting along  
with her family

*Did I tell you? she asks  
About when we had friends over  
we were not supposed to  
My family is mad at me.  
the whole family was called together,  
my Kokôm too  
they were talking about me.  
They all blame me.  
Even though others were there  
Said it was my fault.  
They say I do all kinds of things,  
and that I am mean.  
That I am spoiled.  
That I want everything.  
Sometimes I wish I could go and live with my friends.  
But I have no way to get there.*

As she tells me those stories. I think how sad I would be. The feeling that no one is on my side. I don't wonder about the truth of the stories in this moment. I just wonder about the girl who the stories are about and how this experience is for her. Then I wonder about how as she carries all of this with her to school each week, no one knows, instead they stamp her book LATE and say "If this continues we will have to call your mother."

It seems so small,  
that sentence seems  
so small  
inside of the rest  
of her stories.

As I stay alongside Jayanna as she navigates her way into and out of this third school in our time together, I realize how much my perception has shifted. I

was very much about the routines, structure, and rules of school. While I thought I had made room for families and their stories and lives in my classroom, I am not sure I did. I recall notes sent home about missing homework, phone calls about late students, and poor attendance. Always done with the best of intentions but never realizing that in each conversation told a story of the child and the family. I wonder now how much space I left for them to tell me a story. The next story that I share of Jayanna, captures the disconnect I was becoming aware of between schools, and school policy and the lives of Aboriginal youth and families.

### **Attendance Board Letters**

It is October now  
almost the end  
Jayanna hasn't been  
going to school lately.  
Her family is planning to move to Riverview  
the home community  
to return to Riverview School.  
So she had been waiting  
for the move  
and staying home.  
So I picked  
her up one morning.  
Knowing she was home.  
And  
I asked how her week was.  
She says to me,  
***"I am going back to school again."***  
To the school you starting at in September? I ask.  
The one you stopped going to as you waited for the move?  
"Yes" she replies.  
"Oh", is my response.  
"That means we are playing hooky right now.  
You should be in school.  
Did you want me to take you there now?  
We can meet later."  
She said "***no.***  
***The secretary already called.***  
***I told her I couldn't go.***

*I had something important to do.*  
*I told her my brother, Stewart would be there.*  
*I will try to go back tomorrow".*  
 We sit in silence for a while  
 as I worry about this new development  
 about taking her away from school.  
 Then she says.  
*"I have to go to court".*  
 "For attendance? The attendance board?" I ask.  
 "Yes" she says.  
 Who will all go with you? I ask.  
 She said *"anyone can go. My family. My friends"*  
*But not too many.*  
*My brother will go.*  
*He got a letter too.*  
*He will go live with my dad.*  
*The letter says*  
*I might not be able to live with my mom anymore*  
*I might get locked up*  
*in juvie.*  
 It's not for sure, I say.  
 The letter didn't say for sure . . . right? I ask.  
 All she says to that question is  
*"I read it myself"*  
 My mind scurries trying to remember  
 my own experience with attendance board  
 as a teacher  
 I had reported children.  
 But I never knew what happened  
 I had never heard the impact  
 of a letter  
 arriving in a mail box  
 announcing  
 a court  
 date.  
 I have never heard of the child  
 who has to worry  
 that her attendance  
 her lates  
 and her absence  
 might mean that she  
 gets taken  
 away



from her  
home.

Another week goes by  
we meet again  
I ask if she wants me to go  
to support her  
and the family  
at the attendance board.  
She agrees.  
“That would be good”.

In the meantime  
we wait.  
And we talk.  
I ask her if she has gone yet  
in the week between  
our meetings  
to SBS school again.  
She shakes her head no.  
She hasn’t made it back.  
Even knowing  
the attendance board  
meeting is looming.  
I recall her excitement  
when she started this new school.  
I wonder what has changed.  
I wonder why she doesn’t go  
and so I ask.  
“Why didn’t you go to school yet?”  
To which she replied.  
***“I have to build up confidence”.***

***“I need help with myself”*** she continued.  
***“Before I can go to school”*** she explains.  
***“My mom says there is a ranch.***  
***for ‘kids like me’”*** she tells.  
***“I don’t know what that means”*** she continues.  
***“kids like me?”***

***“I think it will be fun”*** she states.  
***“Maybe cabins, and animals”***

*“campfires too”.*  
*“It is supposed to help me*  
*With myself”* she says.  
We are quiet again.  
We both are thinking  
about what she has said.

### **Look Back – Reflections on a Life Lived**

Then I ask her to write in my researcher note book. I ask her to write words about Indians because I want to know how this word impacts the stories she tells of who she is and is becoming. She writes four things:

*a feather*  
*powwow dancing*  
*moccasins*  
*a drum.*

This takes her a long, long time. She has thought very, very carefully about each and every word. She had no more words to add for Indian. So I ask her to write something else in my journal. I think maybe today writing will be better, more soothing, less invasive, more hopeful. So I write the words “I wish” and I tell her to fill the page with her wishes, anything and everything! She writes:

*I wish I had a better education.*  
*I wish to get over my fears.*  
*I wish for things to get better for my mom and kids.*  
*I wish I lived far away.*  
*I wish to be an actor or a singer.*

Again it took her a very, very long time to think of each one. Her lunch is getting cold. I am finished mine. I am not getting it, how to be in this conversation in ways that are soothing for her. We are not yet in sync. I take the book back. I close it. I tell her to eat. And I say. Ask me a question. It is your turn. She thinks for a long time. Then she says

*“What was life like for you as a teen?”*  
My immediate reaction was to laugh.  
And I said “It sucked actually”.  
Then I told her of times of depression.  
Of struggles with my mom.

Moving multiple homes.  
But I assured her that there were good times too.  
Times with friends.  
With cousins.  
On grand adventures.  
But in there I still told of the hard stories.  
Stories of alcohol  
And how it wreaked havoc  
on my life at times growing up.  
Of not always having friends.  
Of being the new kid too many times.  
Then I told of school  
And how I loved it.  
And how there was often someone  
Who made me feel like they cared.  
I told her I survived.  
I laughed.  
I cried.  
But sometimes being a teenager  
Sucks.

She thought about that for a while.  
She asked me if I was full native.  
I said no  
I told of my Swedish grandfather.  
My Metis / Cree mom.  
I told who speaks Cree.  
And who doesn't.  
I told her who knew the skills.  
of beading  
and drying meat.  
Then I was quiet.

She was thoughtful again for a while then she said, "I miss my life as a kid" and told me the following story.

*Life is hard as a teenager.  
I used to be happy.  
I had friends.  
I had a friend named Donna.  
We used to dress up together.  
I also had a friend named Nick.  
He used to like to wrestle.  
My mom and dad*

*Used to take me more places.  
We used to get along better.  
My Kokôm too.  
She used to take me and my cousins places.  
Now she is too busy.  
She is watching her other grandchildren.  
They live in her house.  
She has had a hard life.  
She shouldn't be taking care of  
her children's children.*

*I used to have temper tantrums.  
When I was a little girl.  
The only thing  
that would calm me down  
was the Teletubbies.*

Jayanna then told me about  
the thoughts  
that go through her head sometimes.  
Bad thoughts that get worse  
sometimes at night  
or sometimes in the middle of class.

She told me about cutting  
For a couple of years.  
About how she didn't want to be  
A bad example  
For the kids  
So she stopped.

She told me about starving herself  
For a couple years.  
Of trying to stop.  
Of thinking about it still.

She told of letters written in anger.  
Secret letters  
Found and read.  
And relationship tensions.

She spoke of anger at parents.  
Of parents not listening to her side.

She told stories of being bullied.  
of losing friends  
of not sustaining new ones.

She told stories of conversations  
with new friends  
and being unable to keep up  
her end of the conversation.  
of how she can't always keep it flowing.

She told stories of old friends.  
Lots of them.  
Who turned away from her.  
Turned to drugs and alcohol.  
Who believed the lies told.  
Who chose to not be her friend.  
She told stories of friends.  
And the lack of them now.

She says when the rage takes over  
And she cries.  
Or yells.  
Or throws things around.  
How she tries to think positive.  
To change the way she is thinking.  
But she can't.  
The only thing she can think of sometimes.  
Is her one friend.  
Who she doesn't even know that well.  
but who she does have fun with.  
That is all  
That she has  
To think of  
on her positive list.

I think of her sitting across from me that day, a slight sparkle of her eye  
shadow in the corners of her eyes. The swoop of her bangs as she pushes them  
out of the way. Of her healthy teenage body, that she tried to starve away. I think  
of her asking for help with herself.

I tell her

to just survive.  
That I will be here each week.  
Together we will figure it out.  
But for now  
to  
just  
survive.  
I  
said  
I lived it too.  
The anger.  
The depression.  
The rage.  
And  
I  
promised  
that  
it  
would  
get  
better  
someday.

### **Conversations that Didn't Happen**

Another month passed since that conversation  
It is winter  
the year is coming to an end  
we have been meeting regularly  
going over the pieces of her story  
deciding what should stay  
deciding what would go  
Taking care of all those we brought with us  
in the stories we told  
Making sure we caused no harm.

I asked her  
how she felt  
in the meeting,  
in the hearing  
with the attendance board.  
The one where I had gone  
in support of Jayanna  
in support of the family

as a friend.  
Her only reply  
was to say,  
*"It wasn't as bad  
as I thought it would be.*  
I nodded like I understood.  
I nodded like I agreed.  
But I was still thinking  
of conversations  
that didn't happen  
the way that  
I had imagined.  
About questions that  
didn't get asked  
the way that  
I had hoped.  
About a family  
silent and agreeable.  
About punishment  
and consequence.  
And the silent  
unheard conversation  
about experience  
that didn't  
happen.

### **There is a Girl**

And almost 2 years from the day I met  
her we finish her chapter  
we have told her story  
the narrative account is done.

As I read it over  
And stay alongside her  
all year.  
I think about her.  
I have this one memory of her  
as she sat across from me  
in a Boston Pizza booth  
at the very start of her grade nine year.  
She was so nicely dressed.

Her dark hair was neatly styled,  
her bangs pushed to the side.  
I thought about how that day.  
She was smiling and polite  
and willing to do all that I asked.  
Sharing anything that I requested  
Sometimes with stories  
and sometimes with silence.  
That day she told me that she was happy  
that her brother is back in school.  
She was happy that she was in school.  
She laughed about her sister's giant Justin Bieber posters  
that were no longer plastered in their shared room,  
She smiled when telling me about her noisy bike.  
She laughed at me  
when I laughed at me  
as we realized  
how I am slightly awkward  
in my eagerness for some of our activities.  
She lit up as we were leaving when she saw someone from her school.  
In this memory of Jayanna  
there is joy  
there is hope  
there is a girl  
and she is composing a life.  
She is seeking coherence.  
She is making her way in the world.

Some days I wonder what story I should tell of Jayanna.  
Some days I worry  
about telling the harder stories.  
But when I see her,  
I begin to think that  
the hope  
and the sparkle  
is in all of her stories.  
All of the moments.  
The laughing moments,  
the silent moments,  
It is in the body language clues  
that I watch for carefully  
so that I know  
when she has had enough.



of me and my questions.  
The hope and sparkle are inside of the hard stories.  
    Inside of the easy stories  
        and in all the stories in between.  
I find hope  
    in the midst of our writing  
        and coloring  
            and eating  
                and talking.  
  
In the end  
I told our story as I lived it.  
I told our story as I knew it  
    And I do sometimes stop and wonder . . .  
        Did she live it the same way?

### **Striving Towards Horizons**

I stayed alongside of Jayanna throughout her grade nine year even though our narrative account had been negotiated. We met again in spring of 2013 to read it over in its entirety again. I wanted to give her one more chance to agree to the way our story was represented. I had yet to share the completed, negotiated, narrative account with her parents and so I wanted her to be certain before I did. After she finished reading it again that day she told me that it was okay. She said that her dad could see it now. He knew those stories. The ones that she had never told him. I understood, by the certainty in her voice that now we were done. The account was ready. At the end of that meal we walked out of that restaurant together, our inquiry finished for now, and I could not help but feel that Jayanna and I were still “straining towards horizons: horizons of what might be, horizons of what was” (Green, 1995, p. 3).



Figure 4-2. A road Jayanna travels to get to one of her home places.

**Chapter 5:**  
**BARBARA INTERRUPTED**

By  
Trudy Cardinal

University of Alberta  
Edmonton, Alberta

B A R B A R A    I N T E R R U P T E D

AFTER OVERTURE  
BEFORE MAIN TITLE

MUSIC PLAYING - (Queen's - I Want to Break Free - one  
of BARBARA's favorite songs)

MUSIC ENDS - FADE OUT TO BLACK (SILENCE):

FADE IN:

**EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - MAY 2013<sup>34</sup>**

TRUDY  
(sitting at a round table, typing, reads aloud)

I remember first meeting BARBARA. Vera and I had been cleaning up the club classroom, taking down old faded posters that had been up on the walls all during the year before. As we were perched up on our stools and chairs BARBARA and her friend T popped in. They had been doing a tour of the school as part of the Grade 7 orientation and were brought in to meet us. We were introduced as the "Aboriginal club". They exuded the giggly enthusiasm of former Grade 6 students now touring their new junior high school. I noticed the careful way BARBARA dressed that day. Her dark brown, shiny hair hung to just below her shoulders making her look young yet already showing hints of the teenager she would soon become. There was a confidence in the way she moved about the room, as if it was almost choreographed. I got the sense that she wanted to be noticed; that she wanted to be seen.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:

---

<sup>34</sup> EXT in a screenplay indicates that the scene takes place in the exterior. INT is used to indicate the scene takes place in an interior. For the sake of this dissertation I used EXT to give the narrative account the look of a screen play and to indicate that the scenes took place outside of the school (as in not part of the public school programming) even though the scenes often took place in the interior of a building.

A SOUND begins, quiet at first then increasing in volume. It is the sound of students LAUGHING, TALKING and FOOTSTEPS running.

FADE IN:

**EXT. CLUB CLASSROOM SPACE – SEPTEMBER 2011**

Teenagers fill the classroom, some heading to the food, other's whispering in corners. Adult researchers stand around the room greeting youth. BARBARA arrives arms linked with her friend. They bounce in the room twirling and whirling. They grab a snack and then from across the room they yell greetings to their friends, and a greeting to TRUDY.

BARBARA & TRUDY

Hi Trudy!!

TRUDY says hello back, talking to different youth, hugging some. BARBARA and T sit down and begin to work alongside of researcher SHAUNA on their individual collages.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP:

BARBARA sits working on her collage with SHAUNA.

TRUDY

(Taking photos, watches as both BARBARA and SHAUNA noticing TRUDY aiming the camera at them, sit up ready to smile at the camera. Trudy says)

No! Pose. Make it look like you are working hard.

SHAUNA tilts her head looks at the collage with interest. Puts her finger to her chin and poses looking thoughtful. BARBARA sits straighter also looking down at the collage. She crosses her legs and also appears thoughtful.

(Everyone laughs.)

FADE OUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN SLOWLY (VOICE FIRST):

Ext. Researcher Office - May 2013

TRUDY

(Sitting at a round table, typing, reads aloud)

I think about this moment now and I realize how readily we fell into the roles of BARBARA as performer and me as recorder of that performance. It is only now as I look back that I realize I must not have been feeling very safe in that club space, being unable to decide how to behave as a researcher, feeling the urge to control movement and behavior. This urge to control was an urge left over from my 13 years as an elementary school teacher, and so I was hiding behind the lens of a digital camera. I was performing "researcher" in the only way that I knew how in that moment by taking photos and by asking BARBARA to pose, asking her to look as if she was working hard. We seemed to both know what that looked like. Yet what I had really wanted was to capture the moment before they noticed me when they were both so engaged in what they were doing, in conversation with each other, an Aboriginal youth and an Aboriginal researcher. I had wanted to capture that moment from behind the lens and yet somehow, with BARBARA's insistence through her initial posing, I became a part of the performance that day instead of just capturing it.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN SLOWLY:

PANORAMIC VIEW THEN CLOSE UP OF BARBARA:

**EXT. CLASSROOM CLUB SPACE – SEPTEMBER 2011**

BARBARA and TRUDY sit with the other researchers, Elder Isabelle and 10 other youth in a circle. Each person is saying their name and where they are from.

BARBARA

(clearly and without hesitation)

My name is BARBARA Brown.

I am from Reserve D.

TRUDY  
(whispers to person sitting beside her)

Hey! That is where my family is from too!  
I wonder if she is related to the Brown that  
I was a best friend with once.

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP:

BARBARA standing getting ready to go.

TRUDY  
(Walking alongside of BARBARA as she prepared to leave)

Hi BARBARA. Who is your mom? MY family is  
from Reserve D too. I want to know if we  
know the same people.

BARBARA  
  
My mom's name is Tonya Brown.

TRUDY  
(excitedly)  
  
I think I know who that is. We were not in  
the same grade or anything but I knew her  
when I was a kid. My best friend was Shirley  
Brown. Are you related?

BARBARA  
  
Yes, that is my auntie.

BARBARA leaves. TRUDY stands, watching her go,  
searching for similarities to the Brown family she knew  
long ago. Wondering if there is resemblance to her  
former best friend.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:  
FADE IN SLOWLY (VOICE FIRST):

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY

(typing, reads aloud)

The moment I heard her say where she was from and her last name I knew I wanted her to be my participant. I wanted to understand how she was making sense of who she was as an Aboriginal youth whose familial ties were from the very land that I used to walk as a little girl. I wanted to hear about how she lived here in the city but still claimed a reserve as the place she was from. As I look back it is as if I can see the different time periods, me as a little girl walking to Reserve D from my mosom's 30 years ago, and BARBARA now, walking to her Kokôm's. I can even remember the feel of the sun, and the wind that was so characteristic of my long walks as a child. Perhaps it was at that moment, the moment where our lives intertwined through our ties to family and friends, that we were at once pulled together and pushed apart. Did that knowledge, the knowledge that we both knew the reserve, the same reserve, make us wary and very careful as to what story we told each other? Or did it create a space, an opening, where we could begin to share stories? I hadn't asked her to be my participant yet but I wanted to know more. I wasn't sure if these connections would make our negotiation of entry into relationship easier or more complicated.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN SLOWLY:

### **EXT. CLASSROOM CLUB SPACE - LUNCH - DECEMBER 2011**

The club space looks completely different. The room is bare and empty.

ZOOM IN:

BARBARA and TRUDY sit alone at a table with McDonalds lunch.

TRUDY  
(leaning in eagerly)



Thank you BARBARA for agreeing to be my research participant. You know BARBARA the afterschool club is part of a research project and part of that research is these one-on-one lunch meetings where I can hear more about your experiences in school as an Aboriginal youth. Right?

BARBARA  
(nods)

TRUDY  
(smiling)

So as you tell me your stories I want to make sure that I remember your words and so I wonder if it is ok that I record.

BARBARA  
(looking confused)

Record what?

TRUDY

Our conversations. To make sure I get it right. To make sure I don't forget anything.

(long pause)

Or I can write notes instead.

BARBARA  
(emphatically)

Write notes instead. I am shy.

