

Understanding Kamlamunikk
(Heart): A Journey Home
by
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ABSTRACT

Thump Thump. Swoosh, swoosh. Kamlamunik. Heart. Mi'kmaq teachings of heart are tied to concepts such as moontime, spirits, ancestors and blood knowledge. Being a Mi'kmaq woman from the west coast of Newfoundland with strong lifelong community connection I was aware that the understanding of heart was multifaceted. Since Indigenous women experience heart illness at a higher rate than non-Indigenous women and Indigenous men, I engaged with community members in discussions about some potential research in this area. Alongside community members it was determined that the research purpose was to explore and discuss what "heart" means to Mi'kmaw women from the west coast of Newfoundland. The goal was to move past Western language that predominantly understands heart as a vital organ that moves blood within a body. The research was grounded in a Mi'kmaq worldview and aligns with a community based participatory research approach. Four women were invited into the research, all which held strong community relations. The methods were fluid, and included talking circles, conversations, and sharing of images and artefacts. The women chose to meet individually at first and towards the end of the research engaged as a group. As a researcher and community member, I journeyed alongside the women, ultimately becoming a co-inquirer. This journey allowed the stories connected to heart to come to the forefront, as well as it allowed for research process to unfold that contributed to the well-being of Mik'maw women. Overall, heart is connected to trauma, love, culture, medicines, teachings, ancestors, and much more. Mi'kmaw women know what they need to sustain and foster their heart health. Nursing has the potential to shift its direction and help Mi'kmaw women live, instead of simply staying alive. Looking towards the next 7 generations, findings from this research can help health care providers to assist Mi'kmaw women to achieve better heart health outcomes.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Erica Jamie (Samms) Hurley. The research projects that comprise this thesis received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name: “At the Heart of Health Care: A Community Based Research Study to Explore Mi’kmaq Women’s Understanding of Heart (Kamulamun) Health and Wellbeing. ”, Study ID: Pro00106739, March 5, 2021. Within the thesis there are three journal articles. The first article Msit No’kmaq: An Exploration of Positionality and Identity in Indigenous Research was co-authored and published in 2020 (Samms Hurley, E., & Jackson, M. (2020). Msit No’kmaq: An Exploration of Positionality and Identity in Indigenous Research. *Witness: The Canadian Journal of Critical Nursing Discourse*, 2(1), 39–50. <https://doi.org/10.25071/2291-5796.43>). I was first author and Dr. Margot Jackson was the second author. The second article Contemplating Place in Nursing: Ontological Understandings was co-authored and published in 2023. I was first author, Keith King was second author, third was Dr. Margot Jackson and fourth was Dr. Vera Caine (Samms Hurley, E., King, K., Jackson, M., & Caine, V. (2023). Contemplating Place in Nursing: Ontological Understandings. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.32799/ijih.v18i1.39511>). The third article The Next 7 Generations: At the Heart of Care Alongside Mi’kmaq Women was submitted for publication in 2023. This piece was solely authored by me.

DEDICATION

*Wen net ki'l?
Pipanimit nuji-kina'muet ta'n jipalk.
Netakei, aq i'-naqawey;
Koqoey?*

*Ktikik nuji-kina'masultite'wk kimelmultijik.
Na epas'si, taqawajitutm,
Aq elui'tmasi
Na na'kwek.*

*Espi-kjijiteketes,
Ma'jipajita'siw. Espitutmikewey
kina'matneweyiktuk eyk,
Aq kinua'tuates pa' qlaiwaqnn ni'n nikmaq.*

*Who are you?
Question from a teacher feared.
Blushing, I stammered
What?*

*Other students tittered.
I sat down forlorn, dejected,
And made a vow
That day*

*To be great in all learnings,
No more uncertain.
My pride lives in my education,
And I will relate wonders to my people.*

Rita Joe (1999), Mi'kmaq Poet, Poem 6

I begin this dedication with acknowledging all those silent and not so silent leaders within our communities who have come before me. This of course includes those within my family, my kin. I would not have been able to give voice to women within our community and complete this work without friends and family who continuously provided me with support, encouragement and strength. I could not have imagined that completing my PhD would occur during some of the most challenging times of my life or that the journey would bring me to a place of such personal growth.

First to my dad (Jim Samms). I am Daddy's girl and will always be. While on earth you taught me many things and one of them was that education is important not only for yourself but for your family. I had hoped my children (Shantel and James Hurley) would learn this but I did feel guilty for the time away from them that it required. However, they are wise beyond their years and are constantly teaching me things. They told me that they don't see all the times that I missed things but rather they remember all the times that I was there. While my parents may have pushed me to strive for all that I can it was my children who helped me continue to push myself in the darkest of times.

To my husband (Shannon Hurley) who from the day we met has always believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself. Thanks for always stepping in and offering a hand. Thank you for your love, kindness and for encouraging me to keep going even when you were unwell yourself needing support. We are a team and I think we make a great one.

To my friend Peggy Colbourne. Thank you for all that you do and for becoming family. Whether it was dropping off homemade meals or picking up my children you have always offered a helping hand while being a cheerleader. Your friendship through loss, struggle, and hard times has shown to be invaluable.

To my mom (Gail Samms). I can only wish to be as strong and beautiful as you one day. Thank you for whispering words of encouragement in my ear when I was hard on myself. Thank you for telling me to stand strong in my voice. There are not enough words to thank you for all the things you have helped me with over the years not only for myself but for our family; the pick ups, drop offs, the meals, the phone calls, and the hugs.

To the little girl from down the bay who's family was referred to as "those Indians" the journey was hard and trying at times but it got you to the place you are now and isn't it lovely.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first thank Dr. Elder Andrea Simon and knowledge keeper Arlene Blanchard White for all that you both do within community. Thank you for dedicating time to be part of my supervisory committee and for pushing me to challenge myself, to stand strong in who I am and to not doubt myself. Thank you Arlene for being an integral part of the research from beginning to the official end. Arlene it was you who pushed me most to explore what heart meant to me and really knew that the experiences were helping to shape not only the work but who I was becoming. Thank you to all the women of the research; Arlene Blanchard White, Charlene Comben, Nicole Travers, and Sabrina Muise.

Thank you to all of my former and/or current colleagues who have shown and/or voiced support for me in various ways regarding my work over the past few years.

Thank you Dr. Margot Jackson for first taking me as a doctoral student and really allowing me the space and time to explore not only the proposed work but also my own thoughts. Your kind gentle approach is really important when students are struggling within academia or within themselves.

Thank you to all the supervisory committee members for all the work and support provided. I would also like to include those who were invited into the final dissertation such as the external examiner. Thank you for the respectful dialogue and questioning that unfolded. I believe it is learning environments that are created with a strong supportive team of individuals that really allow students to flourish.

Finally, I cannot use enough words or praise to thank Dr. Vera Caine. You were a rock to me throughout this journey. Your caring, considerate, heartfelt and often empowering approach really created a place of learning where I felt safe and heard. Through very difficult times including great losses in my life, a global pandemic and changes in committee membership your constant support and encouragement will never be forgotten. You created space and welcomed community members into the committee and always were attentive to community needs/protocols. Thank you for all the time you gave in this work to allow it to become what is has. I felt your heart was also in this work.

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Nkamulamun¹/Preamble

Mi'kmaq² people have been living on the lands within turtle island from time immortal. It was my people who were first encountered and have been impacted the longest. We have been impacted for more than 1000 years by settlers who attempted assimilation but did not succeed. While sitting on powwow grounds, which are the ancestral lands of my family (Great Grammy Webb), Dr. Andrea Simon³ said something that has stayed with me: *We knew that settlers were coming and before setting foot upon our land it was our people who set off with our ceremonies to let the other nations know we had to protect our sacred knowledge, traditions and ceremonies.* It was these stories that were shared over years and years, stories that allowed us to situate ourselves within this place and space. It was in Dr. Simon's story that I learned it may take us, Mi'kmaq of Newfoundland, longer to make our traditional knowledge visible in different places (or spaces) but that we carry our ancestral knowledge. Our inherent knowledge is connected to who we are as original peoples and therefore must not be conforming, shifting, nor doubted. I started my life journey gaining knowledge from my kin but was also expected to attend a westernized school system whereby conforming to western thought was expected. This doctoral journey started out with a focus on expectations that I felt a westernized system was placing onto me. However, similar to others like me, I was simultaneously immersed in learning traditional knowledge, doing work to help community, working full time, volunteering, raising my children, being a wife, and more. I found myself struggling with completing the work I was doing, because often I felt such power

¹ My heart. L'nui'suti 3.0.5. (2019). M'kmaw Kina'matnewey.

² Mi'kmaq are Indigenous people of the Atlantic provinces in Canada and northeastern corner of the United States. Mi'kmaq is the plural non-possessive form and Mi'kmaw is the singular form. English people have used the spelling Micmac.

³ Dr. Elder Andrea Simon (H. Phd., BEd, MEd'17) of Elsipogtog First Nation, NB, has an honorary degree from Mount Allison University. She advocates for Indigenous women, people with disabilities, and much more as a community knowledge keeper.

imbalances. I was reminded of my dad and his analogy to skating. I was skating on ice and noticed that there were spots of thicker ice where I felt safe and valid, while there were other spots that were soft and thin leaving me with a feeling of panic. My dad said one time *once you know where you can place the weight and where you can't the ice isn't scary anymore*. Breaking free from westernized thought felt like I was learning to judge the ice thickness. In this dissertation I attempt to break free from conventional western expectation. Breaking free from the dominant thought that often leads how one engages in such works. However, I ask that you take a moment before reading this work to envision with me long strands of sweetgrass⁴. Imagine running your fingers through the long slender strands of sweet smelling grass. Now lets separate the grass into 3 different bunches of 7 strands. We feel the strands in our hands as they are braided; one grouping representing Mi'kmaw women, another being non-Indigenous people and the third heart health. As we continue to work together to braid this work it is my hope that my writing will invite others not only into my journey, but that it will also create a space where their own journey is possible.

⁴ a slender fragrant perennial grass (*Hierochloa odorata*) that typically grows in moist soils and is used especially in basketry

An invitation to meet my Great Grammy: Mary Francis Webb.



Mary Francis Webb

Mrs. Mary Webb was a midwife, one of the best known and most respected on Newfoundland's west coast. She was also a healer using traditional Mi'kmaq medicines. She was a craftswoman. In addition, she farmed, raised animals, fished, hunted, trapped, and cut wood. She raised children and grandchildren. Her first language was Mi'kmaq. In school, she learned English. From her Codroy Valley neighbours, she learned Scotts Gaelic. As an adult living in Bay St. George, she learned French. These were the languages of early 20th century west coast Newfoundland. Her fluency meant she could speak with clients in their own language.

A "lay midwife", Mary Webb had no formal training or accreditation. She started as an assistant and learned by experience. There were other midwives in Bay St. George: Susan Benoit and Emily Ann Paul in Flat Bay; Minnie Blanchard, Philomena Ryan and Philomena Sheppard in St. George's; Rose Curnew in Stephenville Crossing. Formally trained midwives worked for the Grenfell Mission. Mrs. Webb was noteworthy for the great distances she travelled in her work. In all seasons at all hours, she went as far south as the Codroy Valley and north to Corner Brook and the Bay of Islands.

Midwife or doctor: social change

Until the mid-20th century, women in outport Newfoundland had their babies at home. The midwife arrived shortly before a woman's due date and she or her assistant stayed for several days after the baby's birth. A doctor was called if necessary. Emergencies happen, of course, so the midwife might be called early and she had to deal with complications if a doctor could not get there in time. In the 1950s and '60s, cottage hospitals, clinics and doctors' offices opened in rural areas. More vehicles and new roads made travel to larger centres easier. Hospital births became the norm. Health care became professionalized.

Informally-taught midwives and healers were longer central to it. Mrs. Webb was among the last generation of lay midwives in Bay St. George. She passed on her knowledge of traditional medicines to those interested in learning. And she embodied *being* Mi'kmaw. Her fluency with the language and traditional skills, her pride in her heritage, her self-respect. All these things were noted by those who knew her. For those who were part of the Mi'kmaq cultural and political revitalization in the 1970s, Mrs. Webb was a reminder of who they were and what they were fighting for. She was born in 1881 in the Codroy Valley, daughter of Ben François and Mary Young. In 1903 she married John Webb of Flat Bay in Bay St. George. He died about 1930. She remained in Flat Bay, with Norman Young, her life companion. She died June 3, 1978.

-Dorothy Stewart

Piskwekikm⁵ Chapter 1

Ancestral Strength

Why do I feel so tired I wonder?

*I continue to walk, taking note of the darkened sky with the clouds above,
the strong winds blowing across my chilled body,
and the refreshing smell of the ocean.*

I can't see the water but I know it's near.

Something catches my eye. Wait.

Is that a strawberry patch in the distance?

One foot in front of the other I am drawn towards the patch.

As I get closer the moist soil beneath my feet leaves me more chilled.

*I can now see off in the close distance the rows and rows of runners like a sea of green,
with the jagged green leaves creating a subtle ripple as the wind blows over them.*

White flowers are spread across the plants like dots.

Is that some red I see peeking through the green in random places?

I squint my eyes and try to walk closer.

Wild strawberries were always my favorite to harvest.

*I walk and walk, one foot in front of the other,
time seems to pass but I do not seem to be getting any closer to the field.*

Why do I feel so tired I wonder?

I feel the tiredness as a heavy weight that aches with each movement.

Regardless, I try to keep moving forward.

Wait, maybe I will rest here with the trees for a moment.

*I grab the closest tree feeling the rough bark as a steady myself,
sitting at the base of the tree in between two roots.*

I will just rest my eyes for a moment.

Is that a strawberry patch in the distance?

⁵ Introduction: also "to invite in." See AD Deblois, *Micmac Dictionary* (Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996) at 69 [Micmac Dictionary]; JS Youngblood Henderson, *The Mikmaw Concordat* (Halifax: Fernwood, 1997) at 122 [Mi'kmaw Concordat]

Is that some red I see peeking through the green in random places?



Combdon Charlene
Moms wild strawberries

JUL. 29 AT 7:04 P.M.

Photo taken by Charlene Combdon.

Ketu' wije'win?⁶

I am L'nu⁷. My birth name is Erica Jamie Samms and now married the name I go by is Erica Jamie (Samms) Hurley. I continue to use the name Samms as this connects me to my community and for me that connection is most important. Thinking about the names I am called, makes me think about identity. Within the English language, which is a reflection of western society, people are often known by not only their names but by their titles, positions, and work. Within the English language, it could be said that I am Mi'kmaq, woman, mother, daughter, sister, wife, auntie, dancer, researcher, award winner, scholar, nurse, healer, helper, and so on. However, I have never felt the need to identify with all of these roles or titles. For me what has always been more important is that my name and who I am as a person is associated with love, kindness, humility, caring, and that it is made visible that I am a proud L'nu.

Patrilineal, I am the daughter of James Samms and Gail Hunt, granddaughter of Wilson Samms and Yvonne Gallant, great granddaughter of Angelina Webb and Jack Samms, and great great granddaughter of Mary Francis Webb and John Jr. Webb. My family is from Mi'kma'ki⁸ but the specific lands that I come from are within the Bay St. George area, with distinct and strong ties to Flat Bay, Newfoundland. Matrilineal, through my mother's mother we have a connection to community and to the lands in western Newfoundland towards the great northern peninsula.

⁶ Do you want to come with me? An invitation to meet me: Erica Samms Hurley; L'nui'suti 3.0.5. (2019). M'kmaw Kina'matnewey.

⁷ L'nu, me The traditional territory of the L'nu covers the area known today as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, the Gaspé peninsula of Quebec, and Northern Maine. See Daniel N Paul, *We Were Not The Savages: Collision between Euro-pean and Native American Civilizations*, 3rd ed (Halifax: Fernwood, 2006) at 10–11 [Not Savages].aning the people, the Mi'kmaq people; L'nuk is plural.

I walk along a journey. Sometimes people refer to life as a collection of journeys. While I contemplate my own journey, I think about how I have been taught that life should not be measured by the things that someone accomplishes, but rather how one lived this life. How do we live in relation to all things? How will who we are impact the next 7 generations to come. How one understands their journey can be unique and complex. The acknowledgement of my life as a journey is simply one layer that is interconnected with many other aspects and journeys. For me, my journey is about what my spirit brings into the physical world – what is called forth through my connections to my ancestors. My father would say to me often, *What I do is not for me but for all of you*. This sense of commitment he had to the generations that would come was something that he often talked about. He was a funny man. Another thing he would say in a sing song voice was *we are here for a good time, not a long time*. Often preaching that no one knows when their time will end on earth but that we have control over how we approach our time in the here and now.

A teaching I received was that we enter the physical world alone and will leave it alone. When we first enter the physical world, we are comforted by the water that surrounds us in the womb and by the heartbeat heard from our mothers. Our mothers, the water protectors, are the pathway from the spiritual realm to the physical world. It is the life givers who have been acknowledged by our people as powerful individuals within our matriarchal system. This power, not in the sense of a dominating power but rather a strength, was never obtained by force or through fear. It is women who continue to keep the strong pathway open between physical and spiritual realms. However, over time the historical impacts of colonization have negatively impacted the relationships with women in our communities. It is the relationships that are formed and how one experiences these that help to either feed or starve one's spirit. I am wakeful that my spirit brings with it the ancestral knowledge, deep connections to the lands, and a connection to all

things; my spirit contributes to all aspects of my physical self. The stories that I carry, the ones I share with others are from many relationships and experiences and these stories will be told even when I am in the spirit world. All connections matter. All stories matter. All knowledge matters, including knowledge within dreams.