ZOOM OUT:

(TRUDY pushes aside the iPhone she was going to use to record. BARBARA and TRUDY continue to talk and eat)

FADE OUT TO BLACK (SILENCE):  
FADE IN SLOWLY (VOICE FIRST):

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY  
(typing, reads aloud)

I remember hearing that word "shy" and thinking how it didn't fit the outgoing bubbly girl that I saw in the club. I thought maybe she was shy of the recorder, of me, of sharing her stories. I wonder now, looking back, if she was sharing a story of herself that I wasn't ready to hear or see because I was still thinking about the confident girl I saw walk into the room each week. Only now as I reflect on these stories becoming public do I begin to think about what courage it took for BARBARA to come and be willing to share her stories not exactly knowing at the time what the experience would be like. I think about that word "shy" I think about the many definitions possible, definitions like being "easily frightened, disposed to avoid a person or thing, hesitant in committing oneself, circumspect, diffident or retiring, reserved, secluded, or hidden" (Merriam-webster.com). Her body was showing me a rambunctious, yet poised, pre-teen, as she sat up tall and then bouncing back and forth to the door to see friends, or back to her phone to text someone. She was speaking clearly and loudly, and yet in her words she was telling me that she is also shy.

#### **EXT. CLASSROOM CLUB SPACE - AFTERNOON - JANUARY 2012**

Around the room different groups are working on different activities: Beadwork, paint supplies, dress up props, and food are set out around the room.

CLOSE UP - VERA and BARBARA  
(painting a larger paper)

VERA

Tell me again what a living room would look like on the rez so we can paint it.

BARBARA  
(knowingly)

Holes in the walls.  
Really dirty.

(looking at VERA earnestly)

That's really how it is.

(gets up and twirls away to work with her friends  
leaving Vera to paint alone)

FADE OUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN SLOWLY (VOICE FIRST):

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY

(typing, reads aloud)

I remember her talking about reserves in this way and as she said this I also knew she was talking about the reserve we both came from. "That's really how it is", she said and I had to agree with her. Once again she pulled me back to my childhood but instead of feeling the swaying of the grass, and hearing the sound of the wind in the trees of my childhood walks, I see the inside of some of the homes, some dirty with holes in the walls. I remember once when I was reminiscing about Grade 7 with a former classmate from Reserve D she told me how she remembered me hanging with the popular crowd. I don't remember it in the same way. I always felt insecure, shy, and not quite a part of the group. I wanted to be popular and confident and to move just as BARBARA does in and out of rooms, asking to be noticed, but doing so with an air of performance. Maybe I did act like that at times because when I share stories now of what my home life was like at times, sometimes hungry, sometimes left alone with just us kids, and sometimes feeling quite vulnerable and afraid, my friends and even my cousins say, "We didn't know how bad it got. We didn't know those stories". I think about how when I remember my childhood I don't just remember the dark that colored the insides of some homes, instead I remember quite vividly the open spaces, the sun, the outside, and playing happily with my friends and all the times when life held love, laughter and tons

of family visits. Both memories exist, both experiences happened and yet they are just two stories in the midst of a very complex life and which story I choose to tell leaves a very different impression of what my early landscape was and yet each story is true. As I listened to BARBARA and I think about the contrast of the bubbly pre-teen with stories of holes in walls and dirty homes, I begin to think about how in the midst of these very different experiences, for both BARBARA and I, we were negotiating who we were and were becoming as Aboriginal people.

As I reflect on these early negotiations between BARBARA and I, I begin to see why I was so drawn to her. I think maybe she was enacting the cover story<sup>35</sup>, the performance that I remember trying to as a teenager. Sometimes I did so successfully and sometimes I was unable to hold it in place.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:  
FADE IN SLOWLY:

#### **EXT. CLASSROOM CLUB SPACE - AFTERNOON - FEBRUARY 2012**

Various activities are set out around the room again. Youth are eating and talking and wandering around. Some youth are sitting and painting rattles, or beading or drawing pictures. BARBARA holding two rattles, dancing, skipping and running around the room, shakes the two rattles in people's ears, dancing and skipping. TRUDY is taking photos of the youth engaged in the activities and of BARBARA as she danced around.

BARBARA shakes the rattles in VERA's ears.

VERA  
(dancing a bit)

Ahhh . . . music to my ears.  
Are you trying to put a spell on me?

---

<sup>35</sup> [T]eachers live and tell *cover stories* when they find themselves in out-of-classroom places trying to: fit within acceptable range of the story of school [sacred story] . . . Cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practise and sustain their teacher stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25).

(BARBARA laughs and moves on to do the same to other researchers and youth alike. TRUDY snaps candid photos of her and the other youth in the room)

CUT TO:

**EXT. HALLWAY LOCKERS - AFTERNOON - MARCH 2012**

BARBARA stands with three other girls S, K, and T. Whispering and laughing. Researcher adults stand at the door calling them in.

TRUDY  
(standing with hands on hips)

Come on girls. Let's get inside. We've got lots to do today. Come and see.

BARBARA  
(running off in the other direction)

Just wait!! We will be right back.

TRUDY  
(speaking to the rapidly disappearing girls)

The school says we can't be in the halls. We need to stay inside the classroom.

TRUDY watches them leave, arms on her hips, yearning to call them back, to keep everyone safe inside of the club space, knowing that this rambunctious behavior is not usually permitted in school spaces. Her urge to restrain and contain the youth is strong, born of 13 years of doing just that, but as a researcher she just watches them go and wonders about school spaces and the urge to control.

CUT TO:

**EXT. CLASSROOM CLUB SPACE & DOORWAY TO HALL -  
AFTERNOON - APRIL 2012**

BARBARA takes the digital camera away from TRUDY. She takes self-portraits, holding her arm out and turning the camera back towards herself. She takes photos of her friends. She chases others with the camera. She is carefree, laughing. TRUDY somewhat anxious at the

camera being whirled about with such abandon watches out of the corner of her eye while talking with other youths who are painting.

TRUDY takes the camera back and continues to snap photos of the youth around the room. Some hide, some pose, and some run away. BARBARA and her friends pose readily, without complaint, each time TRUDY and her camera come around.

FADE OUT TO BLACK (SILENCE):  
FADE IN SLOWLY (VOICE FIRST):

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY  
(typing, reads aloud)

I have loved photographs all my life. Some of my first memories are of sitting on the blue vinyl chair in my grandma's kitchen as a girl of about 3 or 4 years old carefully viewing the little album and piles of old photographs that always sat beside that chair. I especially loved the photos of my aunty Mayanne in her wedding dress or the careful poses of my dad holding a birthday cake. I only wonder now who took the photos. It must have been my grandma but it could have been any of the many aunts and uncles who visited regularly. I can still remember her camera. My uncle tells me it was called a Brownie, now very much a vintage camera. It might have even been vintage then. It was in the shape of a box and the photographer would look down into it to it. I wonder if it provided the same sense of *hiding behind* for the photographer as the digital camera gives me. I wonder what image the photographer saw looking down into the box. Was it a tiny version of the camera's subject, of us when my siblings and I stood before that box? I also think about the many photographs of me throughout the years, a few of me as a baby and then as a 4-year-old at my grandma's, only a couple as I stretched through the pre-teen years, and then many more as an adult when digital cameras became all the rage. Even as a little girl I had a sense of performing for the camera. There

was usually a slight tilt of my chin. I often leaned forward, or straightened up striving to be tall, and I looked directly into the camera. I eventually developed my "cheesy" photograph grin. I think about how living with my grandma we lived in low-income housing and how we often were recipients of the gifts and food at holidays designated for families in need. But still my grandma took photographs and printed them regularly, whose son, my dad must have done the same. It is only now that I think about how important photographs must have been to her. Money wasn't spent on things of this less practical nature. Most photographs in those days were staged, in nice clothes, and posing prettily but those images captured by my grandma, my parents, or maybe aunts or uncles are not. My favorite one is of my sister and I and we look like we are dancing. My hair is messy and my sister stands behind me. It is candid, my sister smiling with arms raised looks off to the side and yet I am looking directly at the camera. I am engaging with the photographer but still inside of the experience of playing or dancing.

Rarely are there candid photos of me. It's like I have a sixth sense for cameras and I swivel quickly to look and to smile, or I compose my face and tilt my head aiming to create the look that I want. Even special moments are often re-staged so as to capture the mood in the most photographic way possible. I am by no means a good photographer but my head, and my eye, and my desire want to capture a mood, an experience, that my photographic skills haven't caught up with yet and rarely are my imagined or staged photos candid. Yet in the club I snapped photos ceaselessly, seeking to capture the candid as well as the staged. Is that the freedom gifted to me in this age of digital photos, an age that BARBARA knew well? As I think back to my early experiences alongside of BARBARA inside and outside of the club space I think about how for her too most of the photos became staged. In front of, or behind the lens we both seemed to know to pause at just the right moment to capture the

experience but also create a good photographic image. For both of us there is a knowing about placement of bodies, and angles of the head and often looking directly at whoever it is that aims to capture the moment digitally. Both of us also knowing that if we don't like the image we will delete it with the push of a single little button because sometimes it doesn't always work, sometimes the image isn't what we had in mind, or sometimes a candid moment is caught before we are ready or before we are aware that someone, through a lens is watching us.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:  
FADE IN SLOWLY:

### **EXT. CLASSROOM CLUB SPACE - AFTERNOON - MAY 2012**

TRUDY has brought in a whole bunch of photos of the youth engaged in activities. The idea is to make a photo collage for the art show. Youth crowd around finding images of themselves. BARBARA begins to pull out the ones she doesn't like.

BARBARA  
(grabbing and hiding photos)

NO! I don't want this one shown.

TRUDY  
(looking at the image BARBARA is holding)

Why? I love it! It shows the way you move.  
You look like you dance!  
It is so fun.

BARBARA  
(hiding it again and taking more from the pile)

No. I don't want these ones to go up.

TRUDY  
(Looking thoughtful, and somewhat disappointed, takes the images from BARBARA and tucks them back into the box to put away)



Ok. We will not use these ones. Find some that you do like. So that we make sure you are still in the collage.

FADE OUT TO BLACK (SILENCE):  
FADE IN SLOWLY (VOICE FIRST):

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY  
(typing, reads aloud)

Thinking back to that moment, I realize how surprised I was at how immediate and strong BARBARA's reaction was to the images going up on display. In each image I thought she looked great. They captured her sense of play, the confident way she ran in and out of the room, the mischievous way she pushed at boundaries and limits artificially created for the club space. In the pile of photos were many candid moments captured as she and the other youth experienced the club space as well as moments where I aimed the camera and allowed them to pose. There were photographs taken of themselves, selfies as they called them, self portraits in mirrors or with the camera held out and directed back at themselves. Photographs they took of each other. Yet, posed or candid, she allowed very few to remain on display that day. I wonder now what she saw that she didn't like. There was one photo of me that I too was surprised at. One of the youth took the photo and in it I looked sad.

I wonder what I had been thinking of that day. I wonder what might have happened at home or in the club that I was not speaking of or perhaps that I wasn't even yet aware of. I think about how in the club space I could never seem to land. I was always up in my head trying to figure out who I was supposed to be, always squelching urges born of 13 years of teaching where the physical safety, and movement of my students was directly in my control. Feeling this inability to be still, to land and rest, I fluttered like an anxious bird, or wandered around slowly and aimlessly. I never knew

that sometimes I was there feeling sad. My cover story of capable, happy researcher must have slipped for a moment and a candid photograph captured something I wasn't yet aware of. I also have a favorite photo, where I stand with my hands on my hips surveying the room, *teacher* it seems to say. Apparently my body was playing a role while my head was still thinking about it. I think of those photos of me, captured by others, usually youth without my being aware and I think of BARBARA snatching up and hiding her photos and I wonder now what the story was that was being told in those photos that she hadn't intended. Could it have been a story of sad just as I found inside of the photo of me, a story that I wasn't ready to see, that she wasn't ready to show? Or did she too see an image of something she thought she had hidden or turned away?

FADE OUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN SLOWLY:

#### **EXT. CLASSROOM CLUB SPACE - LUNCH - MAY 2012**

The club space looks completely different. The room is bare and empty.

ZOOM IN:

BARBARA and TRUDY sit alone at a table with McDonalds lunch, salads.

TRUDY

(with notepad in hand, iPhone recording in conversation with BARBARA)

Tell me more about your family.

BARBARA

(looks up from her salad)

What?

TRUDY

(Smiles at this familiar routine. A distracted BARBARA asking TRUDY to repeat the question)

Tell me more about your family. What are your plans this summer? Are you going to visit your Kokôm in Reserve D this summer? Does your mom go with you? How about your dad's family in the prairies, will you go see them?

BARBARA

My Kokôm lives here now. I visit her all the time. She takes me shopping. She says I am her favorite because I am good. I don't get into trouble. I will go visit my grandma, my dad's mom, in the prairies this summer. We will go to Treaty days. I go fishing with her. My brother will come with me. My dad is away working right now. I haven't seen him in a while. My cousin lives with us. My other cousin just had a baby. We get to see the baby this week too. She used to live on a reserve near the city with her boyfriend. We picked her up from there sometimes. It is her stroller you saw outside my house last time.

FADE OUT TO BLACK (voices quieting to SILENCE):

FADE IN SLOWLY (VOICE FIRST):

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY

(typing, reads aloud)

As I look back now through our many conversations they often had this same feel. She would easily tell me facts and little tidbits of stories about her family. If something slipped out that was a bit more personal, or indicated a tension, especially with her mom, BARBARA would tell me not to write about it. She was always considerate and careful about the people she spoke of while still being open with her stories. Some days I would wonder and I would worry that we were never really going anywhere in our conversations, that we were just chatting as acquaintances over lunch and never seeming to move from the negotiating entry into relationship kinds of moments. Yet, at the same time, her stories of family that

consisted of visits to grandmothers and  
kokôms on reserves, cousins moving in or  
staying for extended visits, as well as some  
tensions that happen in families as they  
negotiate their lives as single parent  
families always carried me back into my own  
very similar stories. It is only now in the  
looking back that I become aware of how  
perhaps I too kept the conversation light,  
and didn't reveal those same tensions and  
personal stories in my own life in the same  
ways I did in other conversations with other  
people. It is interesting now to think about  
how together, alongside of each other, we  
were co-composing, and performing cover  
stories of two Aboriginal girls, living lives  
in the light, having even if for just a  
moment, chosen not to focus on the tensions.  
Somehow I had forgotten how those moments,  
those bumping places, places of tension, is  
often where the inquiry lives, where we come  
to know, and deepen understanding. But then,  
at the same time, I have to wonder at the  
ways our bodies, our physical presence in our  
regular Boston Pizza booth were engaged in a  
different sort of inquiry. We led with our  
bodies and our minds came along slowly, mine  
slowest of all as I wasn't yet aware that I  
was performing alongside of my co-researcher  
performer.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:

A SOUND begins, quiet at first then increasing in  
volume. It is the sound of a movie playing. A voice  
is speaking about RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS.

FADE IN:

**EXT. SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM - MORNING - JUNE 2012**

BARBARA sits in the dark writing furiously. A letter.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:  
FADE IN. IN SILENCE:

EXT. CLUB SPACE CLASSROOM - SPRING AFTERNOON (MINUTES  
LATER)

The room, empty except for TRUDY sitting waiting, food ready, notebook out, recorder waiting. BARBARA burst in, full of energy and drops into the chair. She begins to organize her food. TRUDY begins to speak.

TRUDY

Did you take any photographs with the disposable camera?

BARBARA

(shakes her head no)

My brother found them. He took a bunch of pictures. I don't know where the other one is.

TRUDY

(smiles understandingly)

That is ok. Since we are not going to do the photographs today. Let's pretend that we were. I just want you to tell me what kinds of things you would have taken pictures of when you think of the words Indian, Cree, Native, Aboriginal or any other words you use to talk about your heritage, your culture.

BARBARA

Today in social, we talked about Aboriginal culture and Residential school. And my friend, T's mosom (grandfather) was in one of them!

TRUDY

Oh! Did T talk about it?

BARBARA

Yeah, she just said that they paid 'em to go there and that in Residential Schools there were skeletons in there. And if they would punish the Aboriginal people if they spoke their language or their culture, and if they don't listen to the priest then they get a hand shock. They put a needle in their hand and then shocked them.

TRUDY  
(looking a bit concerned)

Really? And is this stuff T was saying or this is stuff that the Social class was saying?

BARBARA

Social class, 'cause we watched a clip and it was the Aboriginal Holocaust.

TRUDY  
(still looking concerned)

Tell me about it, right from the moment you sat in class. I want to understand what just happened in your social class<sup>36</sup>.

CLOSE UP TO BARBARA:  
(telling this story)

BARBARA

I was thinking how there are only 4 weeks left of school as I walked into class and sat in my usual desk. My friends and I started talking about whether we should go straight to U of A club after school or if we should go hang out at the park with our friends. We wanted to do both things and so we were trying to decide. Suddenly we heard the teacher yell, "EVERYONE BE QUIET! WE'RE GOING TO WATCH A MOVIE!" I don't mind him, our social teacher. He's nice enough, tall and kind of skinny with blond wavy hair but he does yell a lot. I was still talking to my friends when I noticed my other friend K. She looked a little uncomfortable. I glance around to see how many people were listening because I also noticed that my teacher was talking about the Aboriginals. I know K feels bad. She's Aboriginal and doesn't like when teachers talk about Aboriginals. Finally my teacher finished talking and said "BE QUIET, and watch this movie". We did get

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<sup>36</sup> I want to remind that the stories told were told from the youth's perspective. We did not speak to the teachers about what happened in class although I did ask for the full name of the video clip, and was told that it was 'award winning'.

quiet when the lights went out. He said: "watch this clip. It is about the Aboriginal Holocaust. It's award winning". I watched as the title "Unrepentant: Kevin Annet and Canada's Native Peoples Genocide" scrolled across the top of the screen. The movie began with a man sitting and talking. My friend K did not even look at the movie. She didn't want to watch it. My friend T, whispered to me saying "this is about Residential Schools. My mosom was in one of them". As the man was talking in the clip, all I could think of is T's grandpa. I couldn't understand everything they were saying. The clips were going so fast.

I thought they said they paid 'em to go there? To Residential Schools?

One of the people talking said there were skeletons in there, at the Residential school.

As I watched I couldn't believe it. They would even punish the Aboriginal people if they spoke their language or their culture!

My friend K would only peek at the movie. She felt bad. I needed to do something so I got out a paper.

I listened some more to the movie and another Aboriginal person told a story about how if they didn't listen to the priest then they got a hand shock. The priest put a needle in their hand and then shocked them. And T's mosom was there. I can't believe it.

One lady on the clip said that the nuns would touch their brothers, you know "touch them". They could tell who was touched, when they started crying and then the nuns would laugh because he was in pain. I have a little brother. I would be so angry.

Another lady, she said that when she was 5 years old she was taken away from her parents and from her home, and forced to go to school.

Scary.

Someone else told about how the kids would get tied down to the bed by strangers.

And that when the little kids were having a bath they would throw snakes in the hot water and some snakes can't stand hot water, they would crawl over them and little kids would die. They would do this just when the kids weren't behaving and not listening.

I started to feel so angry. I never heard these stories before.

K's head stayed down. She couldn't even look at the movie. My teacher didn't notice. There are only 6 Aboriginal kids in this class.

I can't forget this one story of this little girl who got pushed out a window from a two story building.

There was no writing assignment. We were supposed to just watch the clip but I had to do something so I wrote a strong worded letter. I was writing to the nuns, to the residential schools. I said in the letter:

"I wonder how you would feel? What if you got taken away from your parents and your home, and everything that you ever loved?"

I can't even imagine what the rest of the kids were thinking. They probably felt bad for us, or for them. I wonder if my Chapan, my great grandma, knows?

This movie clip made me so mad. If they ever did that to me, put snakes in my tub, I would just throw them at them. Then I'd get out of the tub and I'd start punching them. I think I would do that. But for sure I would ask "Why'd you do that to me?"

We didn't finish the movie clip. He says we might finish it next week. I almost finished my letter. This is what it says so far.



*To the residential schools. OK. You ugly, racist dummies I hate you. You were mean to my religion. How dare you kill my brothers and sisters and take away their homes? How would you feel if we did that to you? If we took away your parents and home and everything that you ever loved? You're the demon of the devil. What if we took away your parents and forced you to go with them with the priest. What if we punished you and forced you to speak Aboriginal? I will never forgive you. I don't like you at all. If I did that, if I had a chance of killing you I would. What if we infected you with a disease and killed you? You guys are . . . I better cross out those words. I can't even say them . . . If I was there I would hit you and start punching and beating you up.*

That is all I have so far.

(quiet pause)

It's Unbelievable. Unbelievable, that he would show it, this movie, when there were Aboriginal people in the room. Unbelievable.

FADE OUT TO BLACK (SILENCE):  
FADE IN SLOWLY (VOICE FIRST):

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY  
(typing, reads aloud)

This was the very first time I thought of BARBARA as fierce. Until now I saw the story of BARBARA as confident, and poised and enjoying performing and seeking attention as she bounded in and out of the club space, interacting with many of the researchers and youth around the room. On this day she was slightly agitated, and angry. She was standing up for what she thought was inappropriate and unacceptable. She was seeking a way to make sense of that moment in school, a moment, all the more poignant, as I recalled my meeting with her mom TONYA where she told me that we would have to plan to meet for coffee outside of the home, away

from the kids. She told me, with BARBARA and her brother sitting alongside of us in the living room, that she didn't talk to them about the hard stories. She didn't tell them the negative things that had happened in her life. So when the school introduced these stories to BARBARA, it would have been the first time she heard them. In her outrage she seemed to want to push back at someone. She didn't know who the letter was to but she had to write it. I didn't realize then, that this was one of the first times I would see the performance slip a little and the cheerful enthusiastic BARBARA, who seemed to want to just enjoy lunch and chat about school, showed me that she was thinking seriously about what it means to be an Aboriginal youth sitting in a classroom and learning for the first time about residential schools and what they did to her people. This was the first time I really heard her speak of native people as her people. Even in the telling she would slip between saying, "them" and "us". Even in the moment she was struggling to make sense of what this story meant in her life and feeling the horror imagining that it might have been her Chapan (great grandmother) or Kokôm (grandmother) who had lived in similar places. And it is only now, as I retell these moments, re-reading and retelling again in each new draft have I come to think about why I might have shared stories differently with BARBARA. Perhaps I picked up the story given to me by TONYA, and I too chose to keep the negative stories, my own tension filled stories, away from BARBARA because that was how this family was choosing to live. I picked it up readily because it was how I wanted to live. I wanted to be able to control, to choose when and if I would tell the harder stories that exist in the stories of my life as I grew up, an Aboriginal youth, and my life now as an Aboriginal woman. As a child I had such a strong imagination and belief that I could become anything that I wanted to. I believed that if I turned my back on the hard stories, and moved only towards the, as of yet un-lived, imagined future I would be okay. Everything would be ok. Yet this residential

school moment reminds me what I have come to know - even when I choose to put down the storied life and all the stereotypes and statistics that seem to come with it, no sooner do I turn around to walk away, do those stories jump right up and cling to me again refusing to release the intergenerational hold they still have.

FADEOUT TO BLACK:  
FADE IN (MURMURING OF NOISE FROM TIM HORTONS):

**EXT. TIM HORTONS (FOLLOWING SCHOOL YEAR) - OCTOBER 2012**

TRUDY and BARBARA sit in a table, sandwiches and hot drinks between them. TRUDY pulls out a 11 x 17 size of paper with a image of BARBARA outlined and filled in with words.

TRUDY  
(holding up the shape poem looking somewhat anxious, brows furrowed, eyes questioning begins to speak)

I thought we could do this as a way to tell a story of you. It shows you, the way you are standing as well as it is full of words telling about you.

(The poem fills the screen and TRUDY begins to read aloud.)

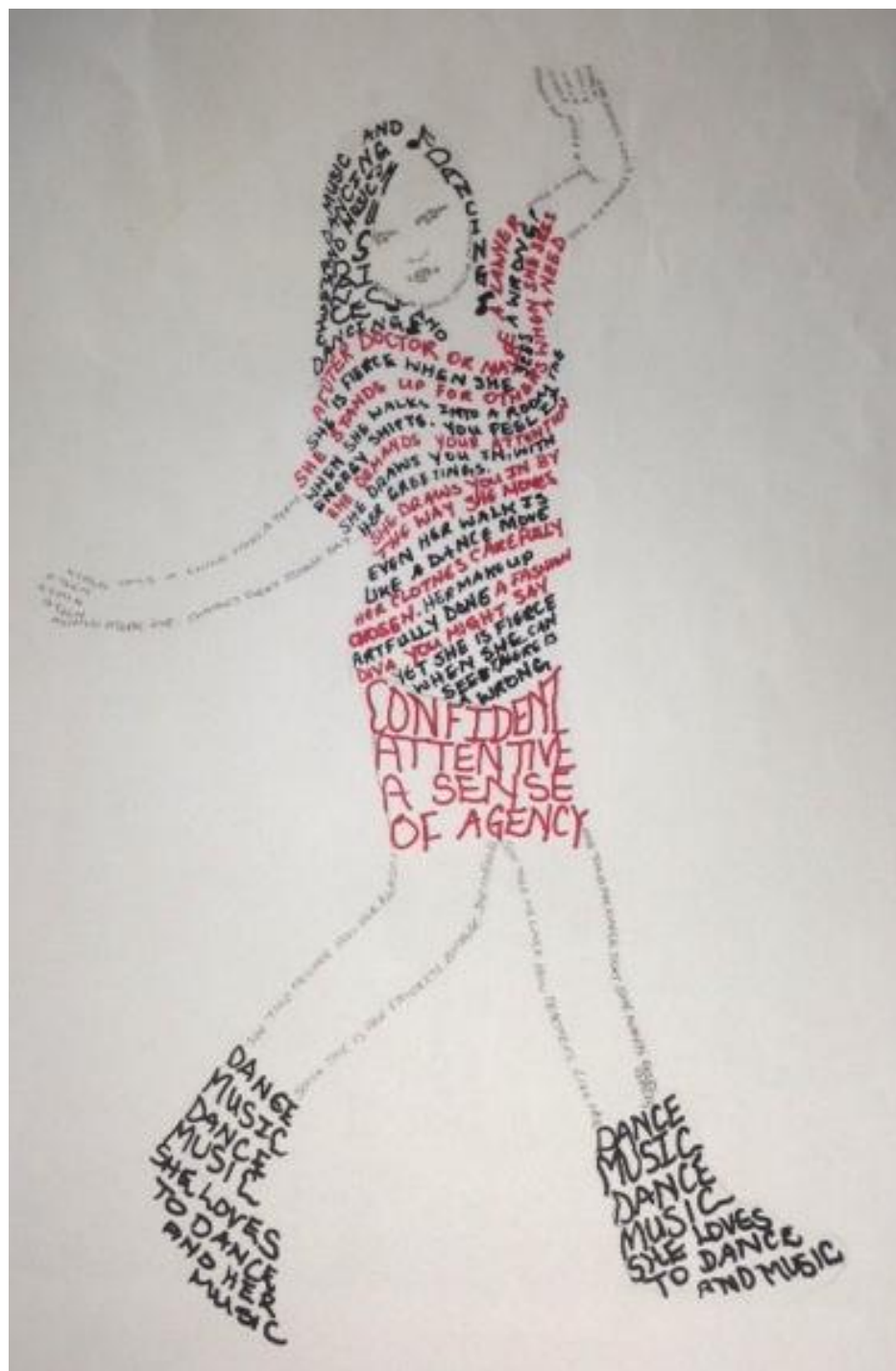


Figure 5-1. Barbara Word Image.

TRUDY

Music and dancing.  
A future Doctor or Lawyer  
She is fierce when she sees a wrong.  
When she walks into a room the energy shifts.  
You feel it.  
She demands your attention.  
She draws you in with her greetings  
She draws you in by the way she moves.  
Even her walk is like a dance move  
Her clothes carefully chosen.  
Her makeup artfully done.  
A fashion diva you might say.  
Yet she is fierce when she can see there is a wrong.  
Confident, attentive.  
A sense of agency.  
She told me once  
how her Kokôm told her she is her favorite  
because she is good.  
She told me once how teachers like her  
and how she wants good grades.  
She love to dance and her music.  
Music and Dancing

FADEOUT TO BLACK:

FADE IN SILENCE:

**EXT. BOSTON PIZZA RESTAURANT FAVOURITE BOOTH -**

**AFTERNOON - FEBRUARY 2013**

TRUDY and BARBARA sit in a booth. TRUDY has large bags of supplies, with markers of various types and with more 11 x 17 pages. BARBARA works on her own shape poem that has her friends and even TRUDY from the club space in it. Writing neatly and carefully words to describe each one, BARBARA laughs as she creates a caricature of TRUDY with exaggerated eyebrows.



I am doing better now. Did you know I almost failed in Grade 6. I used to do well in school until Grade 6. I got 43% one of my last math tests and now I want to do really well. I asked for extra help. My mom doesn't help me with my homework. I do it on my own. Teachers like me because I don't call out. But then I sometimes don't understand and I don't ask questions. They just talk and talk and I don't understand. But I am trying to pay more attention now.

TRUDY picks up the math worksheets and begins to Google and text math smart friends to help as they begin to attack the multiple pages of unfinished work. The poems sit ignored on the seat beside TRUDY

BARBARA

(as they wait for an answer from a math smart friend of TRUDY's begins to talk)

I couldn't meet last week because I had a basketball game. I am aggressive when I play basket ball.

TRUDY

(noticing BARBARA's beautiful artificial nails, very similar to her own artificial nails asks)

How does it work with your nails? Do you have to be extra careful?

BARBARA

(smiling down at her nails)

Well I think I scratched some girl really hard by accident on the other team. Whoops, my bad.

TRUDY

Tell me more about playing basketball.

BARBARA

My second last game I got 8 points. Yeah, they were lucky shots. I play center. I try to get the ball or I drive in to get the shot.

If I look for passes, like say here's the key, here's the basket, I'm right here and then I go from one side to the other, one side to the other, and then if I get the ball then I drive and then shoot. I'm gonna try out next year too.

TRUDY

I can't wait to see you play. Can I take a picture of you, or is that bad?

BARBARA

I don't know. If I look ugly I'll make you delete it.

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY

(typing, reads aloud)

I can remember being so intrigued in that moment having to consider the image of BARBARA as a basketball player, still stylish and poised in her artificial nails, but now aggressive in a basketball uniform. I had immediately asked to watch a game needing to see BARBARA in these more complex ways. Perhaps even then I was becoming aware of how I was helping her to sustain her cover story of confident and composed without even being aware of it. She interrupted my story of her that day. I had not yet imagined BARBARA the athlete. Yet, now as I think about it, why would that be surprising? I see Athletes and performers as both having a sense of their body, and how it moves in and out of spaces, a way of being in the world that is very similar. I was thrilled at the idea of watching her play basketball. I myself have never been very athletic, and especially not team sports, but once in Grade 6 I did play basketball too and I even won most valuable player during one game because I defended and played my position of defense with fierce determination. I never scored even one basket in my short lived basketball career and yet I won most valuable player. As I



write this and I think of that fierce defender I was in Grade 6, at 11 or 12 years of age, I smile at the memory and how already I was defending and playing a part. I wasn't an athlete, I am still not an athlete, but I sure knew how to play one that season. And I sure wanted to see BARBARA play an aggressive athlete as soon as was possible.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:

A SOUND begins, quiet at first then increasing in volume. It is the sound of students cheering. A voice is speaking about talking about the PEP RALLY and the basketball team that is going to play in a few minute.

FADE IN:

**EXT. CLASS GYMNASIUM - AFTERNOON - MARCH 2013**

TRUDY sitting in the crowd with her granddaughter. Watching BARBARA standing (in her basket ball uniform) on the sidelines waiting for the Cheer team to start, before her own game. Interruption by the emcee of the rally.

CLOSE UP ON TEACHER:

TEACHER  
(speaking loudly into a microphone)

We are going to call up all of the VIP students to sit on the stage. They have earned the right to special seating because of their hard work this term. These are the students who have improved significantly from first term to second term.

(a roll call of names and students move to the stage)

TEACHER  
Barbara Brown!

PAN OUT TO BARBARA in her basketball uniform.  
ZOOM IN.

BARBARA  
(looking around in surprise)  
Did they say my name?

FRIEND S

Yes! Let's go. They called us both.  
(They move to go and sit on the stage)

TRUDY  
(holding grandbaby up to cheer)

YAY!!! WAY TO GO BARBARA!  
(clapping and hooting loudly)

CUT TO:

Same pep rally minutes later. The basketball team has divided into half and are playing an exhibition game. BARBARA waits on the side beside the coach to come in. When she does she switches with her friend S. TRUDY watches closely straining to capture her first glimpse of aggressive basketball player BARBARA. BARBARA runs in towards the play. She turns to glance at S to see if she is standing in the right position as the key waiting for the opposing team to shoot. S nods and points. BARBARA stands in position, jumps as the ball when it bounces off the rim of the net. She follows the ball and the play as it moves up and down the court. I see her look again at her friend S who is saying something to her. She nods and heads in to play again.

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY  
(typing, reads aloud)

I remember holding my granddaughter that day as we cheered for BARBARA as a VIP (having improved a great deal from one term to the next and been recognized for it publically at this rally) and for the basketball game, which was only a few minutes of exhibition. I also remember how I thought her definition of aggressive and mine were not the same. I remember imagining she would be an elbow throwing, angry player when she had described being aggressive and how I saw a poised teammate who actively participated and followed the plays, looking often to her friend S for assurance. That was not what I had expected. I wonder if having such a

large audience changed the way she played or if having such a vivid imagination changed the way I saw her play.

I also spent time that day thinking about the school and how she felt being VIP. For much of our conversations over the 2 years she gave the impression that school was good. She was doing fine. Having trouble in some areas but overall doing fine. She seemed to really like school and got along well in the space, seemed to feel at ease. Then as she began to tell me about the efforts she was making to do better in school and how sometimes the teacher's lectures were not helpful, how they said too many things and spoke too long, I had to retell the story of BARBARA in school that I had begun to form in my mind. I remember her telling me how she didn't call out and so teachers liked her and how she moved to the front of the class to not speak to her friends as much. I think about this now, and how she told me she was shy and how I didn't see those sides of her in the club space. I wonder now what the club space was for her. In it I felt more constrained. I didn't know what role to play, what performance to enact, and I wasn't willing to land and just be. Yet I have a feeling that BARBARA did because she appeared so free in the ways I can only imagine. I would not have described her as shy or even "good" in that obedient and still manner that somehow I associate with good students. She was everywhere and not afraid to push at boundaries and limits, she was laughing and free or so I thought. Now as I look back across the many stories I see how she had told me so much more than I was hearing. I think about how much effort it was for me each day in club to build my researcher performance in a space where the old teacher in me fought hard to take over. I left always exhausted. I wonder now how hard it must have been for BARBARA to maintain the stories of herself that she aimed for in the school space. Pushing back against moments like the residential school class, moments she wouldn't really return to again when I had wanted to do more on the topic.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:  
FADE IN SILENCE:

**EXT. BOSTON PIZZA FAVOURITE BOOTH - AFTERNOON - APRIL  
2013**

BARBARA is writing on the large 11 x 17 images drawn of her from the outline of photographs. She is writing words that describe her, words that tell her story. TRUDY is giving suggestions of things they have talked about in their other conversations. Barbara wearily pushes the 11 x 17 image towards TRUDY. Seeing her weariness and uncertainty TRUDY suggests they do something else.

TRUDY

So I want you to have little pictures of all the things we talked about or you were thinking about Indian, Natives, and Residential schools . . .

Some of things you said was

being rez'd out  
all ghetto  
no door  
writing on the wall  
no blankets  
Holes in the wall

(BARBARA laughs a little as she listens)

TRUDY

I also asked you "What do you hear about Cree, Aboriginal, Native People, in the news and the media, from books or from your teacher?"

You said "I hear people getting killed. I hear about robberies."

BARBARA  
(looking at her iPhone)

Wait! I want to show you this.

TRUDY  
(not hearing BARBARA continues on)  
so either pictures or words that you said".  
(BARBARA holds her phone to TRUDY)

TRUDY  
(Shock and surprise on her face)  
Whoa . . . that is . . . do you know how to  
take a picture of your screen?

BARBARA  
  
Ya. I did.

TRUDY  
  
Send it to me.

CLOSE UP:  
BARBARA intent on her phone texting an image to TRUDY.  
TRUDY reads it silently)



Figure 5-3. Why are natives.

TRUDY  
(looks up, brows furrowed in disbelief)

Ya exactly! That is harsh hey?

BARBARA

Ya.

TRUDY

That kind of hurt my feelings.

(TRUDY gives a little nervous, uneasy sounding laugh)

BARBARA

Called CHUGS! Real ugly.

(BARBARA laughs a little too)

TRUDY

Where did you find all those?  
What did you put in?

BARBARA

I typed in "Why are natives . . ." on Google,  
on my iPhone. See.

(shows her phone with the image showing up again)

TRUDY

You see, that kind of stuff. All the things  
that are being told to you from Google, from  
your teachers. And I know they aren't  
necessarily things that you think. It's the  
things you hear.

I want to include those in your story.

That image from your phone is an image we  
could definitely include in your story.

Are you okay with doing that? Or what are you  
thinking?

BARBARA

(Silence. BARBARA doesn't answer the question.  
Fixes her leg in her drawing.)

That is better

(silence . . . more working)

TRUDY

(watching BARBARA draw a flower, is still thinking of  
the "why are natives" image)

Who showed you that? Or you just did it?

BARBARA

(not looking up from her drawing)

It was on Facebook.

TRUDY

(looking thoughtful)

Do you want to do that? Create something  
with those images of natives that we talked  
about? Or how would you like to get your  
story told?

(BARBARA sits in silence, face concentrated on her  
drawing, ignores the question)

Do you want me to write it up and bring it to  
you and you help me fix it up like we did  
with the residential school story?