In the poem *Ancestral Strength*, I attempt to stitch together heart health for Mi'kmaw women with a particular experience. Some may refer to this experience as a vision or a dream. The poem holds a vision, a spiritual connection, an experience that tells a story of exhaustion, intuition, teachings, and strength. The physical aspects of the strawberries are only one dimension to what the story of the strawberry field is conveying.

I think back to my Grandfather Samms and when he was recorded speaking Mi'kmaq words on a cassette tape. As a very young girl I remember that I would listen to this tape over and over, being enthralled with our language. At a young age I was fascinated that my grandfather was attempting to learn these words. So now when I learn a new word in our language, I not only remember my grandfather's voice, but I now understand why it was so important for my grandfather to create this tape. I can now see how I've come full circle in my appreciation and understanding of the importance of my early childhood experiences.

It was not in my childhood days that I realized the importance of listening to and valuing our language. I did not acknowledge the significance of how my Great Grammy was said to be the last known fluent Mi'kmaq speaker on the island. I learned to recognize the importance of our language much later. Language is key. It is how our stories/knowledge are passed on, how we remember the deep-rooted meanings, and where one finds messages from our ancestors. Our language shows us the meaning of who we are, who I am as an L'nu women. Language transcends this knowledge over generations. Really it speaks to how we have been able to maintain who we

are in relation to the lands since time immortal⁹. As L'nu we have an inherent responsibility as people to the physical realm. We have a responsibility to live in a good way, in relation to all things, and to protect generations to come. Trying to pass along our stories, knowledge, and language against all sexist, racist and genocidal acts over decades has left many with carrying trauma, sickness, and a loss of strength. When I try to reach the strawberry patch that tiredness and heaviness slows me down. At this point in my life cycle, I want to do good community work. I am tired from my years within the colonial school system combined with my years of working within a colonial health care system.

Throughout my short lifetime I have used the statement *everything happens for a reason* frequently. It is now, during my time within my PhD studies, whereby I contemplate this notion of things happening for a reason deeper. I have realized that my community upbringing, core teachings and ancestral knowledge has instilled a certain knowledge in me. I have come to this realization while being attentive to medicines, ceremonies, and relationships; being grounded as a L'nu.

⁹ Hanna and Henry (1995) state that language and stories are the most important qualities of our culture, and it is through the stories that the history and teachings of our ancestors are passed down. They further point out that we have a responsibility to not lose these stories as this would result in the loss of our culture.

Ne'w¹⁰

Let me introduce you to the four women who co-created this research alongside me. I will introduce them first and lay the groundwork for the dissertation because for me this research started long before I entered my doctoral program. I have come to understand deeply that these women are strength, gave me strength, and are continuing to gain their strength as they journey along.

Arlene

In 2015 I found myself nominated and running in the band election for the Qalipu First Nation Band council. The Qalipu Band and its formation is controversial¹¹; its roots are very much interconnected with my own. My grandfather being a plaintiff against the federal government as a member of the Federation of Newfoundland Indians for recognition and entitlement for a nation-to-nation agreements left me wanting to step up. Step up and help mold a new band into what people envisioned it could become. While running for band council, I was able to reconnect with individuals and also meet new people. For example, I was at an election meeting in Bay St. George that a woman came up to me.

Hey, I'm Arlene. Not sure if we met in person or not but I don't know if you mind if I ask you something?

I was surprised but struck by her openness. I grew up with strong L'nu women and I welcomed her approach.

Sure, I said.

Are you here because of someone else? she spoke as she looked into my eyes.

¹⁰ Four. An invitation to meet those who joined me: Arlene, Nicole, Sabrina, and Charlene; L'nui'suti 3.0.5. (2019). M'kmaw Kina'matnewey.

¹¹ Newfoundland is the 10th province to join confederation in 1949. Indigenous people not recognized at confederation. Federation of Newfoundland Indians (FNI) forms (initially as the Native Association of Newfoundland and Labrador). Formed 1972 with six affiliated Mi'kmaq bands. In 2011 the Qalipu First Nation became federally recognized band through the FNI negotiations for recognition but is now a landless band with membership controlled by agreement in principle (Qalipu First Nation. (2016). Enrollment. <https://qalipu.ca/enrolment/#1486137355179-98e4cac4-61aa>)

I knew what she meant by that question. That question spoke volumes about her history and knowledge. It also spoke to her protection of the community. She was gauging my reasons for running for a council position. Arlene (Blanchard) White is a strong L'nu woman who from that day forward became a sister to me. She and I have bonded over many things. She is so much more than a sister and friend. **She is medicine.**

Arlene is from Shallop Cove on the West Coast of Newfoundland. Her Grandparents were from Flat Bay. Arlene grew up in her culture and she is known for being a jingle dress dancer, fancy shawl dancer, pipe carrier, and a community knowledge keeper. She is being mentored for various ceremonies by Elders and she holds knowledge about Mi'kmaw culture, dance, traditions, mawio'mi, fasting, different roles for men and women, strawberry fast, and pipe ceremonies, water ceremonies, and sweat lodge ceremonies. Knowing Arlene like a sister has allowed me to get to know her personally. We clicked from the moment we met. Maybe it's because our ancestors are both from Flat Bay or maybe it's because we believe strongly in the same principles. Perhaps we have known each other long before we physically met. Arlene is always ready to give to her community and share her knowledge with others. As I prepared to go out onto the land for my first fast, I talked to her about being nervous. Not knowing how cold it might be, or if I was prepared enough, or what animals I might encounter. She shared with me how she entered one of her fasts with a terrifying fear of thunder and lightning. Her story is not for me to tell, but she shared how it was that fast where she came to understand the thunder and lightning spirits. Sitting with this story right now has me thinking and reflecting about how my dad would go into the deep forest cutting wood all alone or how he'd take his skidoo out upon the wintery ponds without batting an eye. Yet, when anyone made mention of a hospital he would shiver. I was surprised when he actually came to the hospital to see my daughter Shantel, his first grandchild, when she was born. I have always

wondered if his fear was related to what happened to Great Grammy Webb. Grammy Webb was a traditional healer who was well known on the west coast. Born in 1881 she lived to be 97 years old, but her passing is said to be tied to misunderstanding. Apparently, Grammy became sick and her condition kept worsening to the point whereby her family thought it best to take her to the hospital to be seen. The story as I know it is that the hospital kept her as a patient. Grammy Webb had long hair and due to her being unwell and the care the nurses felt that the hair needed they decided to cut it all off. It is a teaching that our hair carries spirit and that the closer it is to mother earth the stronger we can become. After her hair was cut, she quickly deteriorated and they said she passed into the spirit world at the hospital, never coming home again. I cannot speak for Dad nor his reasons for not liking hospitals, but I am certain that Grammy Webb's story played a part. He loved the open country, the smell of the woods, the freedom, the crisp air, the peace, and the feeling of contentment. Perhaps a hospital with four walls, limited window views, the harsh smells, and the stories it holds all added to his negative association. Although, now that I reflect it may have been more a fear over the thought that someone else would have control over decisions that should be his. It is said by some that facing fears can be healthy but maybe it's our acknowledgment of the root cause that makes it no longer unhealthy for us. The greatest warriors are said to know fear, but they let it drive them not hide them. I know and have known a few warriors. Dad and Arlene are what I would call modern day warriors.



My Dad in 2006 with his first granddaughter, my daughter.



Arlene Blanchard White

Nicole

I was elected and became a council member as Western Vice Chief of Qalipu First Nation. It was an important time for me. During that time, I met a lot of people, some of whom I have not seen again and others who I have stayed in contact with. I first met Nicole Travers during my time in this position at one of the community craft events. We briefly spoke, sharing our love for crafts. She is from Little Port in the Bay of Islands on the west coast of Newfoundland. Nicole is a self-taught beader who started her art just after the birth of her first child in 2015. Nicole is a dancer, harvester, and advocate for environmental rights. She is one of those people who I kept running into at various times, but it wasn't until I reached out to Nicole to commission a pair of earrings that we really connected. Nicole does a variety of beadwork but what I was particularly drawn to was her work with skins, using natural methods to create her pieces. It was January 2021 when my Nan (Hunt) suddenly started her journey to the spirit world and three days later Dad. Some time after that I had messaged Nicole and asked if she would be interested in making me a pair of earrings, no rush but whenever she got around to it. May 2021, she messaged me and let me know that she had finished the earrings. At this point my PhD work was challenging, as I experienced the trauma and grief that accompanied the loss of my dad and Nan. I too imposed expectations on myself about the doctoral work that paralyzed my ability to move forward. I was glad to hear from Nicole about the earrings. I love earrings. My husband, Shannon, says that earrings are my addiction. Displaying handcrafted items that Indigenous people from all over the world have created is something that gives me joy. So, when reading the message that said she was going to deliver the earrings she made was something that had me excited. I had seen very few people at this

point due to the COVID 19 ¹²pandemic. Losing people during the COVID-19 pandemic created a unique and difficult layer to an already complex situation. So, when Nicole came to deliver the earrings we hugged, cried, and talked. She told me about the stress she was experiencing in her life and how creating was an outlet. It was funny how someone I barely knew felt connected to me. After we talked and Nicole left, I eagerly opened the package she had placed the eel skin beaded earrings in. I found a handwritten note. This note told me a story. The story was about me and how the earrings were a representation of me. It was at this point I knew our paths were always meant to cross; it was our journey.

¹² The COVID-19 pandemic is a global outbreak of coronavirus, an infectious disease caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) virus. The first cases were detected in China in December 2019, with the virus spreading rapidly to other countries across the world. This led World Health Organization to declare the outbreak as a pandemic on 11 March 2020. (Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. (2023). World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>)



Nicole Travers

Sabrina.

I had my first regalia when I was a young girl. I remember learning only the sidestep and the round dance. I have always loved to dance, all music, all speeds, just enjoying the ability to move and express myself. Various events were held over the years in which traditional drumming and music was played but it wasn't until 2003 that we started to have powwows on the west coast of Newfoundland. Around 2018 I saw Sabrina for the first time in the arbor at a powwow. I loved her energy and her footwork. She was a young girl, and it was nice to see my daughter who was around 7 at the time watching her. Sabrina Muise is a queer, neurodivergent, youth from Bay St. George on the west coast of Newfoundland. She is a lifelong helper, fancy shawl dancer, song carrier, crafter, beader, advocate for youth and for Indigenous rights. I would not see Sabrina for periods of time and then our paths would cross again. Something inside of me led me to invite Sabrina to travel alongside me in this research. When I connected with Sabrina, she let me know that she was at a place whereby her life was very hectic, but she still wanted to participate in some way. She wanted to give what she could. This is Sabrina. Always wanting to be involved in things she believes in, in whatever way she can. She is an empowered young woman, and I am aware of the importance of protecting her energy.



Sabrina

Meeting Charlene.

In 2017 a group of people had gotten together to organize a Mawi'omi¹³ in central Newfoundland and one of the key women involved was Charlene Combdon. Charlene reached out and asked if I'd volunteer and dance at the event which would take place in Grand Falls, central Newfoundland. Charlene may have been told that I love to dance. She offered up her home to myself and Arlene so we could stay for the few days we would be in town. Charlene had informed us that she was new to the culture and that she was starting to reconnect. Charlene is from Jackson's Arm on the west coast of Newfoundland. Throughout her life she has been tied to the water, is an entrepreneur, hunter, crafter and cook. Even though she is living in Grand Falls it doesn't take long for someone to hear her telling a story or two about her hometown. Throughout that weekend we shared laughter, stories and lots of food. The conversation went from a formal cordial conversation, to one which was easy flowing and natural. I really connected with Charlene over the short period of time, and it was as if we had known each other for years. After that weekend she welcomed me back numerous times, always up for an adventure or two. My children call both her and Arlene Auntie. Thinking about my and Arlene's relationship I realize that she is interconnected to each of the women who became part of this work. I think about the 5 of us women and I am drawn to the Mi'kmaq creation story. The fifth level is about recognition and introduction to Nogami, Glooscaps grandmother who was noted to be wise and respected for her knowledge. I can't help but ponder more about these connections.

¹³ Mawi'omi means gathering. Sometimes a powwow is referred to as a miawomi..



Charlene Combdon

Ketu' pite'man?¹⁴.

From coast-to-coast Indigenous nations can have different traditions but the core teachings are more often than not grounded in similar principles. This is why tenants of an Indigenous research approach resonated with my approach to research. Yet, it was important for this work to first and foremost be situated in a Mi'kmaq worldview; it is what anchors the work. Young (2016) states that it is the deep ecological experience of the L'nu within Mi'kma'ki from which their distinctive worldview is derived. Young Further states that as L'nu it is through observation and lessons from our ancestors through teachings, stories, values, customs, knowledge derived from living in harmony. Thus, much of my understanding and knowing about Mik'maq worldview has been passed on to me through teachings, stories, dreams, and experiences.

I remember when Dad and I were dropping off a truck load of wood to some old guy. He had salt and pepper hair, smoked rolled cigarettes, and his driveway was on this long bumpy hill. Once we were up the long bumpy hill close to the house my Dad had me help place chunks of wood under the tires so that the truck wouldn't move. While unloading the wood the guy started telling me about how my dad was good with a power saw, but that he himself was a great hunter. He told a story of how he took down the biggest moose you could ever imagine. He said his antlers were so big he couldn't even fit them in the pan of his truck and that he has been living off that moose meat for 3 years. I watched his eyes light up as he told the story while using his arms to show us the size of the moose, my eyes following as he would pass his hands back and forth to describe the size. It was only much later that I realized he had not helped throw any junks of wood out from the back of the truck. When we finished and got back in the cab of the truck I said, *Dad*

¹⁴ Do you want tea? Grounding the work. L'nui'suti 3.0.5. (2019). M'kmaw Kina'matnewey.

holy, I thought Uncle had a big moose last year! My dad chuckled, waved at the guy, and as we drove away said *know when to listen and know when it's just an old guy pulling your leg.*

Msit No'kmaq / Chapter 2

Paper 1

The following paper, entitled *Msit No 'kmaq: An Exploration of Positionality and Identity in Indigenous Research* was published in 2020.

Msit No'kmaq:

An Exploration of Positionality and Identity in Indigenous Research.

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Abstract:

In this paper I explore the Mi'kmaq words Mist No'kmaq, which can be translated as 'all my relations'. Msit No'kmaq is not only at the center of who I am as a person, but also who I am becoming as a researcher. Reflecting on how to honor all my relations within research, has allowed me to explore my beliefs about research, thereby developing a clear understanding of the purpose and intentions of engaging in Indigenous research. Rather than seeing researchers as insiders or outsiders within the context of Indigenous communities, I argue that it is important to engage in reflexive processes that make visible a researcher's positionality and who they are and are becoming.

Key words: Identity, positionality, Indigenous research, relations, relational accountability

Msit No'kmaq, is a Mi'kmaq phrase that most closely translates as 'all my relations'. As a Mi'kmaw person, I¹ recognize that this is not a simple phrase, but rather a prayer, a teaching that holds great meaning. Msit No'kmaq holds me accountable to address who I am and how my Indigeneity impacts how I experience the world. I am called to attend to all my relations. My relations include the universe, living and non-living things, and my community. Msit

No'kmaq holds an understanding that Indigenous peoples and their understanding of relations are important within research. For Indigenous peoples, the word *research* and the relationships associated with it has often been connected to colonial trauma and acknowledged as something 'dirty' (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). As a Mi'kmaw woman, I grew up in Newfoundland, a province in Canada. I hold close connections in my community, which shape who I am and

¹ 'I' throughout this paper refers to Erica Samms Hurley, the first author. While Dr. Margot Jackson co-authored the paper, the focus was not on her experiences.

name becoming. In this paper, I explore researchers' positionality, which is reflected in the ideas of being an insider/outsider. Rather than seeing this as being dichotomous, I emphasise the importance of exploring who I am within the space created by research.

Indigenous peoples have endured non-Indigenous people completing research *on* them, rather than in collaboration *with* them (Canadian Institutes of Health Research [CIHR], Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada [NSERC] Social Sciences, & Humanities Research Council of Canada [SSHRC], 2018). The 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) final report calls on all Canadians and various institutions to work towards true reconciliation (TRC, 2015) and to engage in research *with* Indigenous peoples and communities. The report points to the importance of building the capacity of Indigenous communities and peoples to undertake and lead their own research programs.

The TRC report along with the most recent Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans chapter 9 guidelines reflects historical changes and ethical requirements placed on researchers when engaging in Indigenous research (CIHR, NSERC, & SSHRC, 2018; Riddell, Salamanca, Pepler, Cardinal, & McIvor, 2017). While ethical guidelines are critical, they are not enough. In response to this gap, the Government of Canada (2019) released a new set of directions aimed at strengthening Indigenous research capacity. The four key strategies include: prioritizing Indigenous peoples research; enhancing funding; championing Indigenous leadership; and building relationships. This means that research with Indigenous peoples requires more than collaboration. There is a need for researchers to recognize communities are central to any research and that they can become co-researchers. Indigenous peoples are requesting that researchers are clear in their intentions, which means valuing and respecting Indigenous knowledge held in the community. Valuing and engaging with Indigenous ways of knowing is

essential to achieve meaningful and rigorous research outcomes (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Some Indigenous researchers, such as Tuhiwai Smith (2012, 2008), take the position that Indigenous peoples are inherently researchers. Her stance is related to the concept of Indigenous consciousness, in which the nature of Indigenous awareness, thought, knowledge and conceptualization is part of all aspects of seeing, feeling, knowing, and doing. This includes being mindful of the historical and political constructs that have influenced Indigenous identities, Indigenous thinking, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous ways of being (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2019; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Kwame (2017) and other Indigenous researchers counter this belief and state that non-Indigenous researchers can complete authentic and valid Indigenous research, even if they come from an alternate consciousness. While Tuhiwai Smith and Kwame take different positions both raise questions of identity and intentions. These questions are critical as I consider who I am and the research I will undertake.

Questions of identity are important to raise throughout the research. While identity is often defined as the personality or characteristics of an individual (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020), identity also speaks to who people are and are becoming; identities are not static or fixed. Questions of identity call me as a researcher to make visible my position in relation to the research I engage in. This understanding of positionality reflects the social, historical, cultural and political contexts that influence one's identity, and one's understanding and outlook (D'Silva, Smith, Della, & Potter, 2016). Msit No'kmaq is a reminder that my identity is shaped by experiences beyond physical encounters. Within academic settings I have consistently struggled to have my Indigenous perspective heard.

Researchers have a long tradition of differentiating their positions from an insider or outside perspective - whereby non-Indigenous people who engage in Indigenous research are most often positioned as outsiders. How one is

positioned affects the research and great care must be taken to account for one's position during all phases of the research; yet I argue that the dichotomous position as either/or does not make visible the complexity in working with Indigenous communities and peoples. It is important to recognize that all researchers must engage with complexities inherent in the negotiations of ongoing historical relationships with communities and individuals, while simultaneously learning the cultural context and history of the community. In this way, the complex dichotomous positioning of insider/outsider requires an ongoing wakefulness to who one is.

As I begin to explore my own positionality, I considered my relations within multiple constructs. These constructs are influenced by my understanding of Msit No'kmaq. I am a Mi'kmaw woman who is culturally connected to community from conception. The relations with my community are shaped by my role as a woman, daughter, granddaughter, nurse educator, and health care provider. In this paper I will further explore my positionality and identity. Through my exploration I will explore the need for researchers to move away from words that define fixed positions, to actual actions when engaged in research with Indigenous communities. For me, this call to action is embedded in Msit No'kmaq, which emphasizes ethical and relational ways of being, knowing and acting with, for and in Indigenous communities.

Paradigms and Positioning

Research most often begins with the formation of a research idea or question; a sense of wonder about a particular phenomenon. The phenomenon is frequently foregrounded. Yet, it is equally important to explore one's identity and position in relation to the proposed research or phenomenon under study. It is important to examine ones' understanding of the nature of

thoughts, the nature of reality, how knowledge is gained and also the worth of knowledge through reflexive and introspective processes (Wilson, 2008). Often it is an individual lived experience that shapes the reasons why one is interested in doing research (Brooks, te Riele & Maguire, 2014), or work with particular populations or communities. This interest also reflects identities. While it is important to engage in this reflexive process at the outset of any study, it is also necessary to return to this throughout all phases of the research (Pitard, 2017). In this way, researchers gain insights and awareness in how the research changed their experiences and ultimately who they are and are becoming. Each study calls us to engage in new experiences and calls forth knowledge. Many researchers and scholars assert that there are interconnections between epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Who one is, including one's intentions, and how one is positioned shapes decisions and actions, including how to collect, analyze, interpret, and disseminate data (Brooks et al., 2014).

Moffat (2016) stated that researchers must define and redefine themselves, while acknowledging the cultural and societal underpinnings that create their worldview; a researcher can never fully understand another worldview or reality, neither can this understanding be fixed. While it is necessary to position oneself, there is also recurring pressure within professionalized bodies such as nursing and medicine to identify with dominant paradigms that have shaped academic institutions. Some of the dominant paradigms that have been prevalent include positivism and postmodernism (Blackstone, 2014). These dominant paradigms reflect the culture, history, and philosophies of Western thought and often do not give voice to other cultures, including Indigenous peoples (Elabor-Idemudia, 2002; Tuhiwai Smith, 2008). This dichotomize tension between Western paradigms and Indigenous worldviews and thoughts on knowledge has called Indigenous researchers to develop research approaches that are reflective of Indigenous ways of knowing.

Rather than starting with the

identification of a research paradigm, it is important for researchers to contemplate their identity, position and consciousness (Sale, Lohfeld, & Brazil, 2002; Wills, 2007). As an Indigenous researcher, I consistently struggle within academic institutions that reflect Western ways of being, as they do not account for the relational respect that is part of Indigenous peoples' original law. Few spaces exist for me as an Indigenous researcher to speak against the imposition of Western paradigms and to honour Msit No'kmaq in ways that reflect my knowledge and experience as a Mi'kmaw woman. This lack of reflective spaces that value diverse ways of knowing can be harmful. I embody Msit No'kmaq, which is visible in my spirituality and my emphasis on relational inquiry. It is important to attend to diverse ways of knowing and to create spaces that openly welcome differences, rather than scribe positions.

Many times over, research is divided into categories of qualitative or quantitative methodologies, whereby qualitative research encourages reflexivity. This division does little to challenge the fundamentally Western assumptions of knowledge and experience. For example, qualitative methodologies are often used to give voice to Indigenous peoples, yet the methodologies chosen are often not culturally appropriate when engaging with Indigenous Peoples (Wright, Wahoush, Ballantyne, Gabel & Jack, 2016). Alasuutari (2000) states that research with Indigenous peoples is often categorized with 'other' procedures and methodologies within the qualitative realm because this has been convenient. The tensions I have experienced make me wonder what happens when the worldview of the researcher does not fit into either qualitative or quantitative paradigms? What if a researchers' worldview raises serious questions about existing paradigms, paradigms that do not reflect who Indigenous peoples are?

Positioning Identity to Examine Indigenous Methodology

Moving away from a Western construct of research, in order to produce and legitimize Indigenous knowledge and ways of being is important (Akena, 2012). As a Mi'kmaw woman, my identity and positionality offers insight and context to my thinking. I purposefully position myself as an Indigenous person and self-identify as a culturally connected Mi'kmaw woman who is a daughter, granddaughter, mother, nurse, educator and researcher to disrupt common notions of forefronting the phenomenon under study. It is from this understanding that I situate my identity but also my positional stance that inform the intent of conducting Indigenous research. I share the beliefs of Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Wilson (2001) who recognize that as part of Indigenous research methodologies, researchers need to break free from Western influences.

It is critical to note that Indigenous communities and peoples are not universal in their core beliefs and values. While there exist some generalizable or common threads (Chilisa, 2012; Wilson, 2008) it is important to understand that communities also have specific and uniquely individualized beliefs and values regarding knowledge, experiences, and ways of being and relating (Kovach, 2010). Therefore, Indigenous research must reflect the unique experiences of the communities and peoples who are part of any inquiry.

Frideres (2008) states that there is no pan-Indian (Indigenous) identity and that each community holds different identities. There is an interactive and iterative process between the community and individuals that creates identity and shapes values and beliefs. Frideres further acknowledges that communities do not have to be identified by their geographic location, but can include communities that are connected through shared cultural beliefs. Therefore, a tenet of Indigenous research methodology is that inquiry must allow for fluidity of positions (Burnette,

Howard, Butcher, & Rand, 2014). Wilson (2001, 2008) states that this includes fluidity with methodological approach and methods, in order to recognize, honor and celebrate diverse relations, spiritualities and ceremonies. Kurtz (2013) stated that the academic realities associated with language, protocols, and Western methodologies creates a linear approach that does not allow for the change and fluidity necessary in Indigenous research. Hierarchical and linear realities of the academy specify ethical protocols, language, and Western methodologies and methods of research, which challenge and impact the research process with Indigenous communities – often they reflect a paternalistic stance. When Indigenous researchers push back against these hierarchical and linear realities, it can raise questions of rigor (Tuihawai Smith, 2012). It is important to recognize that the examination of rigor solely on the tenets of dominant Western “gold standards” can result in the continued oppression of research with Indigenous peoples (Cochran et al., 2008) and dismiss Indigenous knowledge.

Reflexivity is a vital component in Indigenous research as it encourages the researcher to question their own identity, experiences, beliefs, and ways of being, contributing to the decolonization of existing research approaches (Alasuutari, 2000; Russell-Mundine, 2012). Researchers utilizing Indigenous methodologies need to work in close collaboration with Indigenous communities, to ensure methodological approaches that will not only fit their research questions, but also the ways in which the community or peoples work and live together (Alasuutari, 2000). Here, we can see that attending to Msit No'kmaq has real consequences that shape how research unfolds.

Identity Shapes Positionality

Positionality in research is directly related to aspects of identity and includes the premise that people stand in relation to others (Berger, 2015; Greene, 2014; Mullings, 1999; Noh, 2019). Attending to and honoring identity of Indigenous peoples is important and a necessity

when thinking about the historical impacts of assimilation (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003). For some the close attention to identity has been linked to resilience, which helps me understand that research is not only about knowledge production, but holds a possibility to impact communities, families and peoples in good ways. Specifically, enhanced self-esteem, positive social coping abilities, validation of knowledge systems and overall wellness has been linked to strong social connections, all of which are reflected in the concept of identity and transcend into the unfolding nature of research that attends closely to reciprocal relationships (Dockery, 2010; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Houkamau & Sibley, 2011; LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck, 2006; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

One significant aspect of research I want to attend to is the terms insider and outsider, which are primarily used within qualitative research to describe the positionality or position of the researcher. Specifically outsider refers to researchers when they are not a member of a community, population or identified group (Asselin, 2003; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Witcher, 2010). When examining research conducted by an insider versus an outsider the concept of rigor often comes under scrutiny. Whereas some researchers argue that being an insider improves rigor (Merton, 1972), others believe there is a negative impact and that it can lead to assumptions of what one knows (Merriam et al., 2001). Recognizing that a researcher is a part of the study is important when considering identity in relation to positionality (Streubert & Carpenter, 2011). Wilson (2008) expands this idea with his notion of relational accountability. He states that Indigenous reality is not just shaped by relationships, but rather that relationships are the reality. A question that should be considered when coming to any research is how researchers identify themselves in relation to the phenomenon under study. It is important not to make assumptions about who is or is not an outsider, it is not simply a categorical endeavor; a deeper understanding of identity both at an individual and a community level is needed.

Holmes (2014) stated that positionality can change intentionally and unintentionally; yet it always reflects a relational aspect between the researcher and those who engage in the research. There is an urgency that researchers allow Indigenous voices to be heard and to place the community at the center of the research and embrace them as partners. As part of research in Indigenous communities, a researcher is expected to create relationships that allows them to be welcomed in the community during all aspects of the research process. It is more than this for me, and I feel the need to continuously reflect on how the relations I hold will be impacted by the research I propose and engage in.

Who a researcher is, impacts how they construct the world; who a researcher is, is shaped by their worldview and social and cultural backgrounds (Berger, 2015). It is the combination of these aspects that impact and shape all aspects of the research process and ultimately the research findings (Berger, 2015). An outsider who comes to the research with a different worldview may be unable to fully grasp the deeper meanings associated with an Indigenous perspective, thereby offering limited and in some cases incorrect findings (Doyle, Cleary, Blanchard & Hungerford, 2017; McClelland, 2011). While I have tried to provide a translation for Msit No'kmaq ('All my relations'), I recognize that this translation does not reflect the depth of meaning that this prayer holds. My knowing of Msit No'kmaq has developed over many years, through both formal and informal teachings and by being in relation with family members, knowledge keepers, and Elders. I would even further acknowledge my knowing gained from relations with the environment and spiritually. Witcher (2010) noted that being an outsider may decrease the chance of subjectivity and bias. In most case it is argued that being less familiar with the community or with the lives of research participants, results in greater objectivity. The lack of familiarity at times allows outsiders to raise questions or wonders that have not been previously considered. Yet, an insider who identifies with the community has the potential to have a profound understanding, thereby

increasing the depth and breadth of the research (Greene, 2014; Muhammad et al., 2016).

I believe it is important to consider the historical relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people when thinking about researcher positionality. Issues of a lack of trust and actual or perceived power imbalances have been common when outsiders engage in research of Indigenous communities or peoples (Morton Ninomiya & Pollock, 2017). Outsider researchers can potentially overcome these power imbalances through exposing their biases, lack of knowledge and vulnerabilities to aid in building relations that allow and encourage communities to gain trust and build meaningful relationships (Greenhill & Dix, 2008). This requires that researchers be situated in a place where questions about their identity and intentions can be raised and where there is a recognition that colonization continues to affect many aspects of Indigenous research (Held, 2019; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

Saini (2012) stated that outsiders who are not familiar with cultural aspects, including aspects of spirituality, may not understand their research findings within a specific context, or report research findings in ways that disregard cultural knowledge or cultural protocols. It is important to recognize that many researchers have been educated in institutions that are guided by Western paradigms of knowledge and have been trained using Western approaches to teaching. While researchers do not intend to cause harm, Western practices and beliefs intrinsically can lead to devaluing Indigenous knowledge, and inherently bias the research, and ultimately decrease rigor and validity (Cochran et al., 2008). Researchers who are considered outsiders have to consistently work against and actively resist what they have been taught in order to stay open to working with Indigenous peoples. There is a need to recognize the relational research impacts on the community and beyond. Both verbal and nonverbal language is important to consider when examining research (Greene, 2014) and requires significant insight by the researcher. Researchers must not only have the knowledge and ability to understand others, but require knowledge of the meanings of words and phrases in specific cultural, historical, and

political contexts in order to understand deeper meanings (Pelzang & Hutchinson, 2018; Witcher, 2010). In communities where Indigenous languages are spoken, researchers also must make every attempt to either learn the language, or work with translators. This is a significant undertaking and often requires that researchers engage in long term relationships with communities. A researcher who is an insider and who is familiar with Indigenous languages spoken in the community may hold a deeper understanding, which decreases the risk of findings being misinterpreted (Witcher, 2010). Ragusa and Kime (2016) point out that oral histories and understandings have been a source of cultural identities for Indigenous peoples. Insiders may be in a position where they recognize the distinct cultural identities and are able to enhance knowledge translation activities and minimize power imbalances between researchers and participants (Breen, 2007; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Greene, 2014).

An insider who recognizes the significance of their experience and accepts the context of their positioning, might be able comprehend their responsibility as a researcher and as a person, as an extension of their relational accountability (Chilisa, 2012). Relational accountability is described by Loppie (2007) and Wilson (2001, 2008) as an Indigenous belief that knowledge is relational and not owned by any one person. An insider may be better situated to understand that Indigenous peoples are knowers who have multiple connections that not only inform what they know, but also how it can be known (Chilisa, 2012). Insiders may understand the complexity that relationships hold with all things, including: the land, rocks, trees in our physical environments, interpersonal, intrapersonal, spiritual and with ideas (Campbell, 2014; Wilson, 2008). These researchers have an understanding that expands from an individual level to a relational and holistic perspective, encompassing Indigenous beliefs and worldview. The extension to community and beyond might be more easily understood by an insider, who holds a personal sense of responsibility towards the future of the community (Doyle et al., 2017), and to the

development of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Yet, without raising questions of who one is in relation regardless of insider/outside position, research will be difficult to undertake.

Conclusion

In order to represent experience, it is important to understand the ways in which the identity, position and intentions of researchers intersects with the processes of research. Thus, reflecting upon and inquiring into ones lived experience can help researchers understand their positionality and gain deeper insight while remaining focused on the relationships that are key to engaging in research alongside Indigenous peoples. Chavez (2008) and Greenhill and Dix (2008) argue that there is a possibility, that when spending considerable time with participants, that boundaries could become unclear and challenges in the research process could occur. While this is important to recognize, I would argue that the depth and significance of the research increases when boundaries are blurred. The importance is to attend to these challenges, rather than avoid them. I have argued that positionalities and identities are not fixed or frozen and hence insider and outsider positions must be viewed as fluid; a view that is supported within Indigenous research methodologies (Berger, 2015; Lavallée, 2009; Mullings, 1999; Wilson, 2001; 2008).

Situating the identity of researchers within the context of Indigenous research moves beyond positioning the researcher. It requires careful attention to the historical, social, political and relational aspects of the researcher's life, as this speaks to the Indigenous knowledge they hold. Weaving Indigenous ways of knowing into all aspects of the research not only places value on Indigenous knowledge, but also significantly changes the contributions research can make to the knowledge development within Indigenous communities. Most importantly for me is that I recognize that *Msit No'kmaq* is not only at the center of who I am as person, but also who I am becoming as a researcher. Reflecting on how to honor all my relations with my own research, has allowed me to explore my beliefs about

research, thereby developing a clear understanding of the purpose and intentions of engaging in Indigenous research. It is important to me that as a researcher I honor Msit No'kmaq in my ways of being. For me this is possible because of the deep knowledge I hold of Msit No'kmaq and my openness, humility and thankfulness to receive the ongoing teachings from family members, knowledge keepers, Elders, the universe and spiri

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Ankita'si15/Chapter 3

Reflections or slowly coming to my research wonders.

A Visit from My Child.

You enter the physical alone and leave the physical alone.

While there is truth behind these English words there is also a lack of truth.

One enters into the womb of their mother.

Mother earth, birth mother.

Dreams and visions come and go.

Trust in one's teachings because that is what cradles ones heart.