BARBARA

(continuing to fill in the missing lines of  
the image of her, sits head down,  
concentrating, doesn't look up. Softly  
says).

Ya.

CLOSE UP:

BARBARA drawing lines on the image of herself drawing a  
flower. Beside her sits her iPhone with the image "Why  
are natives" still showing.



Figure 5-4. Why are natives (2).



Figure 5-5. Barbara drawing a flower.



FADE OUT TO BLACK:  
FADE IN-SILENCE AT FIRST then SOUND OF TYPING:

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY  
(typing, reads aloud)

I remember that day scowling at the image on her little phone. I also remember thinking that she seemed so tired. Once in a while she had come to lunch tired but usually she wasn't feeling well and so we would just have a quick bite, catch up on how she was doing and end the conversation. But today, the tired seemed different. It had that feel of a weary soul. I felt as if she were saying to me, with her body, that she had told me all that she was going to tell me. As she pushed over that paper towards me that day I felt her silent plea "now you, it's up to you now". And in that moment I wondered if I had been somewhat absent in her story in the ways I wasn't intended. I had intended to be alongside of her. To be with her as together we co-composed our story. I was supposed to be in there too. I was sharing the words she had told me but they were all about her. I had created the first shape poem and thought I had been in there but again I only told stories about her to her and that day she seemed to be asking me for more. So I took it, the request, the pages, and the image of the "why are natives" Google search and I left thinking that I would create a narrative account and bring it back to her for her to re-enter the co-composing again. But what I did when I left that day was to carefully compose the cover stories into a list. I wrote a poem of all the performances of BARBARA that I had heard of or watched. I loved it. But when I showed it to my works in progress supervisory group they expressed a little bit of concern that I was noticeably absent. I noted that I was indeed absent but I wanted to see her, to see BARBARA, as she wanted to be seen. I wanted to write that story of her that I felt she was creating. I wanted to give her the space on the paper to be poised, and confident and at ease. To be

the beautiful stylish teenager that she was and was continuously becoming. She was enacting and living a good story of Aboriginal youth and family, a story that is rarely told. But what resulted in that poem was a shell, a weary empty shell, a mask left to hang alone on a wall, the human noticeably absent.

I had a lot to think about that day after that supervisory meeting. I think of my mvp award in Grade 6 for being a fierce defender and I think I was still defending. That poem perhaps was my push back against the statistically predetermined stereotypical negative stories of Aboriginal people, my people. I was also feeling a little bit frustrated that cover stories were not sustainable. I wanted to be allowed to reinvent myself whenever I wanted to. I wanted to be the queen my grandma told me I would become. I wanted to be the athlete winning mvp. I wanted BARBARA to have someone who believed alongside of her, in every story of herself that she wanted to tell. But that day when she also pushed her phone towards me, showing me that despite our best intentions we, her and I and her mom Tonya, cannot outrun the negative stories that are a part of being native. When we do try they show up on face book pages, in Google searches, in social class and on our iPhone screens. They also show up in our lives because of the intergenerational legacy of colonization and residential schools. Traumas experienced by BARBARA and my ancestors, but also traumas experienced by our living family members as well as by us, BARBARA, her family and I. We still live some of those stories. They are a part of us and I have not always shied away from them as I did at times in this relationship. Indeed I want to tell about them. I think they are important but sometimes I think I too want to just maintain a performance, ignore that they exist and sometimes I am angry when my cover story slips or is pulled away by the experiences lived and stories told. Sometimes I am irritated that even candid photos shows that the stories make me sad, or

angry, or frustrated. Sometimes it isn't okay that I cannot walk in the room alongside of my Aboriginal youth participant without those multiple single stories of natives flitting about us, in us, or through us. And like BARBARA that day, sometimes I am just weary and I want to push them away and say your turn, you carry them for a while.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:  
FADE IN:

### **EXT. UNIVERSITY OFFICE - AFTERNOON - APRIL 2013**

TRUDY sitting at a table in her office. Working on her dissertation. A worried look on her face wondering how to finish the narrative account to bring something back to BARBARA. A noise sounds from her phone. She looks at the text and smiles. Intrigued by the idea that Barbara wants to talk about being native and residential schools.

CLOSE UP OF TEXT

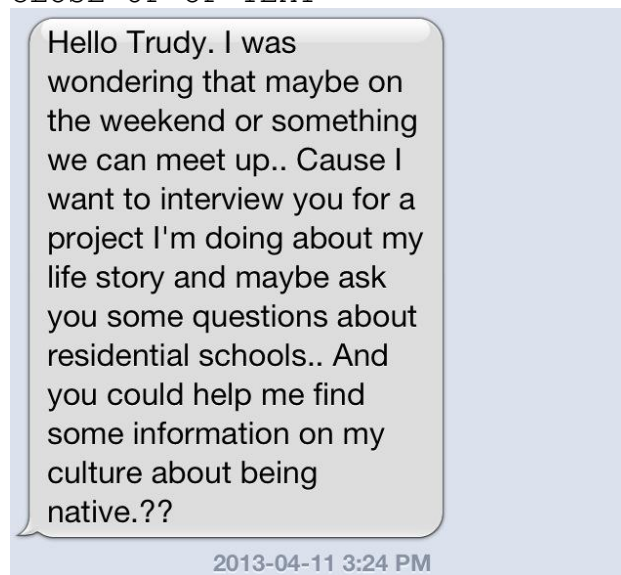


Figure 5-6. Barbara text to Trudy.

FADE OUT TO BLACK -

FADE IN-SILENCE AT FIRST then SOUND OF TYPING:

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - April 2013

TRUDY  
(typing, reads aloud)

I was happily surprised to get that text that day. I couldn't think of how I was going to write the account. I didn't know how I would attend to the wonders I had about BARBARA's stories to live by so being alongside while she worked on her own identity project. I was intrigued that once she was outraged that she was shown a movie clip on residential schools and now she wanted to include her native culture and residential schools in her identity project.

FADE TO BLACK:  
FADE IN:

**EXT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON - APRIL 2013**

Trudy and Barbara sit together discussing the identity project.

TRUDY

Why don't you show some contemporary Aboriginal artists like Adam Beach. He has some great videos where he speaks about Idle no more.

BARBARA  
(ignores the suggestion)

Has anyone in your family been to residential schools?

TRUDY

I think a couple of my aunties. I will ask my mom tonight. But my daughter presented to her class about contemporary artist and political leaders for her presentation on her culture. Do you think that would be a good idea?

BARBARA  
(continuing to ignore the suggestion)

I am going to talk about my family. Then a bit about the dancing. And then I want to talk about Residential schools. Can I interview you? I ask my mom if I could interview my Kokôm and she said no. She said my Kokôm doesn't like to talk about it. So I thought of you.

TRUDY

(wondering what story of being native BARBARA is seeking. Feeling as if she might not be able to provide what it is that BARBARA is seeking.)

I will prepare something for you next week. Let's meet at the museum. They will have a lot of artifacts and things you can take photos of for your iMovie presentation. We can do the video there too.

BARBARA

(show the page of notes she already wrote about residential schools)

I already wrote a lot of notes from Google. I will make a speech about residential schools and add some pictures. Yes the museum will be quiet so we can record.

FADE TO BLACK:  
FADE IN:

### **EXT. LIBRARY ABORIGINAL DISPLAY - AFTERNOON - MAY 2013**

TRUDY and BARBARA reading the display and taking photographs of the RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL display at the museum.

FADE TO:

CLOSE SHOT

BARBARA taking photographs of one or two things to use in her "identity project". TRUDY points out different things. BARBARA returns again to take more photos of the RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL display.

FADE TO:

TRUDY and BARBARA talking and walking through the displays of ABORIGINAL HISTORY and culture; the Camera

forgotten in the bag. Quiet conversations and jokes, BARBARA leading the way, twirling with her hands out touches as many displays as possible. TRUDY wonders if this touching is allowed in museums.

FADE TO:

TRUDY and BARBARA sitting inside the tipi. Laugh as BARBARA interviews and records TRUDY talking about RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS.

TRUDY  
(smiling into the camera waiting for BARBARA to respond)

BARBARA  
  
Did anyone in your family go to residential schools?

TRUDY  
  
Yes I asked my mom last night, and these are stories I heard before, but she said she has never gone herself because they are Metis and at the time it was only the treaty status Indians who were made to go to residential schools. She remembers a time when they came into her yard to pick her up and take her and her dad said "no." They had no right to take her and he wouldn't let them so she never did go.

But I asked my aunty and two of them did go to residential school for a while because they were living with their mom. My mom's mom and dad were not together so those ones were with the mom. And the mom ended up going into the hospital because she got sick and the 2 little girls got taken into residential school for a little while. And what my aunty said was when she thinks of the days she was in residential school, the bed time prayers stand out, and the gray bed covers, the walls, the clothes, everything seemed colorless. So when she thinks about residential schools or when she dreams about it she just dreams about that gray color.

(TRUDY pauses, takes a breath).

And my mom says one of my aunties had nightmares for a really long time after living there but no one will really talk about it. I know for sure my mom's mom Sarah went to residential school and she lived there her whole life until she married my mosom.

BARBARA

How did they feel about it?

TRUDY

Most of them don't like to talk about it because it was a really hard time to be taken away from their mom and everything they knew and the freedom they had living with their mom and dad because they were allowed to play outside. They got to do a lot of things they couldn't do in residential school. I know it is a really hard story for them. One they don't like to talk to very much. But they are starting to talk about it more now because they think it is very important for us, for my generation, all of my cousins. They want us to know about our history.

(BARBARA gestures silently from behind the iPhone camera for Trudy to wrap it up. They both laugh.)

TRUDY

(talking really fast)

So ya, they talk about it more now, and it was a really hard time.

BARBARA

Did it affect them in any way?

TRUDY

Yup. There are still some who have nightmares and I know it was traumatic because they don't want to talk about it . .  
.

(slight pause, TRUDY thinking about her audience of other students and teachers in the public school classroom where this video would be shown)

but what we do know now is how strong they were as women. And how they taught us to be really strong because they survived it. They still did really well. They still raised really strong children and so it did affect them in negative ways but they turned those negative ways into something positive by becoming stronger and teaching us to be strong, especially strong women

(suddenly remembers all the boys in the family realizing she hadn't even been thinking about them as she spoke to BARBARA about her family's experiences)

but also all of the sons in the family.

BARBARA

(turns camera off, instructs TRUDY for the next attempt)

Try to make it more interesting. Draw in your audience.

(turns camera back on)

TRUDY

(trying to be more lively and animated, speaks with exaggerated enthusiasm)

Hi, my name is Trudy Cardinal and my family is from Reserve D, Alberta. And I am very honored to do this interview for you.

(BARBARA & TRUDY burst into laughter, camera cuts off. Two more attempts, more laughter and bloopers).

TRUDY

(feeling the need to include the success of her own educational career, TRUDY, in defense mode, tries again to speak about the residential school experiences in her family.)

Hi, my name is Trudy Cardinal and I am currently taking my PhD and I will be a professor at the University of Alberta next year.



BARBARA

Did any one of your family go to residential schools?

TRUDY

(speaks a little quicker trying to share all the details in only 1 minute allowed to her by BARBARA. Trudy is thinking about this as a teacher, aware of other Aboriginal youth potentially watching this clip, isn't sure what message she is supposed to send. As Trudy retells the stories of her aunty she sees an images of a little girl, her aunty as a little girl, who is unable to make sense of a new cold and gray world. And then TRUDY's mind jumps to the memory of the warmth of her grandbaby's body as she cuddled her that morning. An urge to protect children flares up in TRUDY but knowing that BARBARA is waiting for her she continues trying to be "interesting").

BARBARA

How did they feel about it?

TRUDY

It was really hard for them, quite traumatic. They still have nightmares about it. And it is really hard for them to talk about it.

(As she says this TRUDY hears echoes of others words "Why do natives keep talking about something that happened so long ago?" She hears echoes of words of natives "I will not dwell on those stories. We can move on. We are doing well. I will not make excuses". TRUDY's imagined audience is getting larger and larger. She is unsure of how to speak to this topic in one minute. She knows how important it is to herself, to BARBARA, and to the rest of the audience at the junior high school who might potentially see this clip. She fumbles on in her attempt to be fast, but trying to be interesting, attempting to explain, to teach something, she continues to talk.)

But in the last few years they feel it is really important that we know who we are and where we come from so they have begun to talk about these stories more so we understand better the impact it still has.

BARBARA

Did it affect them in any way?

TRUDY

Ya it made it really hard for them at time to  
learn to be parents to their own children  
because a lot of times they didn't have a  
parent figure in those kinds of institutions  
. . .

(TRUDY pauses slightly not liking the way that sounded  
knowing she is who she is because she has been  
surrounded by many strong women; knowing that she has  
been parented by aunties and friends of her mom, as  
much as she was ever her mom and her grandma. Yet  
knowing the truth in the statement. It is hard to know  
how to parent, especially to parent carrying all the  
statistically dismal stories that influence the  
experiences lived as Aboriginal women. But she doesn't  
like how that story sounds. Is she reaffirming  
stereotypes that exist in the teacher's thoughts about  
Aboriginal youth and families if she says this. A hint  
of a scowl crosses her face, and then she continues.)

and so sometimes they still have nightmares  
about some of the things that happen there,  
some of the things they are not quite willing  
to talk to us about yet but what also  
happened is that they survived it.

(TRUDY just cannot leave the story without hope. She  
cannot leave the story of her family as broken by this  
experience. She has to show the glint and glimmer of  
hope, of a future that is different).

They still did really well. They raised  
children who are also doing really well. So  
it also affected them in a positive way by  
showing how strong we are as a people, how  
strong we are as women and how we can  
continue to make good lives for ourselves no  
matter what happens.

(Two more attempts are made telling the same story,  
creating the video for BARBARA as TRUDY tries to cut  
out more and more to make it shorter. TRUDY struggles  
to figure out what story it is that BARBARA is hoping

for, struggles to tell a story that she can be comfortable with too; a story that her mother would not mind; that her aunties would feel no discomfort. Each new take making her more and more unsure. She knows that somehow she isn't succeeding at either goal.)

TRUDY  
(the final attempt)

Absolutely it did. In some ways it affected them negatively. It was really hard for them sometimes to bond with their own children. To learn what it meant to be a caring and loving parent. But it also affected them . . . some good things also came out of it in that they showed what strong women they are. They overcame some of those traumas. Because they came out having nightmares and feeling really bad about some of the things that happened in there. And then they ended up raising families, being very caring and nurturing, finishing schools themselves and a lot of their children are now in school and doing really well. And so there were some really bad things that happened and some hardships but the good thing that came out of it is that they showed how strong they are and how strong we can be. And how no matter what happens to us we persevere and we still do really good things.

BARBARA

OK. Thank you.

TRUDY

You are welcome.

(TRUDY smiles into the camera thinking "I just couldn't tell a story where my family is traumatized and broken as a legacy of residential schools. I am telling the stories I know in the way that I know how but BARBARA seems to be wanting something more. A performance?)

(BARBARA behind the lens smiles too).

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY  
(typing, reads aloud)

The next time we met, our last meeting before I shared a draft of this screen play where I finally entered into the story, she told me that I didn't make the cut. My one minute interview lay forgotten on the cutting room floor, unwanted. She didn't want my smooth, happily ever after story that I thought she wanted as she told me to make it more interesting, to draw the audience in. She had wanted a real survivor. She wanted the stories that she had heard and read about, that she saw in the movie clip in social class. She told me she would ask her teacher if she could add the video clip. She tried to comfort me by saying she had just forgotten to include it but she admitted that she had really wanted to hear stories of what really happened, stories of survivors. I assured her that we didn't need to change the iMovie. I understood how an interview with a survivor would indeed make it more powerful. I didn't tell her that I thought we were still all surviving this experience. The intergenerational reverberations still being felt as I tried to tell the story.

I still wonder what it is that BARBARA was looking for in me that day. I wonder what Indian we both had in mind because we didn't seem to be finding the resonance between our ideas. BARBARA seems to have a sense that the residential schools are close to her life today. She attempted to write a letter to the nuns, imagining the perpetrators standing before her. She seemed to want to share her intense horror at the treatment of residential school survivors as a performance, in the ways she saw in the movie clip she was shown and I wanted to tell the story of how the effects linger and are negotiated right now in my family. This didn't seem to be the story she was looking for. Maybe I wasn't performing native culture in the way she had imagined I would in that moment. Maybe I couldn't perform in the ways that I imagined.

So I changed the subject that day and I asked her to tell me about her movie so I could hear, in her own words how it all came together. She told me her story, the story she was sharing with her classmates, and potentially with the whole school if her teacher thought her movie worthy of sharing.

FADE OUT TO BLACK:  
FADE IN RESTAURANT NOISE:

**EXT. BOSTON PIZZA FAVOURITE BOOTH - AFTERNOON - MAY 2013**

BARBARA

That was my cousin D I was standing with at the school. She made a movie too. The teacher is showing it to everyone around the school. She talks about her mom, how she died in a car accident. Her dad went to jail. He was drinking. She told about all those things. She has never told them before. It is interesting for her.

TRUDY

(looking a little perplexed is thinking about the many times BARBARA would say "not write about that" when talking about her family usually about things far less traumatic than the story she just told).

How do you feel about personal stories about your family told like that? Does it bother you?

BARBARA

No. I think it is interesting for her because she never told anyone personal stories before. She doesn't really know what to do.

TRUDY

And how is she feeling about everyone knowing her personal details?

BARBARA

Ummm. She is kind of shy because she never told anyone about her problems with her dad except me.

TRUDY

Right. So did she not like them showing or she doesn't mind?

BARBARA

She doesn't really mind but it is kind of surprising. Because . . . she . . . I don't know how to describe it.

TRUDY

(still struggling to comprehend)

She is surprised that so many people hear the story and like it or . . . what is the word? Are interested? I don't know if liked is the right word.

(TRUDY begins to understand the source of some of her discomfort. It lies in the idea that the teacher, the school might have "liked" such a story of alcohol, jail, death and Aboriginal youth and families. And of that story being told to the whole school. A story an Aboriginal youth formerly carried close to her, silently, now becoming public).

BARBARA

(simply, without great emotion, says)

Yes.

TRUDY

(A long pause, TRUDY is thinking of how easily BARBARA and her cousin D were telling this story, as easily as TRUDY herself usually tells stories of her own life. TRUDY wonders at the ebb and flow of her need to clutch tightly stories, so as to protect and defend others, and sometimes how freely she throws them out there showing that there is no shame in the stories. They have made her who she is. They are hers, and her families. Yet she still worries for the youth because now, forever, the school might look at them and see alcohol, death, and jail. But maybe they did see that

already or maybe, just maybe they see a gifted film maker whose story told in iMovie captivated them.)

TRUDY shakes off her musings and asks BARBARA to share her own iMovie story)

What was your story about? Tell me about it?

BARBARA

Oh. Well first it starts out as me, my mom, my dad and my brother. A picture. Then I say "this is my story". Then I go to my picture and I say "Hi my name is BARBARA Brown and I am 13 years old. And I am from Reserve D. Ya.

And then I go to my brother. And I introduce him "He's like 9 years old. Bobby Brown." Then I go to a picture again and I say that . . . because he burnt his back when he was 3. So I talk about that. They had to peel the skin from the right side of his back to the left side of his back.

TRUDY

How did he burn it?

BARBARA

He fell into a fire pit backwards.

TRUDY

(remembering how her own little baby brother died in a house fire exclaims)

I have always been scared of that!

BARBARA

We had a fire outside and my brother was playing around it. When my mom almost went inside she looked to the side and saw Bobby fall in. So then good thing she was there. And then I go to my mom and then I say this is my mom "TONYA Barbara Brown. She is like my best friend. I don't know what I would do without her". And then I go to my dad and I say this is my dad Bob M. And I say, "He

wasn't really around because he was always working in camp." Then I go to my Kokôm and I introduce her and I say that she is caring and I love her". Then I go to my chapans (my great grandma and grandpa) but I wasn't really close to them so I didn't really know what to say.

TRUDY

So what did you say? Just who they were?

BARBARA

Ya. and they died when I was about 5 or 6. Well my great grandma died when I was 2 or 3 and then my great grandpa died when I was a little bit older. And then I go to my friends. I got a funny picture of them K going like this (makes a face) because she wasn't ready to take a picture. I was like "nope I am using this picture". And then I go to T and I say that we are kind of like "sisters" because even we have been best friends since like Grade 7 we are still really close. Then I go to my culture and I say the story behind the jingle dress is to bring strength to those who need it. Then I go to the fancy dancing and I say . . . I forgot what I said about Fancy dancing.

TRUDY

Where did you find the information on the dances or who told you?

BARBARA

The internet. Then I go to the drum and I say "the drum has its own beat, its own tone, it is sort of like a heartbeat". I don't really know what I said.

TRUDY

That sounds nice. Poetic. That sounds very poetic.



BARBARA

Ya. That's what I am going for. And then I go to my residential speech but I don't think I can memorize it.

TRUDY

Right, just give me some highlights.

BARBARA

Well I think I memorized the first paragraph because I kept on doing it over and over again.

TRUDY

Okay tell me the first one.

BARBARA

In the 21st century there were two types of boarding schools in Reserve D. One of them was called St. M Boarding school. The more popular boarding school near Reserve D was called St. J boarding school. And then it goes the priests and nuns had been cruel to the Aboriginal children by removing them from their families forcing them to speak English and taking away their native culture and ways. And then . . . umm . . . that is pretty much all I remember.

TRUDY

Then just other little facts that you wrote down?

BARBARA

Yes.

TRUDY

Then what next?

BARBARA

A picture. And the end.

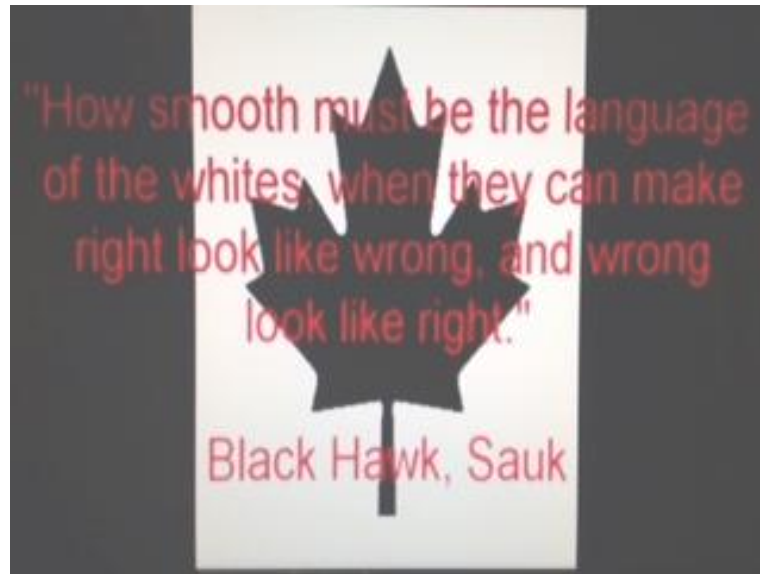


Figure 5-7. Black Hawk, Sauk.

TRUDY

So what was the last sentence you said in your video. When the picture was showing. The very last thing you said and then you shut it off.

BARBARA

Well the paragraph was about about . . . hmmm . . . how the residential school survivors, their stories, and the schools so I said "I showed it so that it will never happen again".

EXT. RESEARCHER OFFICE - May 2013

TRUDY

(typing, reads aloud)

I think about BARBARA and how she chose to include residential schools into her identity project, her iMovie about her own story. I think about how to include her culture she looked to me, and I took her to a museum, we read books and we looked on the internet. She tried to ask me to tell my story but somehow I wasn't telling it in the way that she was looking for. I didn't tell her in the making of her movie, that we, just as we

are, represent our culture, our people. Because I wasn't sure what she was wanted to know and we had such limited time I wanted her to have access to authentic artifacts and the history that I too mostly learned through books and the internet. It is only in the last few years have I begun to realize that my history is in the stories of my family, the stories of my aunties and uncles, the cousins and especially my mom. Sometimes however I get told that they don't want to talk about it. Or they will not tell me certain years. They tell me the stories are too hard. BARBARA had wanted to ask her Kokôm to tell about her time in residential school and her mom told her not to. She said that her Kokôm does not like to talk about it. And so BARBARA had turned to me. In that moment I was afraid that I was still not the Indian that BARBARA had in mind and I tried to perform the one, or find her examples of the one she might. BARBARA however quickly discarded that one-minute performance and figured it out her own way.

I am intrigued by the journey into this relationship, with all its twists and turns. I have learned so much about performance and storytelling. It took me a while to become awake and I am sure as I re-read and retell these stories again and again that even more tensions will be revealed. Tensions that help to share experiences of what it is to live a storied life.

I asked BARBARA to tell me her favorite songs because I thought they might themselves tell a story of BARBARA. When she sent me the title of Queen's "I want to Break Free" I was fascinated. It is from the '80s era, long before she was even thought of and of the era when I was a junior high student. I love that song too. "I want to Break Free" seemed to capture the tensions I had been experiencing wanting to break free of being storied always by the statistically dismal, stereotypical negative stories of Aboriginal people, of natives as BARBARA names us, and so I thought how perfect. It is a metaphorical representation of how we live in

response to these stories, of how we, as Aboriginal people write our lives in response, in resistance, to these stories. I wrote this interim text initially imagining I wanted to break free of these stories. I wrote imagining BARBARA did too. It is only in this last section, in these weeks of the writing of this narrative account do I realize that maybe it is breaking free of the cover story, of the constant performance, experience that BARBARA was trying to share with me. There is a way of being that I wasn't even aware of, an embodied knowing of how to move between worlds and on different landscapes that seems intuitive in some, intuitive in BARBARA. And only now must I think of what an immense energy it takes to do this performing, and to think of at what cost is it to always have to present oneself. I also have just begun to imagine what life can be like when finally, we get to lay down the masks, to relax our bodies, and to just be alongside of each other. I have seen a glimpse of this place only now as BARBARA and I move towards the end of this narrative. I have found, even if for just moments, a place to land along side of my fellow performer, my co-researcher participant BARBARA.

Who then, I wonder, has really been interrupted?

FADE TO BLACK:

MUSIC BEGINS TO PLAY - (Queen - one of BARBARA's five favorite songs - I want to Break Free)  
FADE IN (with music playing)

The big screen is filled with IMAGES OF BARBARA & TRUDY. Each image is composed of words that describe the multiple ways they have described themselves, stories they tell of themselves, the cover stories. The images each stay asking to be read carefully. They stay asking to be looked at. They stay knowing that they will not last. The other stories will come eventually. They in fact are already there just underneath. The stories that BARBARA brings willingly these days. Stories that TRUDY still struggles with. Stories that beg the question, "Why tell them?" BARBARA will say "So that they never happen again".

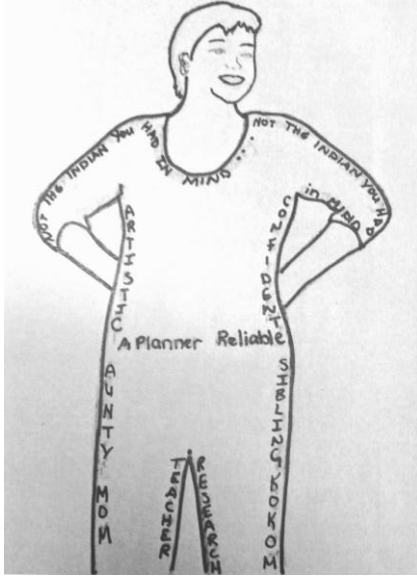


Figure 5-8. Trudy Word Image.



Figure 5-9. Barbara Word Image.

FADE OUT AS MUSIC QUIETS.

I want to break free.

THE END

## **Chapter 6: Looking Across**

### **Seeking Resonant Threads**

Within the narrative inquiry process I looked across the individual narrative accounts seeking resonant threads that could be discerned from the stories I lived alongside the three Aboriginal youth and their families. In this move I left the intimate space of the relational that existed between me, as researcher, with each of the youth and their families, as participants, and looked across all three accounts inquiring more deeply into the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families as they negotiated who they were and were becoming, on and off school landscapes. I was seeking a deeper and broader awareness of their stories to live by and how they were shaped by stories told to, by, and about, Aboriginal youth and families. Making this shift I had to pause and “[freeze] . . . lives in motion” (Clandinin et al., 2010, p. 43), knowing all the while, that as I was writing, Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, and their families and I continued to negotiate our identities. Their and my multiple stories to live by were, and continued to be, continuously shaped by experiences.

As noted in Chapter 2 the narrative accounts were negotiated with each youth over the 2012–2013 school year, as different pieces of each account were completed. Each completed account was then negotiated in a longer visit where it was read in its entirety first with the youth, and then once the youth gave their assent, it was negotiated with the family member who had given consent for each of them. This was to ensure that the stories that we told together, that were co-composed, did not privilege my own understanding over those of each participant. Since I was interested in the stories Aboriginal youth and families told of who they are, and are becoming, it was important that the narrative accounts represent the stories in ways with which they were comfortable with, in ways that resonated with how they understood their experiences in this research inquiry. It was also important that the narrative accounts reflected the temporal nature of their continuously negotiated stories to live by. From May to August 2013 I placed the

three accounts side by side in order to read across them and to look for what I discerned as resonant threads. Distancing myself in this way, while still knowing that each account was a relational telling was difficult for me<sup>37</sup>. I pulled back ever so slowly from the unique lives of each participant and the living alongside each of them to attend to this process. Until now I had been more able to attend to relational responsibilities alongside each youth and her family. Now I had to see their lives differently. I struggled as I did this, not wanting to be caught within the dominant stories, stories that are so often told of Aboriginal youth and their families.

I did this process a number of times over the four months, and each time I shared my writing with my response groups. I reflected on the many conversations and responses that had taken place over the 3 years with my supervisors, with elders, colleagues, friends, and family members, as well as the weekly research issues table conversations and my works-in-progress groups. I drew together the understanding that had emerged in the process of narrative inquiry, where through telling, and retelling, and carefully reading and rereading the three accounts I discerned resonant threads.

Caine (2007) speaks to the idea of resonance as a “need to move beyond simply understanding, observing, seeing” (p. 143) and instead “demands a presence, to become vulnerable” (p. 143). So as I read and re-read the accounts I was attending to patterns I might note in the accounts but also to what was happening within myself as I read (Hoffman, 1994). I was seeking resonance and asking: What did the narratives evoke as I read them and which responses resonated across the three accounts? Conle (1996) describes how “our very thinking process moves metaphorically” (p. 310) and how the “internal resonance” that I was seeking is “dynamic and complex” (p. 310). Looking across the three accounts I attended to how each narrative reverberated in me as

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<sup>37</sup> The tensions are written about in detail in Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and often “emerge and reemerge as narrative inquirers attend to their experiences of moving from the close relational work with participants to beginning to represent their inquiries for a larger audience” (p. 49).

Conle (1996) speaks to when saying: “[i]t is common place to use the terms resonance for an echoing or resounding process in which something is produced in reaction and in response” (p. 299). I attended to the stories that were called forth in me, like an echo and thought about which of these echoes reverberated across the three accounts. The resonant threads, in this work, were the enduring themes that triggered my own remembered experiences as I read the three narrative accounts.

Reading across all three accounts, I first focused on the “individual narratives of experience” (Clandinin, 2009, p. 4) seeing Drew, Jayanna, and Barbara’s stories “lived and told from unique vantage points, in each [participant’s] unfolding plotlines” (p. 4) as I attended to temporality, the personal, the social and place. Each narrative account “called forth a resonant remembering of my own experiences” (p. 4) allowing me to continue to inquire into my own knowing about stories to live by. However, as I continued to read across all three accounts, I began to “sense the institutional, the social, the cultural narratives” (p. 4) that shape the lives of Aboriginal youth and families, and my own life whose stories are represented in these three accounts. Reading across the accounts I began to sense the resonant narrative threads that reverberated across and imagine possibilities for shifting the ways we, as educators, think about the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families, on and off school landscapes, as they negotiate who they are and are becoming.

### **Returning to Stories to Live By**

I begin by returning to the narrative conception of identity that informed this work. Clandinin et al. (2006) understand identity as “a unique embodiment of each [person’s] stories to live by, stories shaped by knowledge composed on landscapes past and present in which [each person] lives and works” (p. 9). Drew, Jayanna, and Barbara’s stories to live by were “multiple, fluid, and shifting [as they] continuously composed and re-composed [stories to live by] in the



moment-to-moment living . . . both on and off the school landscape” (p. 9). Their stories to live by also were composed and re-composed as they negotiated relationships alongside friends, family, teachers, administrators, and those they encountered on the multiple landscapes in which they lived. I engaged in this inquiry with an understanding, that in my experience, retelling and reliving stories, had changed my stories to live by and that a deeper understanding of stories to live by offered this “same possibility for change” (p. 9) in the lives of Aboriginal youth and families. I saw the potential for shifting the stories told to, by and about Aboriginal youth and families in relational and ethical ways.

### **Seeking narrative coherence.**

My doctoral work has been a search for deeper understanding of how stories told to by, and about, Aboriginal youth and families shaped their identities. I saw these stories, stories the participants told of themselves and that others would tell about them, as relatively stable, creating indelible marks upon Drew, Jayanna, Barbara and their families, or at least being carried around by them, shaping their experiences. But what I found instead was how the stories told to, by and about Aboriginal youth and families were more like storylines (Carr, 1986) which

combine to make up larger stories, or unrelated they [appear to] criss-cross and interrupt one another, sometimes hindering and sometimes contributing to one another’s progress. Elements of one . . . [appear to] be elements in another . . . [sometimes] by accident or design. (p. 98)

I began to more deeply understand how identity could be viewed as a searching for narrative coherence (Carr, 1986). This concept of narrative coherence, includes the idea that it is through self narration that we think about identity and what it is to be human (Kerby, 1991) and that the formal quality of experience through time can be understood as “inherently narrative” (Bruner, 1986, p. 291). It also includes understanding experience as a storied phenomena (Crites, 1971).

As I read across the three accounts, I began to better understand narrative identity as being dependent on the coherence and continuity that can be constructed as lives are composed (Carr, 1986; Kerby, 1991).

I saw the ways the three Aboriginal youth and their families “knit together” (Carr, 1986, p. 94) and render coherent and whole “the loose strands of [their lives]” (p. 94). I began to see Drew, Jayanna, and Barbara’s lives and the ways they constantly negotiated who they were and were becoming as Carr (1986) describes: “The unity of self, not as an underlying identity but as a life that hangs together, . . . not a pregiven condition but an achievement” (p. 97). Inquiring into our stories, Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, their families and I were “telling and retelling to ourselves and [now] to others, the story of what we are about and what we are” (Carr, 1986, p. 97). In this telling and retelling, as we each were seeking a story that held narrative coherence (Carr, 1986), we began by speaking about our past experiences, looking at them “in light of [their] connection to the present and future” (p. 98). From within this overarching concept of narrative coherence the first thread I discerned was that of a multiplicity of early landscapes.

### ***Thread 1: Multiplicity of early landscapes.***

I was often reminded about the ways Drew, Jayanna, and Barbara and their families were shaped by their early landscapes (Greene, 1995). I thought about the words of MacLeod (1998) who says that when Aboriginal people meet for the first time “Where are you from?” is the most common question (p. 58). As I wrote in Chapter 1, I know that question for it is one that I too have asked and have answered many times in my experiences; a question that not only calls forth early childhood stories, but also geographic places in which childhood is often situated. Looking back on the stories to live by that were formed during the childhood years, we also look, as MacLeod (1998) speaks of, to stories that locate us to our “roots, [our] family, [our] ancestors, [our] relations, [our] home, [our]

place” (p. 58). What seems to be asked in those moments is “Who are you?” As I engaged in my autobiographical narrative inquiry in my master’s research (Cardinal, 2010), I wrote extensively about how I learned to respond to those questions.

Returning to the stories of our early landscapes, involved a search for shapes of childhood that are not merely a “memory game” (Greene, 1995, p. 77), rather a kind of search “intended to restore a visibility to the shapes of a primordial, perceived landscape . . . making visible what has sunk out of sight, of restoring a lost vision” (p. 77). In the reading and rereading of the narrative accounts, and in the retelling I was able to see that, Jayanna, Drew, Barbara and I were “choosing to see past . . . childhood experiences in new ways (Greene, 1995) . . . [seeking to recognize how they] reveal the inner life of a girl inventing herself—creating the foundation of self-hood and identity”(hooks, 1996, pp. 119-120). This, I understood, had been no easy task as I realized that there are multiple early landscapes for each youth participant, landscapes that constantly shifted and continue to shift in their lives. They didn’t seem to return to the landscapes of their childhood in the ways that I had imagined they would.

For my own understanding of landscape, I looked to McLeod’s (1998) idea of “home . . . as mean[ing] to dwell within the landscape of the familiar” (p. 51). A landscape can include places of belonging. Early landscapes I likened to home places similar to what Caine (2010) speaks of when she recognizes “how critical the place of early home is to . . . identity formation” (p. 1305), to understanding who we are and are becoming. Thinking of landscapes in this way illustrates how stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) seem to be “rooted in geographic places and locations . . . that shape the images in [our] heads” (Caine, 2010, p. 1305). It is the geography of where we stood, part of the landscape (Basso, 1996), a place where our absence may have “left its marks” (Caine, 2010, p. 1305). It includes, in its multiplicity, places from which to “re-depart, a departure with different pauses and arrivals” (Minh-ha, 1991, p. 1305).

It includes also the places “where stories have already been lived and told that shaped the place” (Young et al., 2012, p. 17). Landscapes may also include places of unease where the memories of those moment, “linger in the landscape of . . . souls” (McLeod, 1998, p. 60). The experiences of Drew, Jayanna, Barbara and their families seemed to speak to this idea of geographic places, filled with people and experiences, and how these early landscapes might possibly have “become wedded to the landscape of the mind, to roving imaginations” (Basso, 1996, p. 107).