Ancestral strength one does not even know they carry.

Physical life, spiritual life. Life immortal.

I grieved for what I was told I lost. I suffer.

I pray.

I sweat, I heal. I fast, I heal. I pray, I heal.

You came to visit me.

My heart held you.

You were always meant to be.

Three months inside me and a lifetime alongside me.

¹⁵ I am thinking. L'nui'suti 3.0.5. (2019). M'kmaw Kina'matnewey.

It is when I was able to sit with my teachings and trust my instinctual knowledge that I have truly felt grounded, connected; when I felt well. I remember a conversation with one of the Elders from our community:

So, I guess I am asking for some guidance, some direction, something to help me figure out if I'm on the right path." The hairs on the back of my neck stand up as if I'm having a moment of déjà vu and a familiar prickling cold shiver follows down my spine. The Elder looks at the gift I had placed in his hand for a brief moment and looks back into my eyes.

Patience is the hardest teaching to learn.

He breaks eye contact and starts to walk towards the sweat lodge. I follow closely behind each of his footsteps. I am happy you asked me for this sweat today, let the ancestors guide you.

It was during this sweat and moment in time that this teaching became alive for me. The ancestors did guide me that day and left me with a stronger sense of self. This is not to say that I did not continue to have moments of self-doubt. However, it is in this moment that I realize how deeply I have been impacted by colonialism; how it continues to impact. Shedding thoughts and ideas that do not align with who I am as a L'nu was increasingly important and significant to the research I was about to begin. Impacts from Canadian colonial institutions led to an inherent feeling or need that I must seek validation, approval and/or affirmations. That spring day it was my doubt that led me to ask an Elder if they would provide me with some reassurance about the

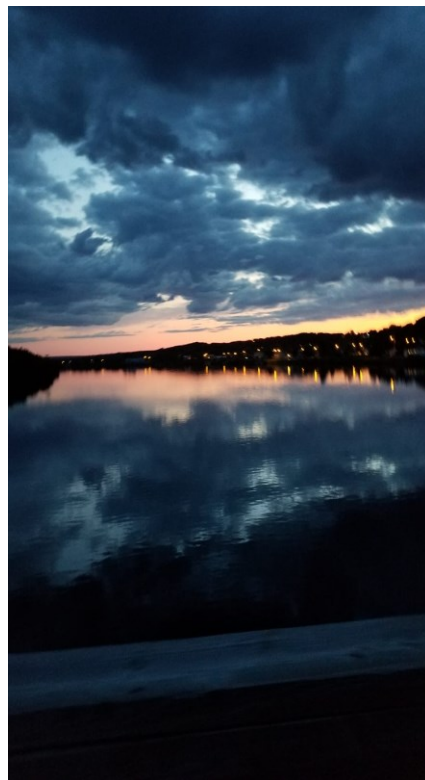
path I was on, my life journey. I felt as though I was carrying the weight of 1000 rocks on my back. Least of all in my work I did not want to disappoint anyone in community.

Patience is the hardest teaching to learn.

It became clearer in the sweat that the ancestors supported me in my journey. Reflecting on this moment with the Elder at the lodge brings me back to the start of my doctoral journey. I think about my initial research question that I submitted on admission, which was to explore cardiovascular disease and Indigenous women; how plain and general it seems, lacking both the personal inspiration and the real “heart” work. Over the course of my first year in the doctoral program, I was thinking about my teachings and knowledge around my heart and I was brought back to comfortable and uncomfortable places.

When I experienced my first pregnancy it was like I could hear the heartbeat inside me long before it was audible by any instrument. The joy, thrill and excitement were so immeasurable by any means. My husband and I could not wait to share the news and I remember talking to him about when we should share the joy. We thought why wait? So, I vividly remember going to my baby moccasins that sat on display and thinking I would share the news with my parents by giving them a small pair of infant booties. The shock and excitement as they opened the gift bag to discover the surprise is something that I will never forget. The smiles on all our faces did not last as long as you would hope because after only a few weeks I started bleeding. I rushed to the hospital. As I waited, I was so uncomfortable. When my name was finally called, I entered a stark white examination room where I was questioned, examined, and instructed. The doctor told me I needed blood work and ultrasound because I was most likely

having a spontaneous abortion. The whole process seemed so impersonal and I felt like screaming. After what seemed like an eternity the emergency nurse came back to talk to me, confirming that I had or would abort my first child. The nurse said the wrong things, over and over. *It happens to so many women. Often a fetus is aborted because there's a genetic issue. You should be happy that you were only early in the pregnancy.* I was devastated. I was a nurse. I knew this was possible. However, I was in no way prepared for this. It changed my life. My heart hurt at a level I never experienced before. I cried from that moment on until I fell asleep, only to wake up and start crying again. This cycle went on for some time. My heart was not considered in the care I received that day nor any days following. I was discharged and received no follow-up and no support. For days and weeks after it was my family, my community, and my friends that helped take care of me and help me understand my heart.



Spirit Guides

Why did I feel so tired I wonder?

I feel the tiredness lift slightly but I still ache with each movement.

*Wait, where am I? As the darkness eases
I feel the rough bark against my cold fingertips,
I'm sitting at the base of a tree in between two roots.
I thought I just rested my eyes for a moment.*

I still ache and am cold but regardless, I will force my eyes to open.

*A shadowy image off in the distance commands my attention,
A feeling of familiarity washes over me.
Grabbing onto the root and using it for support I stand up.
I try to keep moving forward.*

Is that a strawberry patch in the distance?

*I continue to walk, taking note of the darkened sky with the clouds above,
the strong winds blowing across my chilled body,
and the refreshing smell of the ocean.
I can't see the water but I know it's near.
Something catches my eye. Wait.*

Is that someone in the distance?

*One foot in front of the other I am drawn towards the patch.
I can now see off in the close distance the rows and rows of runners like a sea of green,
with the jagged green leaves, creating a subtle ripple as the wind blows over them.
White flowers are spread across the plants like dots.*

Red is peaking through the green in random places.

*I walk and walk, one foot in front of the other,
Time seems to almost stand still as I get closer to the field.*

Why do I feel so tired I wonder?

*Wait did I just hear my name?
Heart Berries, strawberries, I see them in the distance.*

The Mi'kmaq teachings that I have received tell me that I must understand kinship to be with all things. This understanding of kinship is very important to who we are and it is our responsibility as L'nu people to recognize this. Mi'kmaq language has less of an emphasis on words and more so on the meaning or action behind the word. Young (2016) states that the Mi'kmaq language comes from nature in action with the purpose of communicating to establish and maintain relationships with both life forms and forces. Therefore, it is vital to not only understand a word but to also understand the emotion or intent they elicit; understanding their connection. When I think about the strawberry patch, I think about the place and how it calls to me.

Tami wejien¹⁶/Chapter 4

Paper 2

The following paper, entitled *Contemplating Place in Nursing: Ontological Understandings* was published in 2023.

¹⁶ Where are you coming from. L'nui'suti 3.0.5. (2019). M'kmaw Kina'matnewey.

Contemplating Place in Nursing: Ontological Understandings

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International Journal of Indigenous Health

Abstract

How nurses understand and integrate their understanding of place is important to nursing practice. In this paper, we explore the concept of place in relation to our varied backgrounds, with the understanding that this concept differs from one person to another depending on their experiences. By coming together to talk about place, and the intersections between our common circumstances, interests, and beliefs, we share and discuss the realm of place as home, as relationship(s), and as memory. Each of our unique and distinct identities—Mi'kmaw, Métis, Jewish, and newcomer to Canada—brought varied perspectives on how the place is integrated into our lives and our work as nurses. When we pay close attention, we can begin to understand that nursing research, practice, and education are intertwined with place. Along with spirit and healing, these factors have implications for our health and wellbeing.

Keywords: place, ontology, Indigenous, reflection, autobiographical, Two-Spirit, healing, nursing

Contemplating Place: An Ontological Understanding

Over the past year, our group came together at regular intervals to talk about what matters to us personally and as nurses. All four of us have many years of nursing experience either in acute care or community settings or in academia. It was during our conversations that we noticed how each of us kept returning to ideas and understandings of place. We did not intend to come together to discuss the connections between nursing and place, but rather this focus on place evolved organically. Geographically, our stories were linked to the places we found ourselves while having conversations; during which, we often recognized the lands we were on and their First Peoples. What unfolded was a meaningful exchange of ideas, wherein all of us felt the urgency to re-think place, and how future responses in nursing might consider the significance of place.

Keith: *Thinking about the recent events - the unearthing of the death and bodies of Indigenous children across Canada located at residential schools - I have been thinking about how much place holds memories, silences, and injustices.*

Vera: *This sense of unearthing Keith that you talk about has a notion of revealing and exposing. It calls us to take responsibility. Yet, it too makes me think about the notion of displacement ...*

Erica: *... displaced purposefully to cause harm. I am acutely aware that places not only hold the bodies of children, but they also hold acts of harm. The harm that continues to shape intergenerational stories of Indigenous peoples - harm that was caused by displacement and by being denied access to place(s) and relationships that are considered our home.*

Margot: *Until recently, I understood place as grounding, as a way to recognize what was meaningful to people. In the past, I used to think about how a place holds the possibility to feel at home, the possibility to recognize and celebrate connections.*

Keith: *It is interesting Margot, as I think with the sense of place you are describing. For a long time, questions like 'Where are you from?' or 'Where do you want to be buried?' seemed easy for me to ask, and also answer. It is only in the last few years that this sense has been disrupted for me in profound ways - these questions now are not only complex but also complicated. These questions have helped shape my thinking about and with place.*

In this paper, we outline a relational practice, which looks like connecting the practice of nursing's relationship with health back to the ontological roots of the place. Equally, it looks like a place that is central to health and healing. We begin this paper with fragments of one of our conversations—fragments that we will further contemplate later on. While we each carry distinct identities, which include being Mi'kmaw (Erica), Métis (Keith), Jewish (Margot), and a newcomer to what is now called 'Canada' (Vera), we also all come to this work as nurses. In the later part of this paper, we begin to explore how we might take up ideas of place in nursing. We make visible that place plays a central role in healing, health, and well-being.

We are particularly focused on place in this paper, and understand that “[p]lace is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning” (Tuan, 1979, p.

387). We turn to our own experiences as sites of knowledge and knowing. In this way, it becomes visible that place is embodied and calls forth particular experiences. At the same time, we know that our experiences are shaped by the “world conditions of exile, displacement, diasporas, and-inflamed orders, to say nothing of increasingly tumultuous struggles by indigenous peoples and cultural minorities for ancestral homelands, land rights, and retention of sacred places” (Feld & Basso, 1996, p. 5). As we inquired into our experiences and made visible the complexities we each live in relation to place (Clandinin, 2013), we recognised that all of us were shaped by feminist pragmatist ideas (Addams, 1902).

Place as Home: Place as intertwined with Spirit, Healing and Belonging

It is Erica who helps us see place not only as a home but also as intertwined with spirit. Place in this way is connected with our bodies, with who we are, and with who we are becoming.

Mi'kma'ki. The territory and traditional homelands of the Mi'kmaq. My home. My nation. I was raised on the west coast of Newfoundland where I now raise my children. There was a time when I thought I might leave my home, mostly due to the idea that other places could offer better jobs, more money, and more happiness. However, my dad would keep me grounded by saying: 'There are other places and you may always chase after more money but none of that is better than being home'.

With the words of Erica's dad in mind, we begin to wonder about the connection between place and home. Are the ideas of place and home tied to happiness? What creates a sense of having to move? What pushes us to move? What holds us in place? It is Feld and Basso (1996) who help us think about these experiences in terms of rootedness, uprootedness, or transrootedness. Erica continues:

I left my mother's womb and entered into the physical world in Mississauga, Ontario. My parents moved from the island to pursue jobs and what they were told was important. However, it was in Ontario that my father quickly realized that he could not live away from his homelands, away from family, from the lands of his ancestral roots. The disconnect he felt was sickening. I only lived in Ontario for a few months before my parents sold everything and moved back to Newfoundland. My children were shocked when they found out that I was not born here, perhaps due to the fact that I have always referred to the island as home. I never thought too much about this until I started to travel and every time I left I longed to come back. This longing and need to be in my place allows for a feeling of deep personal ancestral connection.

Here, we see the ties to place across generations. The stories of Erica's dad reverberate and carry forward in Erica. The longing to return home can be profound and shape how our lives unfold and also gives us purpose. The land embraces who we are, and perhaps it calls us back each time we leave. Yet, there are times when staying in place becomes difficult:

My mother's father did not want to go to the hospital for palliative care and she cared for him at home; he and my grandmother lived next door to our house. Next door to their house lived my great-grandparents. His strong desire to stay rooted at home and my mother's willingness to give whatever she could to make that happen shaped how I see my connection to the place. Through watching them, I began to understand that health and healing were more about an individual's place and family, than any one act of care he would receive in institutional settings that were located far from the place that mattered to my grandfather.

As Erica tells the stories of her grandparent, we fall silent and are called to think about our practices as nurses, and as people who care for and with others. Yet, Erica's story offers us something more—it makes visible that even the most attentive care cannot provide healing and well-being if the spirit is sick. The spirit is connected to place; it provides depth and meaning, it calls us back often, and it holds the stories of who we are, have been, and are becoming. This connection also provides grounding for ceremonies. The physical notion of connection, either to a geographical place or to a physical being, is discussed within the literature (Cummins et al., 2007; Carolan, Andrews, & Hodnett, 2005), yet there is a need to expand nursing to encompass the link between spirit and place:

I thought I was attuned to the idea that place and spirit were deeply intertwined because I grew up with teachings and knowledge. However, it was not until my first fast that I realized that I was mainly processing information cognitively, through colonial constructs of thought. It was by being in a place that I began to attend differently. I recall writing the following note to myself after reflecting upon my fast:

As I emerge from the tent, I feel a cold drop of dew running down the back of my neck, which had fallen from the tent most likely. It sends a prickling sensation up and down my neck and I shiver slightly. The cool morning air engulfs me like a familiar embrace and the sounds of the birds are in the air. I can feel those who visited me yesterday are with me still and this type of happiness mixed with contentment is something I never experienced before. I look down at the pinecones left at my tent door and smile.

How does one know when a place provides comfort, security, and connection? As we can see, when Erica experiences her first fast and has ancestors/family visit her, who she is begins to shift. The ceremony was an eye-opening experience and created a deeper understanding for Erica about her connections to place. It is a place that embraces us, that calls us home. After reading Erica's words, *place* becomes a way of understanding the world, rather than being an object. There is a need for nurses to reach beyond their own understandings, to be present in their experiences, and to allow for the alignment of place and spirit.

Place and Relationships: Place as Being Contested

The snow woke me (Keith) up, as though the soft sound of the flakes striking the various surfaces outside my window were an alarm. It's 4:00 AM, the hour I often find myself awake, and not alone in the world. Winter always surprises, it was 8 degrees and sunny 10 hours ago, and now the snow is beautifully blowing her cold embrace across everything outside. I say a silent prayer for all the kin sleeping rough, may they be sheltered from cold wind cousin, and if not, may the journey to the creator remind them of the dignity they may not have been afforded in this life, on these lands from which they have been dispossessed. I go around closing the windows, the building's heating system hasn't switched to spring mode so our apartment was too warm at midnight when we went to bed. I had left windows open to cool us in the night, Winter may have seen an opportunity to be mischievous and sent the wind and snow to tour our home. Luckily, I heard them and now their beauty has me staring out the window and marvelling at these spirits and the unending and constantly shifting landscapes they create in our world. The streetlights make visible each perfect snowflake as they are carried by the wind towards their next destination. I'm working on decolonizing my mind, and I consciously think to shift from thinking of water as a feminine spirit, they might be more like me, tastawiyiniwak, an in-between spirit, neither man nor woman. Perhaps some of the flakes are one or the other, but perhaps each one is simply unique and beautiful at this moment before spring comes and joins them all together again in a new form. It's strange at 41 years young to be reflecting on my life as a process of re-learning, re-claiming, and re-sisting so much of what I was taught as a child and young person.

Place encompasses the elements of wind, snow, sun, and rain, which shape place/our experience of place in unique and profound ways. Keith's writing reminds us of how society contests the idea that relationships can be their own places, too. This contestation impacts one's ability to be somewhere and connect with who—and not what—one is. In nursing, connecting with who, rather than what, is central to therapeutic relationships. Who we are is shaped by where we are—equally, where we are from influences how we care for one another, and how we implicate place in our healing. Place, as Keith shows us, is organic and calls us to resist the need for control. Instead, it calls us to understand that life is an ongoing process of re-learning, re-claiming, and resisting. There is a need to “worry less about place in broad philosophical or humanistic terms, than about places as sites of power struggles or about displacement as histories of annexation, absorption and resistance. Thus, ethnography's stories of place and places are increasingly about contestation” (Feld & Basso, 1996, p. 4).

I wonder if I had been given the teachings of the ancestors in less subtle ways, how things may have been different for young me. Would I have spent so much time with alcohol and other intoxicants? Would I have hurt myself so many times, trying to fit my beautiful and expansive spirit into the tiny boxes of western expectations and toxic masculinity? I know in my heart that most of those teachers meant well for me, were in their way trying to make

the path easier, but as I've heard said, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. I'm grateful for other teachers, who encouraged me, both human and other-than-human. The accepting ones, who saw me, and embraced the parts that others found uncomfortable. Today, I continue to learn and connect with community and kin, proud and comfortable in my Two-Spirit Métis identity, with a growing knowledge of the ancestors on both settler and Métis sides of the family. This connection would not be possible without a deeper and more expanding sense of place.