When I return to the narrative accounts seeking Drew’s early landscape stories I notice that I must consider the many moves that she made in her 17 years. There is no sense of her story as having a singular childhood place. She moved regularly within her biological family from very early on, and then within the foster care system, as she got older. Many of the moves took her to vastly different places, perhaps more akin to worlds as Lugones (1987) writes. Drew would inhabit these different worlds, and as she world traveled, she constructed images of who she was and what she was about, as well as constructed images of who others were and what they were about. (p. 14) A world can be described as “a construction of a tiny portion of a particular society” (p. 10), not necessarily the whole society. When I speak about Drew “world”-travelling I think about how Lugones (1987) describes this experience, saying “those of us who are ‘world’-travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different worlds and of having the capacity to remember other worlds and ourselves in them” (p. 11).

Drew, looking back to her childhood experiences, remembered a multiplicity of landscapes ranging from homes with her mom, and her Kokôm to moves in and out foster care, public schools, and other institutions where children in care might travel. Moving places physically was one thing, but Drew would also “world”-travel (Lugones, 1987, p. 11) finding herself at times in “worlds” where she might feel as if she was an outsider. Lugones (1987) talks about how a

“particular feature of the outsider’s existence [is that the] outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where she is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where she is more or less ‘at home’” (p. 3).

Cultural narratives are narratives that can live in our skin and in our bodies (Steeves, Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 230) and are often intergenerational. Cultural narratives “are not only embedded in the geographic places we are born into, or in the color of skin, but they come alive in the tensions on [diverse] landscapes [that can be] in contradiction with . . . youth’s stories to live by” (p. 230). Drew travelled from her Aboriginal family where the larger cultural narrative was embodied (kinship and familial relationship<sup>38</sup>) more than performed (as in traditional dress, dancing and food), to a Mormon foster family, whose cultural narratives would contradict what Drew embodied, and eventually to her non-Aboriginal adopted family where Drew would “world”-travel (Lugones, 1987) once again. As Drew’s early landscapes shifted multiple times over her life I got a sense that her cultural narrative as an Aboriginal person also became “interwoven with the places [she] was living, [at times noticing] the gangs, violence, and high rates of poverty” (Steeves et al., 2013, p. 231). Drew travelled to the vastly different “worlds” (Lugones, 1987), moving across multiple landscapes, more than she returned to an original landscape as Young (2003) did.

Jayanna also moved among multiple landscapes through many moves in her almost 15 years. She moved regularly between urban and rural landscapes, between maternal and paternal home places, as well as the homes of many other relatives on and off her familial Aboriginal home community. Her early landscapes also include regular movement between schools, sometimes a result of moving communities but sometimes a result of not finding a place of belonging in

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<sup>38</sup> “A cornerstone of Cree culture can be the backbone, the foundation of our culture. We are given substance, nurtured, and sustained by family. Kinship goes beyond family and is the connection we feel to the world at large and everything in it” (Marshall, 2001, p. 210) as cited in Steinhauer (2007, p. 8).

those schools and at other times being pushed to the margins within schools. Reflecting on Jayanna's early landscapes and remembering how we inquired into the landscapes that shaped the stories she tells of who she is, and is becoming, I note that there is not singular defining landscape that shapes her stories to live by. Instead there is a multiplicity of early landscapes and a need arising to inquire into the different ways the multiplicity of experiences on those differing landscapes shape the ways she lives in the "worlds" (Lugones, 1987). This way of looking backwards speaks to a need to reflect, a "rememory" (Greene, 1995, p. 82) as the only way to "become present to them" (p. 73). As Fournier and Grey (1997) remind us, an important Aboriginal teaching points out "we will not know where we are going, unless we know where we come from" (p. 207). I wonder now about the impact and the shaping influences when we come from a multiplicity of early landscapes?

While Barbara's moves appear less random and sporadic than Drew's or Jayanna's and always took place alongside her mother and her brother, her early landscapes were also ones of shift and change as they spanned provinces and in and out of urban communities, and Aboriginal reserves. While Barbara's early schooling experiences were mostly in the same urban setting, they included the family moving around the city, to a small town outside the city and back again. Even in Barbara's somewhat less varied early landscape stories I did not get a sense of one early defining landscape.

This looking to our past, and seeking our roots, is considered important for Indigenous researchers and for Aboriginal peoples as they negotiate who they are and are becoming and attend to familial responsibilities. Young (2003) speaks to Kerby's (1991) understanding of narratives as a "primary embodiment of our understanding of the world, of experience, and ultimately ourselves" (p. 21) as she looked back to her residential and school experiences and how they continued to reverberate in her life (Young, 2003). Inquiry into our early landscapes is important as "it reinforces and contributes to the person [we are] and . . . continue

to become” (Steinhauer, 2007, p. 5). As I seek resonances across the stories of the Aboriginal youth and families I awaken to how I had been thinking of these early landscapes as more singular, just as they seem to have been for many including Greene (1995) and Young (2003). How are our stories to live by, and the ways they shape who we are and are becoming, shifted when we look to our past, seeking our roots, and find them planted in a multiplicity of early landscapes?

I began to shift my understanding of early landscapes to include not only experiences like Young’s (2003) who speaks of how by “taking into account [her] original landscape, where [she came] from” she would be “truly present to [herself]” (p. 7) but also to include experiences like Drew’s, Jayanna’s, and Barbara’s early landscapes that did not have this “original” feel. I became awakened to the need for a different way of articulating this sense of returning to early landscapes, seeking roots when the seeking necessitates a return to multiple landscapes. Looking across the narrative accounts I see Barbara, Jayanna, and Drew engage in their search for narrative coherence (Carr, 1986). Their “constant effort, even struggle, to maintain or restore narrative coherence in the face of an ever-threatening, impending chaos at all levels” (p. 91), becomes much more complex when looking across early landscapes that are multiple and shifting. Thinking about this, I was drawn to the stories in the accounts where the youth also encountered multiple “worlds” in the ways Lugones conceptualized (1987).

### ***Thread 2: “World” travellers.***

The multiplicity of early landscapes seemed to have enabled the Aboriginal youth and their families to develop an embodied knowing (Johnson, 1989) of how to “world” travel in the ways Lugones (1987) speaks of. From their earliest landscapes they seem to have known they are world travelers in a multiplicity of “worlds” and know they are constructed differently in those worlds. They also know how they construct themselves in multiple worlds. In

some “worlds” they may not have understood or held “the particular construction of them that constructs them in that ‘world’” (p. 10), or it may be that the youth and families have understood the construction, but did not “hold it of [themselves]” (p. 10). But what was most interesting to think about was how they “may not [have accepted] it as an account of [themselves], a construction of [themselves]”, yet they may have been “*animating* [the] construction” (p. 10).

Huber et al. (2011) wrote that Lugones (1987) saw herself as needing to “travel” to different worlds, worlds in which she constructs herself and worlds in which she is “stereotypically” or “arrogantly” perceived or constructed by others” (p. 108). Lugones’ (1987) concepts of loving or arrogant perception, also resonated with the ways I wanted to think about how loving Aboriginal youth and families could also be inspired by a vision of [Aboriginal youth and families being] unharmed by “arrogant perception” (Lugones, 1987, p. 5). I saw promise in Lugones’ (1987) idea that to love Aboriginal youth and families, as Lugones speaks of loving women, is to “at least in part, perceive them with loving eyes” (p. 5). For Lugones, drawing on the work of Frye (1983), “the loving eye is contrary to the arrogant eye” (p. 5). Arrogant perception can be characterized by a failure to identify with them, a failure “to love, in this particular deep way” (Lugones, 1987, p. 4).

Experiences of travelling “between ‘worlds’ ... inhabiting more than one ‘world’ at the same time” (p. 10) is described by Lugones (1987) as being “part and parcel” of the “outsiders experience and situation” (p. 11). I understand that this experience is also part and parcel of Jayanna’s, Barabara’s, Drew’s and their families’ experiences as Aboriginal peoples. I return to Jayanna’s story, specifically to the experience where Jayanna and her family were constructed by the attendance board in ways that did not feel narratively coherent with who they saw themselves to be as a family. Jayanna and her family seemed to have entered into a world that was constructing them as stereotypically “Indian” in that they “acted out” (Carr, 1986, p. 96) the statistics of non-attenders and large blended



family homes while they were at the same time a family quite involved in the traditions of their Cree culture. This experience “being stereotypically [Indian] and simply [Cree] are different simultaneous constructions of [themselves] that are part of different ‘worlds’” (Lugones, 1987, p. 11). As I thought about the “distinct experience of being different in different ‘worlds’ and of having the capacity to remember other ‘worlds’ and ourselves in them” (p. 11) I remembered how very uneasy I felt about the stories constructed about Jayanna by the attendance board. I wondered how Jayanna and her family were feeling. When I spoke to Jayanna about it later, and her father at a later date, they both seemed to have experienced less unease than I had felt in that meeting. They appeared to have a sense of how they were being constructed, and had chosen to be more silent yet agreeable in the conversation, and had left the meeting understanding the different “worlds” they had inhabited simultaneously and did so with an embodied knowing of who they were as they left that day.

I had been thinking of these kinds of experiences, where the three Aboriginal youth and families seem to be awake to the ways they are being constructed, and the ways they are constructing who they are and are becoming in the different “worlds,” in deficit ways; as something the youth needed to overcome and build resilience to. I struggled with ways to speak to these experiences that resonated across the lives of the three youth and their families. I wanted to speak to them in ways that were hopeful and full of possibilities. Lugones (1987) talks about how some “worlds” we must enter at our own risk, because they have “conquest and arrogance as the main ingredients in their ethos” (p. 17). These worlds are entered only out of necessity. But she also speaks to worlds that we can “travel to lovingly and travelling to them is part of loving at least one of their inhabitants” (p. 17). I find hope in Lugones’ (1987) concept because she speaks to how “travelling to someone’s ‘world’ is a way of identifying with them” (p. 17) and beginning to understand “*what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in our eyes*” (p. 17, italics in original). In this way,

if we lovingly world travel to Aboriginal youth's and families' worlds, we begin to know those worlds, and "knowing them is part of loving them" (p. 17).

Across all three narrative accounts I sensed that being able to "world" – travel (Lugones, 1987) was something the youth and their families embodied, moving in and out of worlds their whole lives. For example, I wonder if the ways that Jayanna and her family were constructed in the world of the attendance board was a world which enabled them to travel within it in loving ways. My experience in this attendance board meeting was not of loving "world"-travel, for I could not understand the world the attendance board members inhabited. I felt as if Jayanna and her family were being constructed in arrogant and stereotypical ways, and that the attendance board members were unable to travel to the family's "world." As I look back and reflect on my experience in that meeting I understood more deeply the kind of "world" Lugones (1987) might have meant when she said some worlds have "conquest and arrogance as the main ingredients in their ethos" (p. 17). Or perhaps I was viewing the attendance board in arrogant ways because as the conversation remained focused on punishment and consequences, I could not find ways to shift it to a conversation about Jayanna's experience on the school landscape. I left the meeting feeling troubled while noticing the ease in which Jayanna and her family appeared to have "world"-traveled, with an understanding of how they had been constructed, but choosing not to see themselves in that way.

Reading the youth and families' stories in this way, as seeking coherence, through an embodied knowing of how to world-travel (Lugones, 1987), I began to see this as a gift. Reflecting on the concept of "world"-traveling (Lugones, 1987), as a way of being in the world, I saw the potential it held for deepening my understanding of the ways Aboriginal youth and families compose "lives that hang together" (Carr, 1986). I began to look at things as if they could be otherwise (Greene, 2007). I found such hope and possibility that I too "might come to a point of being yet otherwise than [I] have become. . . [and that] my

altered perspective might well enable [me] to break with a fixed and one dimensional view and look at things as if they too could be otherwise” (Greene, 2007, p. 2). I wonder how often I have missed looking at the worlds of Aboriginal youth in classrooms where I was positioned as teacher from this place of possibility.

Drew was very conscious of how she wanted to be constructed in the different worlds that she travelled. I recall the ease with which she entered into the club space, and how comfortable she seemed with whom she was in that space. As Drew shared stories of the multiple worlds she lived in, she unknowingly shared stories of the ways she lovingly world travelled (Lugones, 1987) and how she seemed to feel at ease in many worlds. I think about the stories of the multiple foster homes she lived in and how she animated constructions of herself that resonated or came from her imagining of who she was and was becoming.

Drew seemed to have an embodied knowing of how to “world”-travel, as she moved constantly within and between multiple worlds. This is not to say that she didn’t animate different constructions, choosing sometimes to embody the persona of tough Indian, and other times of choosing to construct herself as “not into culture and stuff.” I also am aware that sometimes she tried to “live out or live up to” (Carr, 1986, p. 96) others’ constructions of her when she was in a “world” with them. Looking across her account we see also how when her older sister moved and stopped attending the biological family visits, Drew was constructed as the big sister, and as such began to be the one who mediated the conversations, drawing out stories from her younger sister to share with their Kokôm. Animating this construction likely resonated with the relational way she lives in the world, however, she did share stories of not wanting to go visit sometimes, or requiring time to prepare and gather the energy she would need. She did this, seemingly with relative ease, and with an awareness of the ways

others constructed her and with an ability to decide how it is that she chooses to construct herself in the multiple worlds.

There is a sense that Drew's ability to world-travel is done with "loving perception" as she shows her "understand[ing of] what it is to be [someone else]" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17), and see the world from a different viewpoint. She is able to identify with others and understand "what it is to be them, and what it is to be [herself] in their eyes" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). This enables her to travel lovingly. An example of a stories Drew shared that speaks to the ways she lovingly world travelled is the story of when she moved to her Mormon foster home and she became Mormon. The way she told the story, I got a sense that she travelled to her foster family's worlds, and identified with who they were, seeing herself as they might have see her. She viewed them lovingly, and began to shift her stories to live by to include the construction of herself as Mormon, that is, she took on shifted stories as she entered this new world. I did not get a sense that she viewed her foster family arrogantly or in stereotypical ways because even now, years later, she continues to negotiate relationships with them even though she is no longer part of the Mormon faith.

Drew's narrative account contains many stories of experience where she lives relationally in the world, and seeks purposefully to world travel so as to attend to the unease of the others who inhabit the world with her. I think about how often she travels back and forth between her Aboriginal biological family, negotiating who she is and is becoming in that world and then back to her non-Aboriginal adoptive family where she re-negotiates who she is and is becoming in this world. While it is not tension free for her or the others who inhabit those worlds alongside of her, I have heard in her stories her desire, mostly, to be able to identify with others and understand "what it is to be them, and what it is to be [herself] in their eyes" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17).

With Jayanna I had the sense that she world travelled quietly, and tried to leave worlds where she felt dis/ease as soon as she could. She seemed to be

watchful, choosing how she would be constructed as she “world”-travelled, or withdrawing and seeking a way out of certain “worlds” if she did not like the ways she was being constructed or if she felt she was restricted from constructing herself as she wanted to be in that particular world. With Drew I had a sense of her being thoughtful, and travelling lovingly with intention, looking through other’s eyes and trying to live out their storied constructions of her.

With Barbara I got the sense that she moved more deliberately and with her body. When she travelled she animated a construction of herself that she envisioned either in reaction to the ways she felt she was being constructed or as she remembered who it was that she wanted to be or become. She did so by first shifting the ways her body moved and the ways she moved in the different worlds across which she travelled.

Looking across Barbara’s account, there is a sense that she was conscious and aware of the ways she moved and positioned her body in different worlds in order to animate different constructions of herself. She chose to sit closer to the front, away from friends and be quiet so as to have teachers like her and construct her as a good student. I recall how in her story of basketball Barbara was seeking to act out or live up to a construction of being aggressive in how she positioned herself on the basketball court. She also moved in ways that animated a vivacious, confident youth in the school world she inhabited and yet she would tell stories of being shy in her other worlds. She was also aware when she was being constructed in ways that she did not see herself as I recall the anger she felt upon hearing the residential school stories and trying to make sense of what these stories meant to how she constructed herself on a school landscape, and in the worlds that lived there.

While I understand the ability to world travel with loving perception as a gift, I also understand it is not easy, and it requires much energy and awareness. Every time Aboriginal youth and families walk into a room, before they can even attend to the purpose for which they enter or find themselves in that world, they

must understand how they are being constructed, who is in this world and how it is they choose to animate or resist being constructed in those ways. There were conversations with Barbara when I would notice how weary she was and how she seemed to want to just be still. She seemed to want to just be, and not to travel in those moments, preferring to stay in the world that she and I were constructing. Jayanna's way of being in worlds was with silences, and I had to watch her carefully and stay alongside for longer to be able to travel to her worlds. Each time Jayanna reentered a world that she felt uneasy in, it required enormous amounts of energy and sometimes she did not seem to have enough energy to return. Drew's forward looking stories constantly shifted as she constructed and reconstructed herself in different ways in the different worlds she travelled as she moved from her biological family to different foster families and as she moved on and off school landscapes. This required a wide awakeness (Greene, 1977). Drew, Jayanna, and Barbara have all inhabited multiple worlds and travelled in multiple worlds since birth. For Aboriginal youth and families, "outside the mainstream, . . . [world-travelling has become a] matter of necessity and of survival" (Lugones, 1987, p. 10). Through the stories of Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, and their families world-travel has also become an embodied way of being as they move in and out of multiple worlds seeking narrative coherence and constructing and reconstructing who it is they are and are becoming in these multiple worlds.

### ***Thread 3: Liminality.***

Barbara, Jayanna, and Drew continued to seek narrative coherence, while world travelling (Lugones, 1987). Many times Jayanna and her parents were constructed on the school landscapes as not valuing the importance of school and education as the reason for attendance issues. Yet, as Jayanna's mom and dad both shared with me their successful early schooling experiences and the familial narrative (Clandinin, 2013) of the importance of education, I understood that this construction by the attendance board was not coherent with the ways Jayanna and

her family constructed themselves. Familial narratives can be present in visible ways sometimes, as in the home or school, in conversations of their complex lives, or as they attended to their relational responsibilities (Steeves et al., 2013). From my experience at the attendance board meeting alongside of Jayanna and her family I became aware of their familial narrative as evidenced in the ways they seemed to work together, responding politely yet quietly agreeing, without debate with the attendance board members. There seemed to be a familial narrative of how to behave on the landscape of school. This shared familial knowing seemed to be a knowing which my years as a teacher had me unaware of at the time of the meeting. Neither my knowing as teacher, or graduate student, nor even had I been in that meeting as a family member, helped me to navigate the liminal space I found myself in during that meeting. It was a storyless place for me and I could only try to create a conversation as I had learned to do as a relational researcher. When this did not work I followed the example set by Jayanna and her family and eventually I too became quiet and agreeable until we could be set free.

My experience in the liminal space of that meeting helped me to understand how Jayanna might experience school at times. From our multiple conversations, and from my own conversations with her parents, I know they all share an understanding of the importance of an education, and yet despite this shared understanding Jayanna did not live the experiences of her parents and school in the same ways. Her experiences in schools were of liminality, where there was not a story she could draw upon to make sense of who she would be and become in multiple school worlds.

The three Aboriginal youth and families seemed to find themselves often in a state of liminality, to be poised upon uncertain ground (Heilbrun, 1999) to be leaving one world (Lugones, 1987) and entering into another. Heilbrun (1999) speaks to this state as one of unsteadiness, and lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or what one wants to be doing.