It is important to understand where one is on their journey. There is a need to shift towards being in relation with place as both a spiritual and physical being. Webber et al. (2021) differentiate between land-based education and place-based education by stating that, while both work towards similar ends of social and ecological justice, land-based education addresses issues of sovereignty from Indigenous perspectives. Place is implicated in the process of becoming a nurse—therefore, the ways in which place teaches us, enriches our learning, and provides opportunities to learn with and from the land (as good relations), are critical to acknowledge. This shift in thinking reminds us of Seawright (2014), who identifies how settlers claimed individual ownership of land while Indigenous peoples felt they belonged to the land. Connecting to land as a place goes beyond connecting to a geographical physical landscape. Our life stories are connected to the physical land, as well as to the stories, meanings and feelings that create a sense of belonging, wherein one trusts instinct over thought processes. This instinct is both unexplainable and individual.

I have new and deepening relations with Elders, knowledge keepers, community and family. These connections had wilted, and are now being revived with care and attention. I've learned to listen more carefully to our relatives who aren't human, and to care for those relations as I would for family. The Métis homeland and our people's stories have new importance for me, and it is through this revitalization of relationships that I continue on the journey of living in wahkohtawin, the sacred balance of good relations.

We listen carefully as Keith talks. We can hear in their voice the importance of being simultaneously in place and in relationship. Keith expresses that they will feel free once they identify all parts and places associated with themselves, and don't have to contest or explain who they are. This might seem ironic—that reconnecting allows one to be free—but Keith explains that reconnecting through relationship is what creates balance.

Living with and between Bodies: Place as Being

In 2010, I (Vera) wrote an article whose title partially read *Travelling to and within unfamiliar landscapes*. As part of the abstract of the paper I wrote:

Drawing on the life stories of Debra, an Aboriginal woman living with HIV, I reflect on the feeling of (dis)placement from a geographic landscape and cultural heritage that both Debra and I experienced, although in different ways. I explore how place is inscribed onto

and into our bodies and how home can be understood as embodied. In this way I explore place as geographic position of home and as ontological. In the living out of her stories, Debra made me not only understand the deeper conditions of human life, but that stories told are not fixed texts, that they are composed in and out of the living and in relation to others (Caine, 2010, p. 1304). It was and continues to be Debra's experiences that make me consider and (re)consider place.

As we think about these stories, we note that they are more than just fixed texts or accounts of experiences. Indigenous peoples have used stories and storytelling as a way to offer teachings, share knowledge, and create connections for individuals. In the same way that stories are more than just text, place is more than just a geographical location and offers more than the ability to “have somewhere to go”. The etymology of the word place shows a vastly different and evolving understanding of place over time. In its earliest recognition, place referred to a room and space, and to an openness. Much later, it became linked to social status, and to one's position on a social scale. Over time, the meaning of place grew attached to a definition of things happening over time (ie. something taking place). More recently, the notion of someone or thing being ‘out of place’ has given it a more relational context.

In thinking about place, I return to my childhood home and the deep connections that exist between place and my family's history. I recall that as children, wherever we ended up with my parents, there were always stories of place, stories that connected them and us to geographical locations that mattered to them. Yet, in as much as it called forth histories of people and events, it also was about an imagined future. Our future, the future of my parents and the future of my life were tied to the places we visited. There was a sense that place was forecasting my future. With time, I increasingly felt out of place.

Vera examines how the concept of place in itself has morphed and changed across different cultures, over time, and in different contexts. Perhaps it morphed and changed as she grew older, gaining different perspectives and understandings. The notion of place in reference to comfort and connection leads us to examine it as something that can bring unwelcomeness, or as Vera describes it, a feeling of being “out of place”. How can something that can bring such contentment also be something that can bring such hurt? In order to truly understand the vast meanings tied to being in or out of place, perhaps one must examine the individual's relationship with oneself.

I left home several times during my youth, lived for short periods of time on the street, or hitchhiked to places that promised a homecoming in ways that only a stranger could imagine. I think about my time of living on the streets in Paris, I was just a few years older than Debra when this happened. She was barely 11 when she began sleeping in emergency room wards to avoid going home with strange men who wanted her body mostly and sometimes more than that. It was a story that has stayed with me. Thinking about my time in Paris, I remember the guard at the local showers offering free showers in return for sexual favours - I can still feel the disgust present in the moment when he approached me. I

am sure he expected me to agree. That day I learned something about the vulnerability of being displaced, of being without place and of being out of place. I think that day marked a different homecoming for me. Place was never quite the same after that.

The vulnerability of being displaced, of being without place, and of being out of place can be profound. How one interprets place is based on how one interprets being. It takes vulnerability to consider that we might be in a place that goes beyond just our physical location. Vera continues on:

It was years later that I met Debra and that I learned about a lifetime of (dis)placement. Home was nowhere, and the (im)possibility of a homecoming was marked by the visible scars of her body. It was Debra who taught me that home lives within our bodies - that the scars and marks on our body become the maps and the landscapes of our lives - the scars tell the stories of being in and out of place. Debra helped me, for brief moments, to be at home in a place that I have never belonged to, that remains foreign and uncomfortable in my life. Whenever people ask me where my home is, I struggle to find an answer. Debra intuitively knew that I struggled to answer this question. It was Debra who raised new wonders for me and opened up new possibilities. One of the wonders she raised, was: Could my body be my home, could it be the place I am from and the place I will return to?

Debra helped Vera to see that her body could be a home, that it could be the place where she was from and the place she would return to. For Indigenous peoples, this notion of place is not new. Part of this notion is the idea that we are spiritual beings within a physical form, and that connecting emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually all help to create a balance. This balance is essential to staying healthy. Additionally, being healthy and well allows one to connect spiritually through ceremony and to understand life as a journey. Embracing intuition allows one to understand place as being connected more to being than to just living. Vera's story reminds us of how our experiences in our bodies, lives, and the places we inhabit shape the directions our lives take as people and as nurses. We wonder: How do the embodied places of our childhoods—our early lives—influence our decision to become nurses and healers?

*As I continue to think with Debra's story, I begin to wonder again what differentiates place and home. Can one be displaced and still be home? How might Debra think about displacement? Can one be displaced intentionally? Or is it always unintentional? The Oxford English dictionary (n.d) defines displacement as 'the act of forcing somebody/something away from their home or position' (np). Since the late 1940s the word displacement has been associated with refugees, where there is an understanding that people are forced to flee their home due to violence, conflict, and persecution. Often refugees leave their home, their places, with no possibility of return - or where the only return is grounded in the imagination. It is Rushdie (1981) who writes in his book *Imaginary Homelands*: "But the photograph tells me to invert this idea; it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time" (p. 428).*

As we contemplate displacement in terms of place, we realize that place also grounds one's feelings of displacement. If one gets stuck on that place—as well as the past—is home, then the present is foreign and brings about a sense of displacement. However, knowing that place is where we come from and where we will go can release one from the feeling of being neither here nor there. It is in these moments that we turn to Brah (1996, p. 192-193), who states that “[t]he concept of diaspora places the discourse of ‘home’ and ‘dispersion’ in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins”. Moving away from the notion of ‘fixed origins’ opens up a dialogue to further explore how nursing might attend to issues of place, rootedness, and displacement.

Place as Holding Memory: Evoking and Calling Forth Stories

As I (Margot) sit at my computer, I have a purple sticky note with the word HOME written in bold letters stuck to the side of the screen. I wrote this word and stuck the note up many months ago right after a personal therapy session. The word is to remind me of what is important, what I have lost, what I have built, and what I strive for. When I think of home, the first thing that comes to mind is the house where I grew up. I can still feel the sense of belonging and calm that would come over me when entering the door. My parents pattering around, the dog barking in the yard, and a feeling of true familiarity that was comforting. I always think of that house as my home.

As Margot contemplates what ‘home’ means to her, we hear her words: *What is important, what I have lost, what I have built and what I strive for.* The word home invokes thoughts that are linked to the sounds of *parents pattering around, a dog barking and a feeling of familiarity.* In this way, place becomes the feelings and senses that cannot be replicated by anyone or anything else. The definition of ‘home’ is multifaceted and complicated, as it can refer beyond a tangible space, region, or group of people who live in one household (Hundt, 2014). Home can extend to a feeling or emotion that grounds who we are within ourselves. Equally, a sense of home can be felt within ourselves or in connection to another person. Home is complex but often brings about a sense of peace, familiarity, and belonging. Margo continues on:

After the passing of my mom and then the decline in my father's health, things shifted. The house was no longer calming or provided a sense of belonging; it was a reminder of times past and memories coupled with sadness of what could no longer be. I wanted so desperately to hold onto the time and place when this house was my home. Unfortunately, life and time had moved on; my world had shifted and home as I knew it was about to change.

As we listen to Margo, connections between memories and the physical space become visible. Basso (in Feld & Basso, 1996, p. 55) says:

The experience of sensing places, then, is both reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic. As places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and

feelings animate the places on which attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process – inward toward facets of the self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternately both together – cannot be known in advance. When places become actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the mind may lead is anyone’s guess.

What happens when the feelings, sounds, and things that trigger and sustain our memories fade? Does who we are change? What if the connection was not sustained by a physical object, but by a connection to the land, or to a geographic location that will remain without us? Is there comfort in knowing that one resides on the same lands as their mother once did? In this case, does the land bring deeper and more meaningful connections? Or is it the stories that are tied to place and relationships that ground us? When we lose the stories and the memories, do we lose our grounding points?

I did not realize until many years later how the loss of this physical space impacted my sense and feeling of what home is. It has taken many experiences and losses to recognize the importance of ‘home’ and what this means to me; I am not fully there yet. My father’s health decline and eventual passing from dementia immediately following my mother’s death led me to a place in which I questioned much about life and a sense of home. I felt alone and ungrounded despite having a family of my own. I lacked a place where I felt that I belonged or had a foundation. These feelings led me to a long and difficult journey on how to rebuild a sense of home for myself. How was I to provide this feeling of home for my children if I did not feel this within myself? Slowly, I started to rebuild.

The sense of loss is profound for Margot, and uproots her in ways she did not anticipate. When we think about place, we can see how closely it is intertwined with those who matter to us. Home is not simply an architectural structure or physical place—rather, it is a complex and often intangible mix of factors brought forth by senses of belonging, attachment, memories, experiences, and familiarity, which are interwoven (Li, 2015). Perhaps this deep sense of being alone and ungrounded is temporary, and only persists until we find ways to come back to the land, which continues to hold our memories and stories. It is Erica who reminds us that the physical self is connected to a spirit—and, connecting one’s spirit is key to moving forward and to finding oneself. Margot’s journey of rebuilding has a sense of reaching backwards or returning, perhaps to the same place, yet not as the same person. This return looks different for all of us. For Erica it was reconnecting with a deeper understanding of ceremony. Keith worked on relationship building with community. Connecting and having a deeper understanding of oneself and the relationships that matter were important to Vera. For Margot, it was through her understanding of connections and her memories that she was able to rebuild.

Turning towards Nursing and Health

As we near the end of this paper, we return to our conversations about the importance of place in nursing. Initially, it was our shared sense of nursing that brought us together, and a call

to make visible the importance of place. As we reread and revisit our ideas, it becomes apparent that our experiences with and thoughts on place have had a significant impact on the ways that we engage with nursing, both as people with diverse experiences and as nurses. Place has not been a central idea in nursing or nursing research (Andrews, 2003), yet there is a need to think about it if we want to engage in healing (Wilson, 2003). In our conversations, we see how place shapes the act of nursing for each one of us. By making visible how place shapes the act of nursing, we can unravel how nursing research, practice, and education are entwined with spirit and healing.

Erica echoes Simpson (2014), who points out that it is the land that teaches us, and that there is a need for Indigenous peoples to “reclaim land as pedagogy” (p. 1). The land is pedagogical, and it helps us “[m]ake meaningful connections and provide order and continuity in a rapidly changing world” (Cruikshank, 1998, p. xiii). It is the land that holds our stories and the continuity of time. This continuity is important as it shapes our identities and well-being in the world. Bras (2018, p. 161) notes:

I know that the land and my relationship with the land holds embodied knowledge, that memories are present and continue to be planted deep within the soil. As I walk alongside my students, as we share places of significance, I can feel our relationships shifting – our ethical spaces are no longer just between us, but include a commitment and responsibility to the places that shape who we are.

We would argue that, as nurses who walk alongside those we care for, we too experience what Bras describes. In the moments when we pay attention to place, we can see who people are and are becoming. It is with this in mind that we must attend to place when we engage with nursing. Silko (1997, p. 21), offers further reasons as to why, writing:

[i]t begins with the land; think of the land, the earth, as the center of a spider’s web. Human identity, imagination and storytelling were inextricably linked to the land, to Mother Earth, just as the strands of the spider’s web radiate from the center of the web.

Although we arrive at the end of this paper, the conversation regarding place and what it means for nursing has only just started. We return to our conversation one last time:

Keith: *Not unlike our Two-Spirit kin, nursing, in a sense, has become dis-placed. In trying to find a place to ‘fit in’ to the colonial projects of medicine and healthcare systems, is it possible nursing has forgotten that it has always belonged in our communities?*

Erica: *Nursing has not re-claimed its place, it’s home within communities. Indigenous healers lived with the lands, not just on them. They conducted their research, learned with nature as a relative, shared medicines, gained knowledge from working with others, and cared for themselves as part of the community that cared for others.*

Jackson: *There is a need to implicate settler-colonialism as a form of dis-placement. It makes me wonder, how do the relationships with place, displacement, and ideas of being in place impact the way nursing is conceived, conceptualized, and enacted? Do nurses acknowledge their place, on and in the homelands of others?*

Vera: *As I think about our conversations, I wonder about a sense of belonging, and also a deep sense of loss that exists for many who have been displaced. I think it was you Erica who said: How do we acknowledge that place is a piece of one's soul, for if one has no community, no home, no recognizable place - who will they be? And where are they from?*

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Ankita'si¹⁷/Chapter 5

Thinking with Heart.

The smell of cooked chicken and salt beef engulfs me like a hug and I take a big deep inhale, sighing in contentment as the comforting scents of the familiar foods hit my nose. I realize my fingertips are almost vibrating as I rub them unconsciously over my Nan Hunts' corduroy chair as I wait to be told dinner is ready. I can hear the chuckling of Dad over the chatter and clanging of dishes. He was probably trying to eat some of the chicken before Nan even got it on the plate. Dad is always tormenting us or telling jokes. I think Nan just pretended to be upset at his foolishness because we would catch a glimpse of her grin as she would go to walk away from him. There was a smaller crowd here today; just Mom, Dad, my sister, Nan, Pop, my great grandmother, my great aunt, and me. As my hand runs over the chair, I can't help but wonder what we will have for dessert today. Secretly I am hoping it is partridgeberry pie. I giggle as I remember when we went picking the berries. I remember at one point my little sister closed her fist while she held a handful of partridgeberries in her hand and began chasing me around the woods threatening to smear it all over me. Mom quickly stepped in and stopped our shenanigans while reminding us that the less we leave with to take home the less we'll end up having to eat.

As I recall the times alongside my family, I am beginning to think about partridgeberry. It is a berry which survives the cold winters, leaving splashes of red shining through the glistening frost almost as if it calls to you. The berry makes me think of the strength that Mi'kmaw women have as life givers, water protectors and matriarchs. Our women have been leaders to our nation

¹⁷ I am thinking. L'nui'suti 3.0.5. (2019). M'kmaw Kina'matnewey.

but have also endured major traumas. Regardless, they continue to utilize their matriarchal powers and shine as beacons of light for our nation. The colour red is so significant. I have often felt that my shine was getting lost under the frost and harsh climate of Western society. However, it was my family and my community who have helped me find that partridgeberry again in myself. Mi'kmaq teachings are multifaceted and never finished, much like the development of who one is on Mother Earth.

As I sit and think about the partridgeberry, I can't help but also think about the significance of the strawberry and my research. If a strawberry is cut in half, it resembles the physical shape of a heart which may lead some individuals to simplistically conclude that this is why it is referred to as the heart berry. However, from a Mi'kmaq lens and shared knowledge the strawberry represents so much more. The strawberry is a women's medicine. Women in this case are the keepers of the knowledge and hold responsibility. If one just appreciates the sweet berry and neglects to show respect for the leaves, vines, and roots they will never truly understand the interconnectedness of systems, nor how everything we understand is in balance. Our heart is the center of our body and all parts are connected through a system of networks. The same way the heart is at the center we can consider one's self at the center of ones being, consisting of many connections; connections to body, mind, emotions and spirit. Mi'kmaw women are lifegivers who hold responsibility for the teachings of the ceremonial (straw)berry fast. When I was a young girl entering into my first moontime¹⁸ our community was at a place where ceremonies and knowledge was just coming back and being shared again. Therefore, I did not experience this ceremony myself. However, later in my life I was gifted the information and the teachings of a berry fast. I then helped share the teachings with my daughter as a young girl. I would talk to

¹⁸ Moontime refers to menstruation.

her and tell her about moontime, about the ceremony and how it was her choice to enter the ceremonial fast. Being able to share this knowledge with my daughter was an honor and a blessing. Teaching and sharing with her long before her first moontime is an example of how time is important. Allowing her to decide if she wanted to participate in the ceremony provided her with autonomy over herself and gave her a deeper understanding of the power she holds. She made the choice to enter the fast and abstaining from berries for 13 moons and in this choice, she abstained from things that could give her immediate enjoyment allowing her to acknowledge the tremendous willpower and control she has over her own body. L'nu teachings are not simple nor formulated for a single purpose. The fast was not just about my daughter. As an Elder and knowledge keeper were helping teach me, I was sharing knowledge with not only my daughter but also everyone else in my family, including my son. He was hearing about moontime, berry fasts and observing the celebration that his sister had at the end of the ceremony. He got to see how much she gained from this. Also, during this time we all talked about the rights and sacredness of a women's body, the role of supporting a woman and the importance of ceremonies. At the end of the ceremony the berries that she collected for over a year allowed her to create pies and other dishes to gift individuals from our community who helped support her over the 13 moons that passed from her first moontime. Food is a major part of our lives. Also, not just the food itself but the gathering, creating, and sharing connected with it is an important piece of this ceremony. A ceremony that allowed our family to focus on the importance of our connection to our L'nu community.