Jayanna also lived with a sense of liminality as she travelled between the “worlds” (Lugones, 1987) of her home places. She was forever reimagining the possibilities of what her life could be like and who she could be in the worlds that she travelled, in the different homes that she lived.

Elsewhere I explored my own experience of searching for narrative coherence within stories of the Indian I and others had in mind and always feeling that I was in a state of becoming, neither that Indian nor the other, instead somewhere betwixt and between (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 38). In this liminal space, a storyless place, I am unable to “draw upon my narratives of experience in ways that are meaningful to [me]” (Clandinin, 2013, personal conversation) and I often find myself “without a story to get me across” (Clandinin, 2013, personal conversation) to help me to find a place where I know the stories that shape the landscape. The liminal spaces Aboriginal youth and families find themselves in are “unique and in relation with their stories to live by, stories shaped by previous . . . experiences, multiple landscapes and family stories” (Mitton, 2008, p. 224). I do get the sense that liminal spaces exist in what Kennedy (2001) describes as a threshold or that “space between what was and what is to be” (p. 128). I also see how this space “creates both the time and space to play with possibilities not yet imagined” (p. 128). I have a sense that liminal spaces occupied by some Aboriginal youth and families can be spaces that are “between destinies” not “designed for permanent occupation” (Heilbrun, 1999, pp. 101–102).

Liminality existed for Drew as she lived as an Aboriginal youth in care, in non-Aboriginal foster homes. She too experienced the sense of living “betwixt and between” homes just as Jayanna and I had growing up. She seemed to have made these moves open to the possibilities of who she could become in these storyless spaces. I recall the story she shared about moving to a new foster home and telling her sister not to unpack. She had a sense that they were there only temporarily, and so she seemed to have learned to live on multiple landscapes without unpacking her bags. Now that she has become a permanent member of



her adoptive family she no longer lives literally betwixt and between homes however she does regularly visit her bio family, in part because it is mandated in policy that she be encouraged to maintain connections to her Cree culture and because of her desire to remain connected. In this way she continues to live on the threshold, not leaving one “world” (Lugones, 1987) and way of being, while still moving forward, onto the threshold of her new non-Aboriginal adoptive family, inhabiting their “world”. Drew experienced anger, and frustration at a life full of scheduled movement back and forth between multiple worlds, but she also seemed to understand the possibilities that existed for her to “write [her] own lines and, eventually, [her] own plays” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 102) in liminal spaces. Her desire to create a sense of belonging and permanence, metaphorically crossing the threshold into her new family, could be seen as she created the family tattoo and participated in the adoption ceremony. Drew seemed to be always striving towards “horizons of what might be” (Greene, 1995, p. 3) and seemed to embrace the “unsteadiness and lack of clarity about exactly where [she] belongs and what [she] should be doing, or what [she] wants to be doing” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 3). She saw the freedom offered as an opportunity to write up new lines and new plays (Heilbrun, 1999), telling and retelling the story of who she is and is becoming.

Barbara appeared to live in this liminal space as a performer. She seemed to have a sense of the unlimited possibilities of who she could be and become in spaces of uncertainty. When she entered into a “world” (Lugones, 1987) where she found herself in a storyless place (Clandinin, 2013, personal conversation) she seemed to be able to find a story of who she wanted to be and performed her way across the multiple worlds that she travelled. She wrote her own story, while seeming to also try to honor the narratives of her mom and her Kokôm who wished to be silent about the intergenerational reverberations (Young, 2005; Young et al., 2010) that brought the traumas of the past into the lives of the youth today. I got the sense that she stood upon the thresholds of different “worlds”

(Lugones, 1987), and then when she had a story that resonated, she performed who she would be in temporary, not meant for permanent occupation kinds of spaces. I used to feel this standing upon thresholds with a deep yearning to cross and belong to one or the other but as I looked across the stories of Aboriginal youth and families I noted what a skill to be able to live and enjoy the possibilities that exist in liminal spaces.

Just as Huber (2008) saw in the stories of her participant Muskaan, I began to see liminal spaces as places where the youth embody Lugones' (1987) understanding of playfulness, while world-travelling, in that the potential exists for not confining themselves to worlds where all the rules and outcomes are known, but rather being "open to uncertainty, willing to take risks, and engage in "self construction or reconstruction" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17).

#### ***Thread 4: Embodied knowing.***

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) "suggest that our identities are composed and improvised as we go about the living of our lives embodying knowledge and engaging in our contexts" (p. 4). Therefore, when I thought about liminal spaces as storyless spaces, and the relentless seeking of narrative coherence, of a life that hangs together (Carr, 1986) I wondered how Drew, Jayanna, Barbara and their families experienced those storyless spaces in relation to their need for things to make sense, in relation to their stories to live by. To understand more deeply I return to the experience I had of sitting across Drew, Jayanna, or Barbara, usually in a local restaurant booth, as I asked them to tell me the words that came to mind when they thought about the words: Cree, Aboriginal, Native or Indian. For all three youth, this task seemed to be very difficult for them. I recalled most vividly the long periods of silence, especially when engaging in this activity with Jayanna. Feeling uneasy with the long silence, as I sat across from her as she contemplated my request, my instinct had been to stop her and tell her we would just do something different. But the intensity with which she had been trying to

figure out what words she could comfortably give me was evident in her body. By keeping my silence, I acknowledged her efforts. She sat still and quiet, holding the pen in her hand as she looked off in the distance, across the restaurant, seeming to search but not find. I remembered feeling as if I was so out of sync with Jayanna. In my body I knew I was missing something, but I could not bring to consciousness what that unease was illuminating. What I came to understand from those kinds of uneasy moments was how important it was to attend to bodies, because my wonders about their stories to live by didn't seem to live inside of the words, and the language we could find. It seemed to live inside of our experiences and also the experience of being together and attending to our embodied knowing.

I am also reminded of the stories Clandinin, Steeves, and Caine (2013) told about one of their participants who reminded them that “cultural narratives live in our skins and personal lives . . . Anyone can see that I’m Native” (p. 230) I thought about how much, whether we like to attend to this or not, who we are is first noticed by others as they look at our bodies, our skin. For Jayanna who used to Powwow<sup>39</sup> dance, and attend the traditional Cree sweat ceremonies, her body expressed who she was as a Cree person and her body also was what she used when she wanted to be otherwise. I can recall asking her how she responded to her new teacher’s questions about her old school. At that time she gave the name of a former city school, not the reserve school. When I asked *why* she simply replied that this teacher would not know where the reserve was, she didn’t feel like explaining and because she was light skinned it was likely the teacher, nor the students in this new school would know she was native, or that she might have come from a reserve.

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<sup>39</sup> “Powwow - The traditional gathering of [Aboriginal] people and tribes involving singing, drumming, dancing, craftwork, trading and food” (Powwow, n.d.).

For Barbara, when I asked when she first realized that she was native<sup>40</sup> she replied saying “I noticed when my skin began to turn brown.” Even at a young age she noticed how her body told stories about who she was. The color of her skin did not come up specifically in the narratives of Drew, however she did share a story of constructing herself, or at least wanting to appear as if she was constructed as “tough Indian.” Drew spoke to how she and her “albino white” friend would rely on Drew appearing visibly Aboriginal to offer a sort of protection. They imagined anyone walking near them downtown, would construct Drew as *tough Indian*, a construction they knew many Aboriginal people to animate and one that resulted in a protective barrier.

I realize now how much I didn’t attend to the stories our bodies told about who we were and were becoming. While I worried about how others would construct Aboriginal youth and families based on the shade of their skin, I had not really thought about how it is that we, Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, their families, and I do this as well to ourselves.

My wonders about the body and the knowing that lives in bodies did not live only on the surface. I thought also about embodied knowing in other ways. Sometimes our bodies are telling a story we are not yet awake to. Sometimes our bodies are telling us something is shifting. I wondered about what other ways Aboriginal youth’s embodied knowing (Harding, 1991; Grumet, 1995; Johnson, 1989) was silenced or ignored and what remained unattended. Embodied knowing, Grumet (1995) explains as “ways of being and acting in the world” (p. 17) and when we educate someone “we are introducing that person . . . to ways of being and acting . . . that are new to his [or her] experience” (p. 17). This kind of knowing is more than “merely a matter of beliefs held and decisions made; instead it is people’s way of experiencing their worlds, and it involves sensory experiences, bodily interactions, moods, feelings, and spatio-temporal orientations” (Johnson, 1989, pp. 362–363). I wanted to inquire into the ways

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<sup>40</sup> The term she and the other youth often used in reference to themselves or their families

that embodied knowing, “the very way they construct their reality as they live it through their embodiment, with all its tempos, moods, patterns and projections” (Johnson, 1989, p. 372) had been silenced, ignored or unattended to. Embodied knowing, not always part of conscious memory, “is evoked by context, place, and time” (Caine, 2010, p. 1305). I thought about embodied knowledge that Bruno (2010) spoke to that I saw enacted in the youth and families’ ethics of care. “The ethics of relationships and community are an embodiment of knowledge that reflects Nehiyawak (Cree Peoples) values. Cree knowledge is a way of living. It is embodied in who we are as Cree people” and I have come to understand how “for many [including Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, and their families] . . . there [was not always a] comfortable place for this way of living in a [schooling] environment” (Bruno, 2010, Abstract). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note “[i]n narrative inquiry, people are looked at as embodiments of lived stories” (p. 49).

As Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, their families and I negotiated our way into relationships there was a deeper awareness of the ways our bodies told stories of who we are and are becoming. There were stories that we only came to know as we began to attend to embodied knowing, when I began to see ourselves as “embodiments of lived stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 43). Huber’s words in *Warrior Women* (Young et al., 2012) highlight the “urgent need to hear the experiences” (p. 158) embodied in Aboriginal people. I understood her sense of the need to understand the “embodied knowing” of the lived experiences of Aboriginal youth and families because there is a “difference between knowing something of [the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families] in your head and being able to understand the experience in your heart” (Young et al., 2012, p. 158). I wondered how we can move, as Huber did, “away from a head understanding to a heart understanding or a whole body understanding” (p. 158).

## **Looking Back**

The narrative conception of identity that informed this narrative inquiry and my experiences alongside of Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, and their families have informed my understanding of the ways stories to live by shift and are negotiated in the search for narrative coherence, in the search for a life that hangs together. I also awakened to the intensity of the emotions that well up when it doesn't. There was anger and disbelief in Barbara when she was interrupted by the residential school story. I felt alongside of Jayanna the angst of being in a school, which in that moment felt unwelcoming, and constructed us in ways that neither of us felt at ease. Their constructions of us were so sharply different than our own. I watched as Drew constantly sought out ways to create narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) as she moved within the foster care system, and now between her bio family and her adopted family.

Looking across all three accounts I have come to understand stories to live by as a search for coherence and the possibilities that exist in Aboriginal youth and families' lives as we seek a deeper understanding of embodied knowing, the multiplicity of early landscapes, world travelling and living in liminality and begin to understand them in less deficit and trouble some ways.

## **Chapter 7: A Reflective Turn**

Looking backwards, I can see that when I first began this narrative inquiry I was leading with my head and searching for words, stories, and theoretical considerations that offered explanations to understand identities. As part of this, I was looking for explanations of what it is to live as an Aboriginal person carrying the grand narratives and stereotypical stories that had shaped my stories to live by, the *Indian in mind* stories (King, 2003). Once I engaged in field work, the explanations remained relevant, but I also needed to travel new horizons. It is true as Bateson (1990) says, “[t]oday, materials and skills from which a life is composed are no longer clear” (p. 2). While she is speaking of women I say also that it is no longer possible for Aboriginal youth and families “to follow the paths of previous generations” (p. 2). Instead there is the possibility and potential for “imagin[ing] how things might be otherwise” and, in so doing, bring “into being that which is not yet” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 175). My own understanding of identity, as stories to live by, has deepened through this narrative inquiry process. What I have come to understand is that to be myself “is to be in a process of creating a self, an identity” (Greene, 1995, p. 20). It is this idea of a process, a process that involves seeking narrative coherence, of always becoming, and of attending to our embodied knowing, that shapes the ways I have come to think about stories to live by.

### **Becoming – A Personal Justification**

I am drawn to Elder Mary Cardinal-Collins’ words as we talked about how the ways the youth constructed themselves changed and shifted over time and in diverse context and places. She explained to me how this was as it should be, because the youth “are not formed yet” (Cardinal-Collins, 2013, personal conversation). These words resonate because when I asked Drew, Jayanna, and Barbara to create an identity collage, or to write words that described who they were, or to fill an outline of their body creating a shape poem of words describing

who they were, I did not hold this sense of becoming as an ongoing process. In these activities it felt as if I were trying to pin down a construction of the youth that was made up of words so that I could name, label, and inquire into the stories they told of who they were instead of trying to understand the stories of who they were becoming. I was trying to write about experiences but I seemed to always write one step behind the living and was frantically trying to catch up.

### **The possibilities of liminality.**

Writing one step behind the living and trying to articulate in words a way of being that lived in the body kept me, as researcher, in liminality. I understand liminality as a storyless space (Clandinin, 2013, personal conversation). As I became aware of this storyless space I began to take a reflective turn. Thinking back to the earliest stages of the research I recall how I struggled to be a researcher in the afterschool arts club. My body yearned to animate the teacher that I had been for over 13 years. When I began to have one-on-one conversations with Drew, Jayanna, and Barbara, I had little experience to guide me. As I began negotiating a relationship with an Aboriginal girl who was not my child, nor my grandchild, not a niece nor a cousin I felt myself to be in a liminal space, without a story to get me across. I felt that the relational ties, the stories to live by, of who I usually am in the life of a youth were difficult to draw on. The only possible stories I could hold onto in the club space and in those early conversations were those of a teacher.

As the inquiry progressed and I continued to work alongside a team of researchers I became aware of how the stories of teacher that I embodied might not be embodied in the same ways in the other researchers. In this way I was able to see and hear stories of other ways of being in the afterschool arts club and alongside of participants. It was only as I began to release my need for certainty that I became aware of the times the knowing I held as teacher was shaping my conversations and planned activities in ways that I had not intended. Eventually I



began to imagine other ways of being alongside of youth on and off school landscapes. As I was able to respond to my and their embodied knowing (Crites, 1971; Grumet, 1995; Harding, 1991; Johnson, 1989) about how to live in relational ways I began to see possibilities in a storyless, liminal space. I was beginning to see the possibilities of what had not yet even been imagined. Once I understood that living in liminality offered endless possibilities as to how we could be in relation I began to be and see differently.

### **Knowing in the body.**

There were many times when my body reminded me of my relational responsibilities as a narrative inquirer. When I noticed a shift in my body, or I saw a photo of myself, I realized how unconscious I was at times of things my body knew first. With my hands on my hips stance, or a scowl that furrowed my brow, or the turning of my back on certain moments, certain sights, I had to attend to the awareness that in the afterschool arts club, a space both in the school yet outside of it, many things bumped up against what I had learned to expect on school landscapes from my 13 years of experience as a teacher. There was an embodied knowing of the rhythms of school (Clandinin, 1989), rhythms that had not always been sustaining but still rhythms my body had known well and still very much remembered. In the afterschool arts club I continued to perform my teacher self and have only awoken now to how I have not always paid attention to the knowing held in my body.

### **Future wonders.**

It is important that I continue to build on these new understandings; they bring forth new wonders. I am especially intrigued with the importance of bodies and how they move in spaces and how I “world”-travel (Lugones, 1987) by attending to my embodied knowing. This embodied knowing is what I also draw on when I find myself in liminal spaces. I am drawn to the silences in the

conversations, where communication took place with shifting bodies and changing breath patterns, and non-verbal cues. While embodied, lived stories may never “be fully and directly told, because they live, so to speak, in the arms and legs and bellies” (Crites, 1971, p. 295) I seek a deeper understanding and imagine further inquiry.

I imagine inquiry into ways to understand embodied knowing, the ways people move in and out of spaces, and the reading of silences in ways that shift the possibilities in relational spaces. I am also interested in a deeper understanding of the ways that narrative inquiry, a relational research methodology and phenomena (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), can help to honor and validate the knowing that exists and is expressed in bodies and in the silences of Aboriginal youth and families. Because I stayed alongside Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, and their families over 3 years, this over-time-ness (Steeves, 2000) allowed me to begin to see the shifts and changes in the youth and in myself. I understand the need for inquiry over time to continue inquiring into the ways Aboriginal youth animate or perform different constructions of themselves.

### **The Indian we have in mind.**

My research was focused on a deeper understanding of what stories Aboriginal youth and families tell of who they are and are becoming, and how other stories (cultural, familial, community, and school stories), especially those of *the Indian in mind*, influence or shape their stories of becoming. I had been drawn to this puzzle as I inquired into my own stories, including the stories that exist in the shadows; the ones that I had only recently come to understand. In this inquiry I began to understand how *Indian in mind* stories are woven within institutional, social, and cultural narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that shape the lives of Aboriginal youth and families. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) point out:

[T]he focus of narrative inquiry is not only a valorizing of individuals' experience but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted – but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. (p. 42)

Through the inquiry I was able to see the ways the stories the youth and families told and lived were indeed continuing to be shaped by *Indian in mind* stories contained within the larger social, cultural, and institutional narratives. For example, the Indian in mind shows up in the narratives of the youth as they respond to the social narratives of alcohol, teen pregnancy, the over-representation in foster care, and large broken/blended family living arrangements that they have come to know.

The *Indian in mind* also is visible in the cultural narratives, as I noticed how all three youth, and perhaps even I, seemed to seek stories of what Cree, Aboriginal, Native, or Indian meant to us. Stereotypical, although still at times authentic, stories of culture arose throughout the inquiry. When I think about which institutional narratives shaped the stories told to, by, and about the three Aboriginal youth and families in this research, I am brought back to the institutional narrative of truant Indian and parental disengagement. This institutional narrative was very prevalent within Jayanna's stories and very much shaped the stories she could tell and the ways she was constructed on school landscapes. I also recall the times Drew articulated her reluctance to attend a Native school because the institutional story was that of lower standards, more violence, and poor academic results. I also became very aware of the influence of historical institutional narratives such as Residential Schools, and the ways the youth, particularly Barbara and her family, and even myself, had to negotiate how it was that we could tell stories of who we are and are becoming in relation to historical experiences.

I became aware of how often the Indian I had in mind shaped the activities and conversations I engaged in alongside the youth and families. It was most noticeable when I asked Drew, Jayanna, and Barbara to take a photo or give me words to illustrate what came to mind when they thought about the words Cree, Aboriginal, Indian, or Native. They seemed to want to give me the Indian they imagined, or maybe understood, who I had in mind. As beer, young mothers, and residential school came to mind for Drew she wasn't comfortable bringing them to me. Joelle, Drew's foster mom, explained that she thought it was because they were negative stereotypical images of Indians. I wonder now what Drew imagined was the Indian I had in mind. Or maybe it is about how this image, her Indian in mind, didn't resonate with how she was constructing herself or constructing me alongside of her and so the unease kept her from bringing them forward.