The smell of chicken and salt beef engulfs me like a hug and I take a big deep inhale, sighing in contentment as the comforting scents of the familiar foods hit my nose. I hurry along helping Mom put the chicken and salt beef onto plates for the table. I can faintly

hear the chuckling of Dad over the chatter and clanging of dishes. He would have been trying to eat some of the chicken before we even got it on the plate. Dad was always tormenting or telling jokes. There is a small few of us here today; just Mom, me, my husband, my daughter, and my son. Dad is here too of course because it is easy to feel his presence as I think of his laughter. I look at my daughter and smile as I see my mother taking partridge berry tarts out of the fridge to lay onto the counter, I feel the sting and burn as my eyes try to fill up with tears. Those tears never do fall because I watch my daughter sneak over to the counter and stick her finger into the whip cream. Laughter is medicine.



My daughter breaking her fast and my son watching.

I am shaking and so upset. My sister and I were arguing again. Mom came to the window and yelled “You are going to come inside and go to your room pretty soon”. I love being outside and do not want to go in. I am panting now, probably because I’m upset but also due to the trek I am making up over the steep hill. The hill behind my house was like another world to me. I could come up in the tall grass and sit in the middle of the top landing. I felt hidden and safe, as if the grass was hugging me. As the wind blows through the top of the grass my breathing seems to almost match the swaying of the grass as it moves back and forth. I close my eyes and I have a moment of déjà vu. The feeling is not

bad but it's almost unnerving to wonder if you've had this same moment and experience previously, almost as if I'm looking down at myself in this moment. I hear a car pass down below and I slowly open my eyes, my breathing normal once again and my anger long gone.

Throughout the research that unfolded I was often called back to attend to my memories and my dreams – many of these were like medicine to me. For me within this research and the women bringing me along in the sharing of stories allowed me to really contemplate medicine around the context of heart. Our starting place was contemplating what the word heart meant and I was drawn to my own exploration of the Mi'kmaq language and thoughts of heart.



Michael R. Denny

As I began to prepare myself to meet with Mi'kmaw women, I remembered my conversation with Michael R. Denny, a friend and Mi'kmaw language keeper. The more I thought about speaking with Mi'kmaw women about what the word “heart” meant to them the more I thought about the importance of centering Mi'kmaq thought in this process. Our language holds so much knowledge and as I moved into these important conversations, I wanted to allow myself to not focus on simply their use of words in the English language but more on the context and message the women were trying to share in their stories. This set the groundwork and how I entered into conversations.

'Kamulamun¹⁹



Olia Graphics*

¹⁹ Kamulamun is a Mi'kmaq word for heart

Arlene was one of the first people I thought of when I considered women in my community who might like to engage in the research. Indigenous research, including research shaped by the Mi'kmaq worldview, recognizes and values long-term meaningful relationships²⁰ which was important to acknowledge as I planned to ask Mi'kmaw women to share with me their personal thoughts and stories. While Indigenous people's ways of knowing, being and doing are stated as being valued within academia there remains the unspoken pressure and expectation on Indigenous students to fit into a Westernized box. Often, I felt the need to resist and to live up to my ethical responsibility to my Mi'kmaq community.

I relate this to my childhood, where I was taught at an early age that when we visited somewhere I was not to ask for things, including, asking for food or water. It was a feeling that we did not want to be seen as though we didn't have something. Maybe this was a conscious or unconscious attempt at avoiding societal stereotypes about Mi'kmaq people. There was one time we went on a car ride further west and our truck broke down on the side of the road. It took a while before we got the truck going and during that time, I remember we stopped at a family members house. I remember sitting in the chair with my mouth almost stuck together from the dryness, yet I would not dare ask for a glass of water. When I was offered the water, I looked to my Mom. Once she gave a nod, I quickly squeaked out a yes please. It is this constant urge to blend in and not speak up that has been with me for years. Throughout my work years I have had to resist the urge to go unnoticed.

I eventually reached out to Arlene, and she was the first Mi'kmaq woman who joined the research. I remembered that it was Arlene, who also was part of my supervisory committee who

²⁰ Oster and Lightning (2022) state that good relationships produce knowledge that is meaningful and beneficial to community. The authors identify that these good relationships look different in each community and a pan-Indigenous generalized approach is not appropriate.

voiced that it was critically important that I had supports in place. Arlene was clear that she felt that I needed to be able to have access to mental health and trauma support. I remember thinking that I too had been wondering about the kinds of experiences that would be called forth when talking about heart. Yet, I had not considered that I too might need supports in place – I wondered if I could handle the difficult stories and experiences that might be shared with me. Arlene had been alongside me and mentored me for ceremonies, powwows, and various events, and she knew me well. It was not until January 2021 when Nan²¹ began her journey to the spirit world, followed by Dad three days later that I began to feel the weight of my experiences and the work ahead. These two losses followed by two more of my Aunts' passing impacted me on all levels. For the first time, I stopped. I stopped all my professional work, my doctoral work, my daily connections. I stopped everything.

Swoosh, swoosh. Thump, thump. I can hear the sounds of the waves crashing over the rocks with the soft gentle breeze gliding across my skin. The beads of sweat combined with the drifting air over my body caused the hairs on my arms to stand up. Inhaling I take a long deep breath, filling my lungs with the warm sweet but salty ocean air. I feel it entering my lungs and my chest expands. The burning sensation begins, but as quickly as it came, I begin to let the air escape my lungs, breathing out. I can feel my heart thudding against my chest but not in a panicked way. Suddenly, a cold draft creep across my face and the beautiful peaceful sounds of the waves are interrupted by the sound of paper crinkling as someone moves. I move my hand and no longer feel the warm prickling sensation of the sand moving underneath it, as a rough corduroy material replaces it. Oh, I now remember it's the couch I feel under my fingertips. I move and sit up straighter,

²¹ Marilyn Hunt (nee Butt)

taking a last long deep breath in preparation to open my eyes and come back from my safe space to be physically present. The sharp sting of bright light hits my eyes like a movie projector screen when the film finishes as they flutter open and closed. “How are you feeling now”, the counselor asks. I struggle with words as I feel a sense of loss and lack of place now that my ocean has dissipated. “I don’t know”, is all I can muster. My thoughts trail off to why I picked the beach, the ocean, those sounds, when asked to picture a place of comfort, safety and happiness. “What did you envision?” she is now asking. I think to myself what she should ask is where did I go. This beach, which was no particular beach, was where my hurting heart took me to soothe my spirit. “Home”, I reply.

The journey to this corduroy couch had taken many years, at a time where traumas and events had accumulated in my life. I remember driving in my car and a song came on, a simple song to which I had no connection, but I could no longer hold myself together. Another time I was walking on the treadmill with a movie playing on my cell phone and there was a scene where someone died, the air escaped from my lungs leaving me panicked. It was the dreaded overwhelming feeling of not being able to handle one more bad thing. I kept thinking to myself, *If one more thing happens. I am not going to be able to handle it. It will finally break me.* When I told my friend about this, she said that I really had to see a counselor, someone I could talk to. Ironically enough it was just before the first Christmas after losing Nan and Dad that I got the call telling me a counselor had an unexpected cancellation, leaving an opening for a new client. *You have been through a lot of traumas in your life but a lot in the last short while,* the counselor stated during the first visit. *Yeah, maybe I have,* was all I could say. Trauma, my heart, my healing. It was like the first piece of the big, large puzzle coming together: something clicked.

This coming together was a work in progress. Meeting with the women where they were currently at had me healing in ways I can't yet write about. Words fail me. All I know is that I had a whole new understanding of what heart means.

When I called and asked Arlene if she would like to participate in the research she immediately said yes. I recall her saying, *this is going to be good*. That statement was one I kept close to me. I wanted this to be good. Good in the sense of how L'nu refer to things. That this work would be completed with all the core principles of good research²². That work showed respect, humility, trust, and reciprocity. I wanted to hear the women's voices and I too wanted the women's voices to be heard elsewhere.

Arlene suggested we meet for a walk near her home. Not only did she select to meet in an area she was comfortable with but where I was also comfortable. I had major losses in my life within the 8 previous months to when I had last seen Arlene in person. I was only now getting to a point where I was starting to get outside of the house and do things, to reconnect. Slowly, I talked with more to people and I started to face a new reality. As I drove into the parking lot of the walking trail, I saw Arlene standing by her car, her big smile shining as a calming sight. I relaxed and the anxiety of meeting in person left. We hugged, I cried, and I started to heal a little more.²³ As we started out on our walk, we began to catch up right away, talking about family, the community, work, and friends. After getting caught up I asked her the one and only question I had, *what does the word heart mean to you?* Arlene stated, *First and foremost it's a part of the body. It keeps you alive, but then heart also means water {you need water to keep the heart*

²² Indigenous research principles include but are not limited to respect for relationships, knowledge and reciprocity and participation (Futter-Puati & Maua-Hodges, 2019; Nabobo-Baba, 2008; Page, Boyle, & McKay, 2019).

²³ She signed the consent and agreed to be audiotaped during our walk. I obtained written consent before starting conversations specific to the research with all the women.

pumping} also need water to survive.... women protect the water; you know to sustain mother earth.

L'nu women have a role as water protectors. As life-givers and carriers of children, it is the water within the womb that surrounds our children. Some say that the water of the womb is a link to the spirit world, spirit comes into the physical by entering into a womb. This makes me think about the births of my son and daughter. While I did not labor long, I remember my water not breaking on its own and the doctor wanting to break my water through medical intervention. I think about that and wonder if my water would have broken on its own, without any help, if they had allowed me the time. Why was my body holding onto the water within the sac? As I continued to labor it was determined that I was anaemic. My body knew that the water was needed and continued to hold onto it. Mother earth holds water. Without water, we could not survive, and Mother Earth could not survive.

As we continued to talk, I started to think about activism and the role of women to water. All of the women talked about this connection to water. This strong connection to Mother Earth was not only discussed but also seen. For example, Nicole also decided to go for a walk for our first meeting. The outdoors was a neutral and grounding place she stated, whereby she could feel comfortable. Within the first couple of minutes as we connected and talked about family, work and life and I noticed that she stopped to bend down and pull her fingers through a patch of moss.

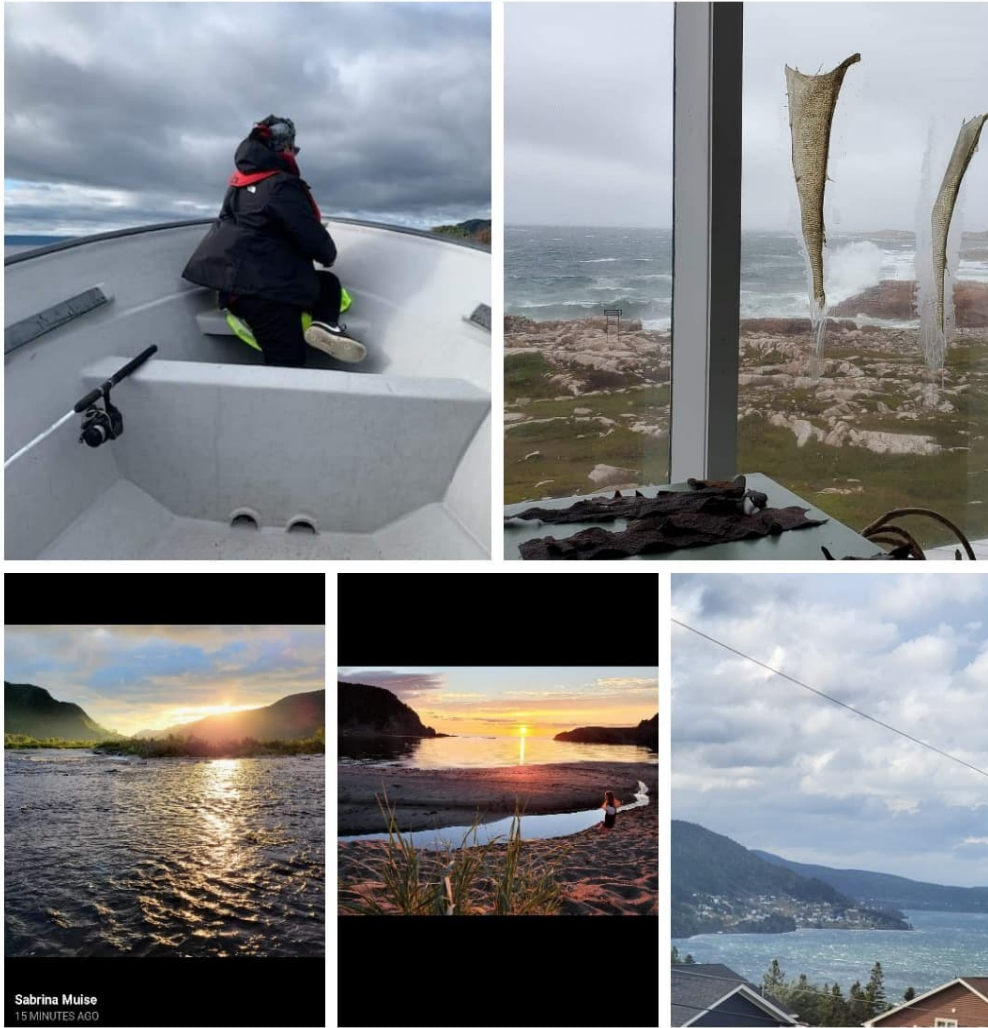
Nicole stated, *sorry, I can't help it. I always stop to pick it up. Just something about touching it*, as she stops and looks out over the water for a moment. I can't help but consider the moss; a non-flowering plant that can provide a coating one might call a blanket over trees, rock, fallen logs, or the ground. Not only does it provide this surface cover but also helps with overall

complex water needs. This image speaks to her responsibility and to the inherent intuition that Mi'kmaw women have in relation to being drawn to water. However, this experience speaks to the bigger picture of how we must understand the whole environment because each rock, each plant, each person carries spirit and thus plays a role. For example, as Dr. Elder Andrea Simon says *you can't consider the strawberries without thinking about the dandelions which prepare the grounds for their arrival.*

Preparing for my arrival Charlene had decided on a menu and planned out a schedule. She had been asked to attend an event previously and asked if I mind attending with her, suggesting that this drive could be a time where we could have a conversation. Of course, I didn't mind. As we started down the highway passing the trees that lined the road, she talked about her connection to the environment, specifically to food. She connected heart to many aspects of food, but she also shared her strong relationship to water. Charlene stated, *Sometimes I jot down things that come to my mind and one was 'breathe'. Where I live there's no salt water, no ocean but a river. I could go to the river but it's not that sigh of relief and doesn't help me breathe. So, first thing when I go home or near an ocean for example is go there, touch my chest. Feel my heart. ... it's part of my heart ... that connection to water.* Her comment made me pause.

It was after this that I talked with Sabrina. Due to Sabrina's hectic schedule, she decided to send a visual to me with explanations about her answer to the research question, *what does the word heart mean to you.* To her heart is connected to the nourishment of country food and being out on Mother Earth; hunting and gathering. What I also take notice of is the creation she made. In the diagram picture, the top is in red, which she relates to the positive aspects of heart health, but the negative aspects are in blue. *Everything in balance.* I notice that the drawing reminds me of a sunrise with the red above and the blue like a body of water below. Swoosh. Swoosh.

Thinking about the connection between heart and environment I am drawn to the pictures that each woman has shared with me. I notice they all shared pictures that are connected to a body of water. As Mi'kmaq women we are drawn consciously and subconsciously to water. As I think about how all the women connected heart to the environment, and specifically to water, I take a deep inhale. I hold it for a moment or two, and then release it slowly. I do this again but with my hand over my heart. I close my eyes this time and picture the ocean. I feel the pump under my hand. Thump Thump. I almost hear the swoosh swoosh as I feel the thump thump. I picture that ocean. I connect myself to that body of water and smile.



Pictures taken by each of the women

lineage, your ancestry and you're holding up all the women that walked before you and allowed you to be here today so that we can be here and keep our ceremonies and traditions going.

Arlene explains that we are connected to our ancestors who journey alongside us. By engaging in culture, traditions, ceremonies, and language we are honoring and connecting with our ancestors. Staying grounded in cultural knowledge allows for a stronger connection to our ancestors. Hence a healthy heart provides a greater connection to the spirits.

Nicole speaks of heart and its connection to our ancestors as well, when she states, *I know we are a link between the physical world and the spiritual ... Heart is intuition. I think heart is your inner life, like the spirit of self which is in you. It is the essence of who I am.* It was this comment that made me appreciate how she was telling her story. That her heart connects her to spirit and that perhaps this connection is linked to her intuition. She stated that she feels as though when she is connected, healthy and within a good place that it happens. To be connected culturally and spiritually means that she is healthier. Charlene speaks to this aspect also when describing heart. She states, *My soul is what grounds me. Keeps me balanced and the two things that give me balance is connection to the land and the water. Your soul is beyond that and is like who you are.*

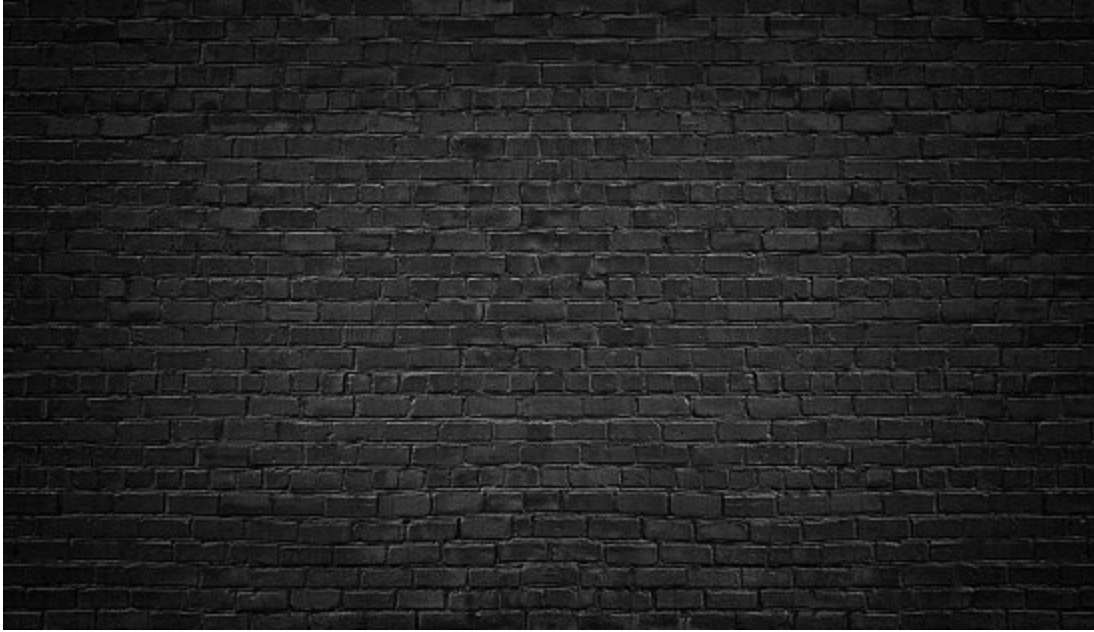
As L'nu people we have a kinship to mother earth, the land. This relationship is connected to our physical existence. Our relationship with our heart goes beyond this, and it is also our connection to our spirit world and therefore our ancestors. Charlene points out that when she is unable to be connected to the lands that she is unwell. Within Sabrina's drawing she shows that heart is her connection to the lands, ceremony, and connection to kin. When following up with Sabrina about the drawing she had shared with me, I asked if she could elaborate what spirit means to her in relation to heart. *Spirit, I understand it to be everything you are; your body is the*

vessel for your spirit; it is interconnected, everything that you are is your spirit. As I reflect on all the women's stories the statement from Sabrina seems to repeat itself. *Your body is the vessel for your spirit.* The heart is at the center of who we are, pumping blood through vessels, sustaining our physical body. Our knowledge and understanding of blood and its importance has been passed down throughout history as L'nu people. As I have mentioned previously my teaching is that our blood has always been said to hold our stories, sometime referred to as blood knowledge²⁴. The heart is a connection to the spirit and our blood which flows through our heart supplies our body with this liquid; this liquid full of knowledge. When one's knowledge carries trauma or one is disconnected from our culture it has consequences, it affects the heart's overall function, its health. Thus, our vessel (body) needs to be healthy for a lifegiver to be able to welcome life/spirit into her body. This is important – it includes healthy moontime for women. *Everything in balance.* This makes me think once again about my daughter and her berry fast, but also reminds me of something Arlene mentioned. *Oh yes, heart berry, strawberry... it helps the heart. It's part of the berry fast; understanding that it's a gift (moontime)... not being taught to be ashamed if you're on your period²⁵.*

Arlene expresses through her story what she has learned about moontime and that the ability to welcome spirit into the physical being through conception is a gift. Understanding the connection between blood and life is significant also when treating illness. Arlene mentions that *Western society goes with pills. So, there's a difference in how Indigenous people look at medicine of the heart and the western world. I'd rather come out on the land.*

²⁴ Blood knowledge/memory is passed down from generation to generation and is an embodied remembrance (Bistoi & Larsen, 2021).

²⁵ When menstruating.



I huff out a puff of air. “Ugh”. I see it curl and dissipate upward just as quickly as it leaves my mouth. I continue to stare at the large dark brick building as I sit in my car in the -12 degree winter weather. I notice a picture of a flower up in the bottom corner of a top window which resembles something of a childhood craft. I stare at it counting the petals, looking at the multiple dots placed within the flowers center and notice how the bottom just ends as a straight cut off end. There is never any roots in these crafts, I think to myself. A metallic bitter taste floods my mouth. Crap. I did it again. I realize I have been chewing the sides of my fingers and that within the 4 minutes that have flashed by I have managed to open up the small sores that I have created once again. I stare at it and question how many times I have done this over my short 41 years on earth. This habit that I have had since childhood has never left me. I grab a Tim Horton’s napkin out of my car’s glovebox and press it against the bleeding finger. Crap. I am going to be late. “Ugh”. Puff. I jump out of the car and head towards the large dark brick building in which my counsellor works.

Sometimes my days and my experiences are intertwined with the stories of the women. I think about how Mi'kmaq concepts of heart and health are not new. And while western thought is welcomed, it is rarely what Mi'kmaw women need. Nicole addresses this notion in our conversation. *We become Westernized, western ways of thought. Like if we had an injury, it's like - lets fix that injury. It's not like asking: what is causing that injury? Is there something that is causing the symptoms? I think some of the biggest medicine is stopping ... And listening to it (the fast-steady heartbeat), and feeding it, and nurturing it so it doesn't go away. You don't stop listening to it.* As we continue to talk Nicole opens up about her personal experiences. She talked about the stress from work and how she was internalizing some of her health issues. She relates this struggle and the stress to not being as connected to her intuition and spirit; having to take time away from work in an effort to try and become healthy again. She talks about how being unwell affected her crafting and ability to create. Nicole shares the frustration she felt when she could not find peace in something that otherwise connected her. She expressed how eventually she realized the frustration associated with this inability to connect to crafting was similar to when she would take on big orders for beaded earrings. She would lose the deeper connection to the process, leaving her with a feeling of *working to get a piece done* rather than *creating* the art. *Like, doing that piece for you (referring to eel tanned earrings), I dunno what it was but I asked you a couple of questions and then I sat on it. I sat on it. I did go back to your answers and I went and created it. And as I was creating something it was like I am thinking about this. I don't even know you, on a personal level, you know. I know, I know something. ... I was picturing you in different places. I was thinking of you experiencing different things. It was like I was a fly on the wall watching you.* As I listened to Nicole and thought about the earrings, she had created for me, I felt a kinship with her.

Nicole expresses how when she is connected to her crafting, she is at peace with herself, drawn to a purpose, creating something meaningful for someone. She states that the ways in which she sees things and comes to know things is not something she can express easily. The eel tanned earrings helped me along in my healing path and connected me to Nicole in a personal way. The earrings are a representation of me. Our paths were meant to cross, it was our journey. The earrings included a written note, something I did not expect when unwrapping them so carefully. I take a pause. I stop and go look at my earrings. I take the soft tissue paper out and unwrap the earrings so delicately. I take my fingers and glide them over the earrings, feeling the texture of the eel skin. My eye catches the note inside the package. I am drawn to take it out and read it again, as I have done many times since receiving it. A sentence stands out, *I prayed for you and thought of you during the stitching. Envision you dancing, with your family, how proud your father is of you.* This one sentence holds so much. I now envision my newest shawl, my regalia. I see the orange, blue and sparkles shine brightly in my mind. What I never told Nicole was that my father never did get to see me fancy shawl dance, nor did he get to witness my children dance, before he left for the spirit world. Holding these earrings takes me backwards in time, memories of my dad surface.

As I think about my dad, a conversation with my mother comes to mind. She had reminded me that my father had not seen me dance and asked if we could dance at a little memorial for him that she was planning to have out at the cabin. Through her art Nicole was able to provide me with the knowledge that my dad will see me dance and that this makes him proud. When I dance, I dance for my ancestors. I dance for my family. I am now realizing that I dance along this journey.

As I dance, I call forth Nicole's words: *Once I moved home with my family and was able to become more involved in the community, I was able to see you and your role in it. You are a strong woman. Faithful and loyal to your family and friends. Not afraid to speak the truth when so many are quiet. An inspiration. These earrings are big, bold and beautiful. A shield, a circle encompassing strength. I wanted to use light colors. Cheerful. Complimentary and dare to say any color would be delicate, but yes delicate. Light colors would stand out on the edging. The dark eel skin and your dark hair. Maybe you have a connection or significance to some or all of these colors or maybe not. I let my spirit choose for me.*



Nurturing and feeding heart as Nicole stated keeps us healthy as Mi'kmaw women. It was our conversation and the thought of continuing to feed my spirit that made me also think about Charlene and the way in which she connected food to heart in many of our conversations. There were a lot of aspects of food which she loved to speak about. *My mind doesn't go to the actual organ, the heart in my body. My heart goes to the heart of my home, which is in my kitchen ... feeding a person and seeing their reaction knowing that I've just fed them good food. It makes them feel warm, it makes them feel homely. And that makes my heart feel good, it makes my soul feel good ... I think about the ways passed down to me. So, when I think about how good it makes me feel, it's kind of like when I think about her (Mom) I think about something that makes me feel good. And that's what makes me feel good; is the way I make others feel when I feed them.*

Charlene continues to talk about the knowledge she gained from living on the lands and proper harvesting. Good food to her is food made from the lands, not just things that are bought at the corner store. While any cooking for her is enjoyable it is cooking *good food* that brings her greatest joy. However, she feels that total peace and fulfillment for her comes from feeding others. She mentions that it is the love which she puts into harvesting, preparing and presenting the food that puts love into others. She shared with me that recently she attempted to make a major life adjustment. For her the inability to cook *good food* that she was used to preparing for her partner and family she felt affected her ability to show them her love. Her relationship with food was connected to her family and community. What she expressed was that she lacked the skills and ability to cook within what would be considered healthy eating habits for a western diet.

Contemplating the topics of food and healthy relationships led me to thinking about Sabrina. She shared that heart and heart health includes *nourishment by country food*. Sabrina

identifies that *this is inherently tied to advocating for social and climate justice because of inaccessibility to these food sources – whether due to our intergenerational poverty, chronic illnesses/disability, unrecognized treaty rights, and/or exploitation of our lands – are ultimately caused by our ongoing experiences with genocide and oppression.* Furthermore, she states *that community work requires radical accountability. This is the work of the community, and it should never feel like it's all on us as an individual. Burnout in grassroots activism is very real and it's a hard balancing act of endless emotional labor and taking care of ourselves. It's important to reflect and make sure that we have the support of the community in taking up this responsibility so that we can think and do this work as a collective. If you're finding yourself getting caught up it's probably time to rest. Resting can be just as productive, if not more beneficial to the collective movement.* Furthermore, she states *this takes radical accountability, this requires committing to self-love.* Self-love to Sabrina includes things such as leading with heart, doing things that align and allow her to thrive in her truth, working on passion projects, and ceremony. It was Sabrina who got me to think more deeply about how our “love” is connected to “trauma”. As I previously mentioned Arlene knew conversations surrounding heart would include heavier negative aspects. In retrospect I knew this as well because we can't discuss how a heart can be healthy if we don't hear the stories of how they become unhealthy. However, it is the knowledge gained through personal growth and experience from this work which has opened my eyes to a deeper understanding. Arlene mentioned, *the heart - I think of love. I think of friendship. I think of love for nature, love for animals, respect for mother earth.... Like Msit No'kmaq involves heart because if your heart isn't into it, you can't act out that prayer ... grief. Look how grief and losing someone, something tears your heart apart. And it's just like how do you recover? If you don't have the tools around to help you and you don't have the*

people who love you with their heart to help ... You can't talk about strength until you talk about your weakness and how you overcame the weakness. Weakness. Guilt. Stress. Pressure. These are all things that I have known, felt, dealt with, and carried. Until the weight became too heavy.

Indigenous Colonial Conforming: How to Lose Oneself.

Imposter monster.

Unceded land on which the institution sits.
Stone walls and concrete
A place where we fight for a seat.

Buckskins, braids, beads and beliefs.

Replace that buckskin with polyester suits.
An itch that reminds you of noxious plants on your skin.
“Oh is that how you got the job”.

Imposter monster.
Braids, beads, and beliefs.

Remove your braids so they don't stare.
Speak quietly but loud enough so that they can hear.
Drop your rez slang and use their language.

Imposter monster.
Beads and beliefs.

Wear your biggest beaded bling today because you want to be seen.
Seen beyond your intergenerational trauma.
To be understood; your voice is not just yours but communities.

Imposter monster.
Beliefs.

Share your worldview but only the pieces that don't disrupt.
Share those beliefs but wait, we need validation.
Follow institutional expectations because this is the way it's always been done.

Imposter monster.

Struggle, work harder, be resilient, work harder.
Be seen, work harder, don't be seen too much, work harder.
Overloaded, work harder, burnout, work harder.

Monster.



2022 Bay St. George Annual Powwow



Left to Right; Me, Charlene Combdon, Michelle Scott, Dr. Andrea Simon, Arlene White

You can't talk about strength until you talk about your weakness and how you overcame the weakness. This statement from Arlene is something I pondered frequently. I had once believed that to advance and be successful as a Mi'kmaq woman that I was unable to show my emotions and had to appear strong at all times. I learned at an early age to box up feelings and carry on regardless of the negative impacts. It is now that I realize that this over time was unhealthy and quieted my voice. It wasn't until a number of major life events occurred within a close timeframe that I felt I could no longer carry on in the same manner. It was the month of January when my dad and Nan made their journey to the spirit world. The next month my great-aunt. Another month, another great aunt. It was at this point that I took time away from work. I just stopped. Stopped work. Stopped working on my PhD work in any real meaningful capacity. Stopped volunteering. Since being a teenager, I cannot remember a time when I just stopped everything. Thinking about it, not only did I stop, but my family also stopped.

I thought my heart was okay to begin the research, so I began to reach out to the women. However, before I could connect things changed once again. It was the beginning of July when I heard a painful scared yelling from my husband. I found him rolling around in the bed holding his arm. "Oh, my god. Erica. Erica. ERICA!!!", he hollered. I assessed the situation and thought he was having a heart attack. As I drove to the hospital, I went over what the protocol was for a heart attack. When we arrived, he was hooked up to the monitors and medicated. After nitro, morphine, fentanyl and the repeat EKG he was still in terrible pain so a (CAT) scan was ordered because it was then that they concluded that his aorta (heart) was perhaps tearing. I remember thinking. *Okay. This is it. We're losing him.* I held myself together and boxed it up. I sat alone. The beeping and buzzing were going on next to me, but the sounds were almost as if they were all in the distance.

My husband {Shannon} came back and we were told the (CAT) scan was clear and the issues were most likely related to his spine, a neurological issue. *Okay. He's going to be okay.* The multiple medications were making him drowsy, yet the pain was enough to still wake him from his slumber. I noticed his respirations were slowing down. Twelve a minute. 10. 9. I laid my hand across his chest and felt his breathing. Beep. Beep. Beep. Ding. Beep. Beep. Ding. The sounds were harsher and more annoying now. I try to focus on his chest. I have a moment where I am back holding my hand on my Dad's chest. One. Two. Three. Four. Counting. Beep. Beep. Beep. Ding. I am brought back to this moment. I can't help but reflect on the differences between my dad's illness and my husband's. Dad refused to go to the hospital. He didn't want to be somewhere that they could do something he didn't want done. I remember him saying, *I want fresh air.* I am caught in the irony of how I admire Dad and his traditional ways but also thankful for the Westernized care that was helping my husband.

My thankfulness related to his healthcare was short-lived. He was admitted to hospital and was a mess. The only relief he got was spinal traction, but the hospital was not providing this treatment. Even though my husband was admitted and an inpatient at the hospital I would have to take him myself to his physiotherapy appointments daily. I had to time his pain medications, leave and get the car as close as I could, come back in and get him to a wheelchair, down and in the car, out of the car into the physio building, onto traction, off traction, back into the car, park the car, get a wheelchair, get him into the wheelchair, take him back to his room and get him medicated. Myself. Having to make arrangements for my children, sleep a couple of hours a night and making sure I was in the hospital to help feed him. Even when discharged I had to do everything for him. This included daily 20-minute drives to physiotherapy for months. I found myself unable to cope in the ways that I once had in both my personal life and my work. My

heart was hurting once again. It was a lot. However, as always, I kept my heart somewhat closed, tried to carry on. I met with the women for the research. I started talking and hearing their stories. Carrying them. Being mindful of the gift that they were giving me in letting me in. But it all added up. It was a lot. It was late fall that I remember my friend telling me, *you really need to talk to someone. You're carrying a lot of trauma*, said my counsellor. Tears, warm and salty, trickled down my cheeks and I felt them arriving on my lips. My bottom lip started to quiver as if showing a last sign of resistance. I hold my breath. *It's okay to let things out Erica*, she said. I had talked about the intergenerational trauma of our people, even given talks regarding the years of struggle, the blood knowledge, but I never really reflected on how deeply MY OWN HEART WAS CARRYING TRAUMA.