I think about Barbara and the collage of Google images she found to illustrate what came to mind for her and the description she included for each image. She chose images that included a canoe, a tipi, moccasins, a traditional drum, and some beadwork. When I asked her to explain why she chose them she said "because they remind me of the natives from the olden days" or "I saw them in a movie about natives." She was articulating the Indian she had gleaned from textbooks and movie images. From her words I understood that these images did not resonate with what she thought she was about (Carr, 1986) and who she was becoming.

Jayanna, given the same task, drew on words that had once made sense to her and how she and her family constructed themselves. She wrote, *a feather, powwow dancing, moccasins, and a drum*. As I observed the very slow and intense process it was for her to think about and write down these four words I realized how they were likely coherent with the Indian she had in mind of a family who participates in the traditions of powwow dance and drumming as well as traditional ceremonies. She understood the significance of each word in her familial stories but on that day, a time when she was not dancing and had not

participated in ceremony in a long time, they may not have resonated. I wondered how the significance of these words might shift over time for her. Did she too seek out words that she imagined I wanted to find in her stories of Native, Cree, Aboriginal, and Indian?

I had not understood how much the *Indian I had in mind*, and the *Indian(s)* the Aboriginal youth and families had in mind would shape the research conversation and the ways we would live alongside of each other. As I began to move from a mind seeking understanding to a heart and whole body understanding (Young et al., 2012, p. 158) and I began to listen with three ears: two on the sides of [my] head and the one that is in [my] heart” (Archibald, 2008, p. 8), I was able to experience new understandings and to think of stories to live by as a process of becoming. Only then could I understand that even as we sat across from each other sharing a meal together, we were always becoming. The stories we told of who we were and were becoming shifted constantly throughout the 3 years together. What I understood in ways that I had only begun to think about in my previous work, was that we all do have an *Indian in mind* and these stories, carried by people of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage alike, shape the ways we live and are able to “world”-travel lovingly (Lugones, 1987). I understand now, as I near the end of this research project, how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people “really are dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood” (p. 10) and how essential this understanding is.

### **Future wonders.**

At the same time as my sense of becoming was shaped, I began to reflect upon my need to attend to how the imposed rhythms of bell times, rules, and regulations hindered my ability to attend to the lives of the youth and families in my classroom. My personal experience as a Cree/Metis child, youth, woman, mother, aunty, and grandmother have shaped the ways I hear and think about the stories the youth and families shared with me. I think about how my teacher

policy on attendance was not very different than the attendance board. I too imagined non-attendance as merely a choice while I tried to cajole and bribe children into coming, awarding good attendance. I too sent letters to the office asking for the attendance board to get involved. I imagined I lived out this story of school because school, while not always a place without tensions, was always a place I loved to be. I got myself up and to school, with or without adult guidance, for most of my life. What I had never questioned was: why did I think that school should take precedence over anything else that was going on in my/their lives? It is these early schooling experiences, and my own understanding of what it means to me to be Aboriginal, that shaped my practice. Future inquiries will also need to continue to identify the larger narratives and inquire into how they shape the stories to live by of Aboriginal youth and families. This kind of inquiry, “involves making what once was . . . invisible and operating below the surface, visible, in ways that allow these experiences to be represented again in productive rather than reproductive (or worse, insidious) ways” (Iftody, 2013, p. 383).

### **Becoming a Teacher Educator – A Practical Justification.**

I wonder now what kinds of questions must we begin to ask in schools as we inquire into the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families when we consider Lugones’ (1987) concept of world travel. While I have always been uneasy with the statistically dismal grand narratives that shape the stories told to and about Aboriginal youth and families, they do speak to the inequities Aboriginal people as a population still experience. I wonder about the ways policies and practices are shaped by the grand narratives. Taking these new understandings and wonders into my journey as a teacher educator I think about how:

The narratives I have encountered in my journey have made it possible for me to conceive patterns of being as my life among others has expanded: to

look through others' eyes more than I would have and to imagine being something more than I have come to be. (Greene, 1995, p. 77)

Near the end of my studies, as I thought about my forward looking stories<sup>41</sup> (Clandinin et al., 2006; Lindemann Nelson, 1999), I began to imagine staying on this landscape of post-secondary education, not as a student, but alongside pre-service teachers and graduate students as they begin “to look through others’ eyes more than [they] would have and to imagine being something more than [they] have come to be” (Greene, 1995, p. 77).

As I write this last chapter I am simultaneously planning my first university course informed by the understandings and teachings that I have come to know. As I continue to attend to the questions of so what, knowing that I have spoken extensively to the personal justifications, situating myself in the study, and speaking to the ways I too have been shaped by the research, I too think about the practical aspects, about how I find it “insightful [in] changing [and] thinking differently about [my] own and others’ practices” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 25).

As I prepare to teach my assigned courses I return to my original wonders as a Masters’ student 5 years ago and must once again think about how it is that literature shapes the stories told to, by, and about Aboriginal youth and families. What I have come to know now is that once I was thinking only about the youth and forgetting that “[f]amilies are webs [and it is impossible] to touch one part of it without setting the rest vibrating” (Setterfield, 2006, p. 59). I was thinking only about how literature that depicted Aboriginal people in certain ways shaped the stories of the youth. I had not attended to the ways they resonated and reverberated into the homes, often bumping up against familial curriculum making (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). I think about how Swanson (2013) speaks to her experiences “composing stories to live by as a Cree-Metis person in

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<sup>41</sup> I have now begun my academic position as an assistant professor in the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta.

three different worlds, the school curriculum-making world, university curriculum-making world, and the familial curriculum-making world” (p. 35) and how at times the experiences in each world bumped up against each other as she awakened to how she was imposing her “school and university curriculum making of Metis people” onto her granny’s stories (p. 35).

It is mandated in Alberta schools that Aboriginal history and perspectives be included in the kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum (Alberta Education, n.d.a). While I agree with this policy, what I understand now is that the ways in which this is attended to must be given careful thought and consideration. As the youth in the social studies class were watching an award winning video clip about residential schools, Barbara told me how her friend would not even look at the movie. She kept her head down. I also recall noticing the agitation in Barbara’s body as she walked into our lunch meeting still upset from the video clip. She had not known about residential schools in the way depicted by the video clip and she was struggling to find coherence as to how this shaped the stories she told of who she and her family were and were becoming. Had we educated teachers to attend to the bodies in that classroom, seeing who was being impacted, the video clip might have been presented in more carefully thought out ways. Had there been opportunities for pre-service teachers to inquire into what it means to lovingly “world”-travel, there might have been a deeper understanding of the ways the legacy of residential schools continues to reverberate (Young et al., 2012) in the lives of the Aboriginal youth and families.

As a teacher educator, returning to the world of words and books, having just understood stories to live by as always becoming, I think about the ways pre-service teachers experience the activities and resources that will become a part of the class, and especially the ways they might reverberate and set the rest of the family vibrating (Setterfield, 2006). I also begin to imagine situations where I am more attentive to possibilities of creating educative experiences in which the pre-service teachers can move from a head understanding to a heart and whole body



understanding (Young et al., 2012). As I think about this, I think not only about the situations full of educative potential that pre-service teachers might create in their own future classrooms, but also the experiences they may have in my course. As I imagine this I see future students just as Greene (1987) views the elementary school child:

I see the [elementary school] child and [pre-service teachers] as . . . veritable image[s] of becoming, of possibility, poised to reach towards what is not yet, towards a growing that cannot be determined or prescribed. I see [them] and I fill the space with others like [them], risking, straining, wanting to find out, to ask their own questions, to experience a world that is shared. (Commencement address, Bank Street College)

### **Living the imagined.**

To begin to imagine what this might look like in the post-secondary classroom I turn to the work of Huber, Caine, Huber, and Steeves (2013) and begin to think about the possibilities embedded in narrative inquiry as pedagogy to create educative experiences for pre-service teachers. From my work alongside of Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, and their families I now think of these educative situations as ones that allow inquiry into stories to live by. Teachers too will need to look back to their early landscapes. There will be the need for teacher educators and pre-service teachers to “world”-travel, to learn to “*be* through loving each other”(Lugones, 1987, emphasis in the original, p. 8). This kind of experience cannot come from inquiry only into the written word, the literature, and engaging with theory; it must include continued inquiry into experiences and how those experiences shape stories to live by.

As I enter into the field of Aboriginal education from this new vantage point as teacher educator I understand that “I cannot blindly follow the paths of the previous generations” (Bateson, 1990, p. 2). Instead I must begin to consider

how I can build on and move forward from the work that has been done, and I must continue to see, for me and the students who will enter into classrooms where I am positioned as teacher, the possibility and potential for “imagining how things might be otherwise” and in doing so bring “into being that which is not yet” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 175). There cannot be a prescribed set of educative situations because each new pre-service teacher brings their own stories to live by as they learn to live on a landscape with me, their classmates, and the literature and resources designed for Aboriginal youth and families. I understand that I must shift the ways I think about liminality and “world”-travel in less troublesome and deficit ways and shift my, and others’, understanding to imagining places of possibility.

There is a need for teacher educators and pre-service teachers to seek ways to honour and understand embodied stories (Crites, 1971). I too am reminded of Clandinin and Connelly’s (1998) concept of teacher knowledge “as embodied in persons” [teacher educators, pre-service teachers and their students]” knowing that they are “context-dependent, [a] weaving [of] live experiences, both the personal and professional, together and as moral and emotional knowledge” (p. 14). As space is made in pre-service classrooms for this knowing, teacher educators and pre-service teachers must also learn to live in liminality as they come together in “places of [possible] tensions, threshold spaces” between “what was and what is to be” (Kennedy, 2001, p. 28). It is this way I imagine education that “signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, moving. It signifies the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out for meaning, a learning to learn” (Greene, 2001b, p. 7) about how to attend to the lives of the Aboriginal youth and families on the landscape of school.

### **Future wonders.**

Further inquiry into the experiences of teachers alongside of Aboriginal youth and families is needed. An inquiry into the possibilities that exist when teachers inquire into their narrative beginnings alongside of Aboriginal youth and families would help to deepen our understanding about the ways relationships are negotiated on that landscape between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers, and families, thinking especially about the ways mandated policies and curriculum shape these negotiations.

### **Striving Toward Horizons on School Landscapes**

I remain awake to the complexities of the lives of Aboriginal youth and families whose narratives cannot have “single strand[s] . . . [for they] stand at the crossing point of too many social and cultural forces” (Greene, 1995, p. 1). I think about the larger social and educational issues that have been informed by the understandings that I have come to know. Thinking about the larger social and educational issues I am drawn once again to the moment when I stood alongside Jayanna and her family in the attendance board hearing. I began to think about attendance and late policies in schools and the policies of larger educational districts and how those policies seem to be attending to something unrelated to students’ experiences in school. Jayanna, her parents, and I tried to make sense of Jayanna’s experiences in school, but at the attendance board hearing the conversation revolved around the statistical data about lates and absences and the mandated options for what consequences could be implemented to change the statistical data. What seemed to be missing was a discussion about Jayanna’s experience or any discussion about the schooling environment. Inquiry beyond the statistics in the attendance reports and the grand narratives of Aboriginal youth and families is needed to begin to see big (Greene, 1995); to see big in the ways that attend to “integrity and particularity” (p. 10) while also

allowing for a conversational spaces that attends to the lives of Aboriginal youth and families, and their experiences within the schooling landscape.

### **Living the imagined.**

Thinking about schooling from the point of view of Jayanna, Drew, Barbara, and their families and being alongside them over the past 3 years there were many moments where I awoke to policies and ways of being within school landscapes that I believed in over my 13 years of teaching. I had to self-face and realize how asleep I had often been as a teacher. There had been a sense of unease and an understanding that my life as a teacher was no longer coherent and was not hanging together (Carr, 1986). What I did not realize was how my embodied knowing of living in relation was bumping up against how I was living as teacher, pulled by policies, routines, structure, regulations, and standardized provincial achievement test scores.

Living alongside Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, and their families I had to begin thinking more deeply about the taken-for-granted policies I followed. I began to question the ways I attended to attendance, seeking to understand why, not merely recording and finding a suitable consequence when the desired perfect attendance was not attained. Being a part of the attendance board hearing I think about how some of the possible consequences: monetary fines, withholding of privileges, removal from the home, and the intrusive feel of the legal often punitive measures seem so irrelevant as we think about families who, as in the case of Jayanna, are seeking ways to understand her experiences on the school landscape. I realize now that as I filled out those forms reporting the attendance issue, I had not understood how much I was shaping lives. I had not understood the impact I was having on the lives of youth and families when, by filling out truancy forms, I had introduced a legal entity into their lives. While I don't disregard the importance of attendance, I see how little effort I made in creating safe conversational spaces for the youth and families to understand their and our experience. I always

viewed attendance as a choice. The youth and their families were choosing not to attend. I realize now, the reasons behind attendance required a deeper and more thoughtful inquiry. I was privileging the schooling over the familial curriculum making, and by enforcing policies based solely on the number of days missed I was stifling the possibilities of creating a curriculum of lives (Clandinin et al., 2006) within my classroom. A curriculum of lives “is shaped [in part] as children’s and teacher’s diverse lives meet in schools . . . [and as] children’s and teacher’s stories to live by bump up against stories of school and school stories” (p. 135). Instead, I was privileging school curriculum and silencing the lives of the youth and families. What I have come to know now is that classrooms need to be educative spaces where the curriculum of lives (Clandinin et al., 2006) begin with the children and include the familial web to which they belong.

### **Future wonders.**

My focus in this research was on the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families. I purposely did not inquire into the stories of teachers and policy makers as to the ways the *Indian in mind* shaped the programs and policies they implemented in schools. There is a need to inquire into the experiences of teachers, pre-service teachers, and policy makers seeking to articulate and understand the ways the Indian they and others have in mind shapes their policy and practice. I wonder about the experiences of educators and policy makers and the stories that formed the ways they construct themselves alongside of Aboriginal youth and families and the stories and experiences that shaped the Indian they have in mind. I think about the ways different policies are experienced, as at times it feels as if some policies are speaking to an *Indian in mind*.

## **Becoming As a Researcher – A Social Justification**

I understand a narrative conception of identity as stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). This knowing, an embodied knowing, has begun to shift the ways I think about who I am and am becoming as a researcher who is Cree/Metis. I understand now that as I lived alongside of Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, and their families the ways I animate the Indigenous (Cree/Metis) researcher I had in mind shifted as I “world”-travel lovingly. I have come to understand the possibility that can exist when living in liminality and honoring embodied knowledge. As I engage in research inquiring alongside of participants, I understand that I am being constructed by my participants, and it is only through relationship that I will come to understand what it is to “be through looking through each others’ eyes” (Lugones, 1987, p. 17).

The ways I am constructed will be different as I speak to the larger research community of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers as a narrative inquirer bringing the embodied knowing and understanding of stories to live by that shape who I am and am becoming. As I am trying to move tentatively as Jayanna did; trying to be thoughtful like Drew; moving towards a performance of the possibilities, trying them on and animating them as Barbara did, I will feel the weight of the *Indian in mind* upon my movements.

I am not unaware of the complexity of the issues that surround Aboriginal people. King (2012) has articulated this as he describes three kinds of Indians. He talks about the Dead Indian, “that Indian that is a cliché, a stereotype, an icon of some sort that North America loves. . . . [I]t’s an Indian in a full feathered headdress. . . . [or] a number of variations on that, . . . the quintessential Dead Indian” (p. 277). He also speaks of “[t]he Legal Indian [as] the Indians that Canada is trying to kill” (p. 280). The Indian that is a “by-product of the treaties that both countries signed with Native nations, . . . for the most part peace treaties. . . . [Legal Indians] are entitled to certain rights or privileges” (p. 280). And King (2012) speaks to how they [meaning the government], “don’t want [any] more

Legal Indians” (p. 280). The third Indian he speaks of “is just the live Indians. Those of us who are living” (p. 277). This way of articulating three kinds of Indians resonates with the unease and tension that I experience as a Cree/Metis researcher, educator, grandmother, mother, and aunty. At times I feel as if Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, their families, and I were skin-tingling awake (Clandinin et al., 2006) to the ways we are constructed, elements of these three kinds of Indians as we enter into new landscapes and cross multiple “worlds” (Lugones, 1987).

### **Living the imagined.**

As I imagine moving from seeing the lives of Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, and their families as big (Greene, 1995) and think about my responsibilities as a Cree/Metis researcher of attending also to the small (Greene, 1995), I must continue to look to the past, to the multiple early landscapes, inquiring into the ways Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were constructed and reconstructed in the multiple “worlds” (Lugones, 1987) that they travel. Returning to the past in this way is important for understanding who we are and what we are about. I cannot stop merely looking to the past. Instead, I must also inquire into those experiences, tensions, or bumps that occurred, that shape the stories told to, by, and about Aboriginal peoples. This inquiry and understanding can never be something that I undertake only theoretically, seeking words and books to articulate. This understanding that I seek is essential to my forward looking stories as an Cree/Metis researcher attending to my responsibilities to all my relations (Wilson, 2001) while honoring the relational way I live in the world. I will continue to live in liminality knowing that I will need to lovingly world travel as I continue to seek ways to guide others into navigating these storyless places.

### **Future wonders.**

What I have articulated in this work is a way to begin to attend to the lives of the people who live within that larger social context; a way that begins and

remains situated in the experiences of Aboriginal youth and families. Because of the diversity of Aboriginal people, a diversity that goes beyond the categories of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit, much more research needs to be done. Because of the mandated policies being created and the curriculum programs implemented in schools, a deeper understanding of how those policies shape the lives of those who implement and engage with them must be undertaken. Due to the ever-shifting political landscape that is continually negotiated by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike, we can never put down our inquiries and call the research done.

### **So What? Who Cares?**

Someone once asked me how I would respond to those who feel that as Aboriginal people we spend too much time wondering about identity and not enough time speaking to the political and legal issues surrounding Aboriginal people. What is essentially being asked about my research project, about this dissertation, was for me to justify the value of experiences, particularly the experiences of Drew, Jayanna, Barbara, their families, and I as we engaged in an inquiry. I have spoken extensively throughout how this educative journey has shifted the ways I think about who I am and am becoming, about my role as a teacher educator, and how I feel I can attend to my responsibilities as a Cree/Metis researcher. I have spoken to how the understandings we came to can shape, in more relational and educative ways, the pre-service teacher education classrooms. I articulated how the potential thinking about stories to live by, narrative coherence, living in liminality, and loving “world” travel holds for a move towards a deeper heart and whole body understanding of who we are in relation to each other. I know now that I would respond to this question by thinking about the potential for this research to shift the ways my granddaughter will be constructed as she enters onto the landscapes of schooling, in daycare, preschool, and elementary school. With her in mind, I respond saying that her



future must not reside only inside of the politics or the debates about Legal Indian rights (King, 2012). Nor must it forever be consumed by comparisons to how she will animate or not animate the feather headdress wearing Dead Indian (King, 2012). Instead, my hope sits inside of the hearts within us all, the Living Indians (King, 2012) and the non-Aboriginal people who live in relation, for the potential understanding of experience and the endless possibilities that arise if we can see her, like Drew, Jayanna, and Barbara, as always becoming (Greene, 1995).



Figure 6-1. Trudy's granddaughter .

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