Powwow is a time of celebration, coming together, making new connections and rekindling old ones. I started going to powwows 7 years ago and began to fancy shawl dance 6 years ago. Powwow for me was always a place where we went as a family, did ceremonies, danced, and had fun. Yearly we would take our trailer to the powwow grounds and spend the whole weekend taking in all that we could. Coincidentally the powwow grounds are located on my Great Grammy Webb's land, my ancestors literally walked upon the Powwow grounds. This year the powwow looked different for me. My daughter who is 16 worked all of Powwow weekend. My husband was about 6 weeks post-surgery and he was exhausted. My son who was 13 was having a rough time with his own depression and was in a place of self-perseverance and decided not to go. My mom had planned on going, but contracted COVID-19 3 days before and could no longer stay overnight with me at the cabin nor partake in any events leaving her to have to isolate instead. I thought I would attend events on Friday, but my car got a flat tire the week before and it just happened that the new tire only arrived on that Friday. So, both mornings,

Saturday and Sunday, I got up alone, got myself partially ready, packed my car full of powwow gear and headed across the highway to Flat Bay. There was a different feeling to powwow this year and I felt that weight as I prepared myself to dance. I cried when I saw my friends that I had not seen in over 2 years. I cried when I heard the drums. I smudged and I thought I was in a better place once I entered the arbor but a friend, a men's traditional dancer, gave me a hug and we said our hello's. He offered condolences. *Are things better? Where is the family?* he asked. My eyes filled up with tears again. *Oh, things are different but getting better I said. The family couldn't make it this year. It's definitely different without them,* I said through the tears. He told me he could see the pain in me, feel the heaviness and sadness right away. *I wanted to let you know I offered tobacco to a jingle dress dancer for you and your family. Please take care of yourself,* he said. At various times throughout the weekend the dancer laid tobacco down unto mother earth, danced and prayed for me. This is what I needed. I needed to be around my people: to dance, to pray, to connect. Counseling, rest, nor time provided me with the healing that dancing, praying and being on powwow grounds did. All of it important but every piece playing their part to help me heal.

The concept of blood knowledge and how the heart connects to not only our ancestors but also to past traumas is mentioned by Arlene. *I consider myself a strong person but there are times your heart can't take anymore horror; any more suffering and it explodes and then we end up breaking down. You can't control it. You shouldn't have to control it. But mainstream society makes it seem like you're not a strong woman ... You shouldn't show your emotions. But that's not who we are as women. ... Having the gumption and the strength to fight for our traditions in this world of so many people trying to claim Indigenous identity. Then, heart also means standing up for your ancestors, standing up for the youth, what they suffered, the abuse, the*

poisonous racism and neglect. Arlene reminds me of the common western thought surrounding women's emotions, the same thoughts that I have struggled with; that women should be soft, resilient, and non-dominant. That the expression of a woman's emotions is equated to her weakness. Additionally, her experience is that individuals and largely non-Indigenous men view Mi'kmaw women who are not quiet, calm or gentle as less than. The constant struggle of trying to display a particular image is draining. If our emotions become visible, we hear comments like, "She must be on her period" or "What a b*t*h". Meanwhile, we must also find the strength to fight for our cultural traditions, stand up for historical injustices, honour our ancestors, stand up for our youth, call out abuse, racism and neglect, all while trying to stay healthy. Arlene identifies that our heart is where we carry all these things.

Nicole also shares this struggle with me. In her stories she shares that her experiences include Western societal expectations around how a woman should act. She states that this has impacted her heart. *So, you put yourself away. You tuck it away ... You ask, am I going to be okay with you (that person). Am I going to be safe with you? And after a while if you are you start to let a little more down. Is it trauma that is passed down to us that we feel we need to be so guarded or is it called preservation.* Nicole expressed that not all relationships are the same. Not all relationships are welcomed nor understood in terms of how it affects different individuals. Safety is so important to one's overall heart. It was Nicole who identified her need for safety and how in her trauma response she had to resort to unhealthy habits to quiet herself. Nicole expressed that we need to understand this whole concept better for Mi'kmaw women, there is a need to recognize its complexities. Nicole knows what helps her heart and her health: being on the land, crafting, and ceremonies. Yet, she also realizes the difficulty in expressing these needs.

Furthermore, in addition she looks for relationships that she feels *safe* enough with to engage in activities that are healthy for her.

When I think about what Nicole has shared, I am reminded of ice panning.²⁶ As young children we were drawn to the beach where at certain times of the year the ice would break up creating pans or pieces (slabs) of ice. I remember faintly someone telling me of water creatures that could come up through the ice cracks and could drag you under, leaving you trapped under the ice. In my mind, I had created an image of a large dark creature that had claws and a face of a johnny sculpin²⁷, big open puckered mouth, large fanned gills on either side, full of lumps and bumps, and dark beady eyes that were wide apart. The creature to me had a shark-like tail and sharp points throughout its body. Perhaps my imagination is what contributed to my dislike for dark water. As a young child I did not ice pan beyond the shoreline. It is only now as I am getting older that I realize the dangers associated with how the ice shifts and moves as the water beneath continues to live. In some ways it might be similar to how we assess life in certain areas - determine the weak from stronger ground, hold yourself light but steady, while trying to navigate through each encounter. Ice panning is a draining and difficult game, that one should avoid – yet, in life these situations are often unavoidable.

When Charlene and I were travelling to a cultural event in which she was asked to attend as a band representative, she talked about her struggles and the trauma she carries. Once again, she connected food to her feelings, but she also expressed sadness that it was only later in life that she was connecting to her culture, traditions, and ceremony. She stated that previously she would feel unhealthy and uneasy in various situations, because she wasn't sure how to respond.

²⁶ Ice panning is when you jump from ice slab to ice slab avoiding the water.

²⁷ A fish, Sculpin is a small bottom dwelling fish with slender, elongated bodies with eyes high on their heads.

I have been in situations recently where I'm like you know, I wasn't comfortable. The drum was there and being used as a toy. I was getting really unbalanced, getting upset. I couldn't control myself from getting angry ... I totally removed myself and went to the water. It was out of my control, I needed to go and protect myself and refresh my soul because I didn't know how to control it. It's like sometimes I am like I'm not being alone with this person ... I am not subjecting myself, I'm not putting myself in that place because it's not worth losing my balance over. I have forced myself to dig deep enough into my soul, into my heart to find that ability.

Charlene connects the unbalanced, uneasy feelings that she experiences to her intuition. The belief that she must follow her intuition and trust her instincts – this has changed how she feels overall. She is now feeling stronger, a sense that was fostered by being culturally connected to community members such as Arlene and myself. She states that it hasn't been an easy journey and that she had to look into her soul, into her heart and overcome the struggles she faced daily to find her strength.

Sabrina identified various aspects that she negatively associates with the word heart in a diagram that she shared. These negative aspects of heart were identified with blue lines. She states, *the blue illustrates the factors that contribute to being heartsick. Things that weight on me and bring a lot of unnecessary stress, toxicity, and/or drama to my life. It can feel like a tightness and/or heaviness in the chest.* She links the heaviness to a number of things such as symptoms of strain and stress on one's heart that are linked to trauma and intergenerational trauma in particular. She states that this comes from simply being and navigating life in an oppressed community. This navigating makes me pause and reflect on the analogy that I have used over the years of ice panning. Initially I did think I was out in the middle of that large body of water

standing upon an ice pan all alone. However, through the conversations with the women, I came to realize that there are others out on the ice pans. It was always us, as a community. Sabrina also shares with me the fact that the heart carries many things and by simply just being part of community that sometimes it calls forth physical symptoms. She highlights some of the underlying causes of this heart sickness as struggling to have adequate income, experiencing racism, panic, grief, isolation, guilt, and lateral violence. Sabrina also points out how she sometimes finds herself in a position to do the work of colonizers and that she feels she is caught in perpetuating their way of thinking. She states that as a youth she feels that the lateral violence and those who impose themselves in community spaces by self-appointing themselves in jobs and leadership roles leads to challenging situations. Often these situations reflect the practices of assimilation by which youth are unfortunately hurt; heart sickness starts to really affect them. Sabrina has many times pointed to the importance of having connections to other like-minded kin who are open to difficult conversations and are respectful in creating safe spaces. She sees the relationships we hold in this small circle as such a place. She chooses to focus on love. For her this is the other side of trauma. Everything in balance.

Listen, don't speak

I am not well.
My heart is breaking.
Unhappy thoughts and unmotivated.
I am not well.

Listen, don't speak.
You're unwell, let me tell you what your heart needs.
I have the knowledge that you seek.
Listen, don't speak.

I am not well.
Full of heart knowledge, backed by ancestral guidance.
Help me but don't tell me.
I am not well.

Listen, don't speak
Here is a prescription, do as directed.
I'll help you as I have the heart knowledge that you must seek.
Listen, don't speak.

I am not well.
You add to the trauma, the heartache and pain.
My knowledge is key, help me fix me.
Listen from the heart, don't speak.

Love is interconnected to ones living out the prayer Msit No'kmaq. Arlene helped me understand this more clearly and I too could see this in the experiences alongside Nicole, Sabrina, and Charlene. Arlene specifically connected ones love to animals, friends, and mother earth to heart health. She does not differentiate between the love one has for friends from the love one has for non-human aspects of mother earth. For Arlene, love goes beyond the concept of caring for or simply having feelings towards others. *When you talk about heart, your love, it's also your lifelong partner, your soul mate. Love for your husband, your mother, your father, your children. Like that child the instant you find out you're having a baby. You don't even know that person or whether it's a boy or girl but you are instantly in love.* She further talks about her love to kin and that one's heart is not simply one's organ. For Arlene, heart holds the deeper kinship connections. These kinships could be a connection one has with thunder, but thunder being more than a noise heard after the expansion of air. The crack within the skies tied to the lightening, can hold messages and knowledge of connection.

As I think with Arlene's words, I am reminded of my miscarriage and how difficult that was for me. From the moment of conception, we are connected beyond the physical to this new life that we carry. Perhaps it was meant to be part of my story and that I was meant to experience such loss in order to have the connection and deep understanding of not only love but also grief. Meeting my child, much like meeting the women, was no chance encounter.

Stories of love and heart were also shared by Nicole. *After I had the girls, my heart doesn't just live in my body anymore ... because like you know you have kids, and they are a part of you and they are a big part. And you know they say you live on in your kids. You give a part of*

yourself physically but also part of your spirit. Even though it doesn't diminish in size, part of your spirit is helping them to continue to keep going. Even part of my spirit goes with them. You give them life and I know we are a link between the physical world and the spiritual.

For Nicole, since we love our children as they are kin, we hold an ancestral bond like no other. The heart and connection to the spirits she states is what we give to our children. The heart is the linkage to a spiritual aspect beyond our physical existence. Our spirit which is shared with kin she states helps them to keep going. What she further expresses is that our connection lives on after our physical time on earth. Our kin, through their heart, are able to draw on the blood knowledge and the ancestral knowledge which was shared or stored. While Charlene and Sabrina do not have children, they play an important role as Aunties. Charlene talks frequently about the love she has for her niece, nephew, and dog. I can't help but think back to when I visited Charlene. When I travelled with her, she would ask me if she could make unplanned stops along the way. She said she was just dropping off a little something to one of her employee's children. In her actions, I could see her kindness and remembered that she has also gifted my children. When I asked her specifically about her gifting she simply replied, *I just like to make them feel good, it makes me feel good.* The process of gifting creates a connection with someone whereby you are giving thanks for their time, their energy, and the relationship. She states that gifting is special to her. In particular, gifting children is special, as children are guided with their honest open hearts, when gifting children it gives her so much love. Charlene particularly likes to gift things that she made from her hand – things that are crafted with love, so that she can share deeper connections with someone. *I appreciate more and more what is given to me rather than taking advantage of things, like running out and grabbing something that is just easy access. When I prepare a meal, I always try to prepare with good intentions because I am giving*

something to somebody, and I want them to feel what I felt when I was either harvesting the meat or cooking that particular dish... But then I'll give it away as gifts to people who would love it, beets for example.

Charlene shares that when preparing a dish or creating something for others that she is mindful that whatever she feels, and her intentions are being given to another person. She states that *good intentions* filled with love for the process and love for those close to her are necessary to pass on good feelings. Similarly, if there are harsh feelings put into something it can have negative effects. A deeper connection and deeper type of love is usually accomplished by creating something herself, with her own hands.

Sabrina creates pieces of art with her hands. Often, she can be seen creating while in meetings, community events, or in conferences. She has said that *it's good to keep your hands busy*. It does not go unnoticed that she is often gifting items to others. She continues to share with the community in whatever ways she can. Sabrina talked about how she felt that trauma and harm was occurring right now within our community and that this knowledge weighs her down in all aspects of her wellness, even stating, *it is these things that keep me up at night*. Despite this, she still focuses on love. She highlights her *love for community, kin, laughter, the land and much more*. Sabrina states that by spending time with like-minded kin, who gather together for various reasons, including crafting, talking circle, or teaching respectfully, that her once empty cup is filled back up. For Sabrina surrounding herself with things she loves, things that ground her and supports L'nu connections is the medicine she needs to fight off the heart sickness. Crafting and creating helps her fight off heart sickness and that her heart is only strengthened more by what she identified as good circles of support.

I have tried to teach my children that love when used in relation to relationships is simply not just a word but that it is a powerful thing. It is not simply a word to be said without meaning. L'nu and our teachings are so insightful. If I think of the berry fast and how some may see it as simply a test of one's inner strength, I cannot explain how it is so much more. This ceremony intertwined with the teachings of life and cycles also connects to our teachings about how we live a life within the cosmos not just on earth. It is overcoming the harder struggles to understand the deeper love for not only oneself but one's existence within the complex systems found through strength and community. Love is everything. My heart was so full one day thinking about my love for the women and this work when I felt the need to message them. I invited them to share any pictures or things that made them think about heart that they were welcome to do so. Right away Arlene sent a copy of the print by Issac Murdoch called, "Love the Everything". Along with the image she comments, *That's an Issac Murdoch print. I will bead it some day. But it shows exactly what heart means, everything.* I was struck by the powerful picture and statement. At first glance at I see the water, the berries, the hearts, and plants. However, reflecting on the image, I start to realize that I see the balancing strength of men and women and how things are to be equal. I see the reference to health and wellness through the plants and berries. The berries and plants are important for not only L'nu but also for the things outside our bodies. I see the twinkling or reference to the sky in which one's spirit journeys. I see the representation of life through the image of the woman's ovaries which is not possible without water, the water so significant in the image and the overarching thought of how all this comes from the heart or spirit. The heart stands at the center of this image and of the lifegiver. I too see the two hearts that are on either side, making me think of Nicole and her comment of how her spirit now lives outside her and carries on in her children. Also, I see those two hearts as a story

of how the water carries heart, spirit, those non-living aspects of mother earth. The birds also carry a heart image to connect us to all things. This picture represents so much more when one has been lucky enough to receive the teachings. This is Indigenous knowledge. This is the heart of health and wellness. This is at the heart of research. Love is everything.

Love transcends over place and time. It cannot be categorized simply by words or simple actions, and it too is often connected to hurt in some way shape or form. It has always been interesting to me having been raised like many L'nu in the catholic church that we were taught there was love or hate. Nothing much in between. Either Christ forgave you for your sins if you repented or he didn't. The results were either living eternal afterlife in heaven or hell. Westernized society used these thoughts to instill fear, gain control and hold power in relationships. We were taught that our ceremonies, beliefs of spirits and the spirit world were wrong. That not fearing death was wrong. Even after teachings from Elders and knowledge keepers, having experiences with spirit myself, and exploring my own spirituality it was difficult to shed the engrained teachings that were shaped by Catholicism. Therefore, even thinking about spirits in a way that shows them love was something of a process for me as we are often taught that spirits are ghosts. Ghosts haunt people. Ghosts are scary things that only come out at night. It makes me think back to the beginning of my graduate work and the struggles I was having.

An old woman I referred to as the hag started to visit me frequently. I would fall into a slumber and a dark brooding figure who caused feelings of stress and fear would appear in my bedroom closet. She started off just standing there very still and not moving but eventually as her visits increased her behavior changed. There were times she would come closer and other times where she would call my name over and over and over. Each time the end was the same. I would be in a state of paralysis unable to move until eventually I would be able to move one body part a

tiny bit, to then over time eventually sit up and wake my husband. I remember the first night he said, *was it a bad dream?* I remember thinking I don't think I was dreaming at all but simply replying, *maybe*. This occurred over weeks, and I remember thinking to myself what does she want? It began a downward spiral in my overall health. I visited an Elder because I felt like I needed guidance. He said, *did you ask what she wanted?* I had thought to myself that I should ask that very question, so why did I not do it before? So, armed with my medicines I went through my house room by room and eventually ended back at my bedroom closet. I said, *what do you want? Can I help you? If not, can you please leave*. She never visited me since. Some may say it was a dream and others may say it was a spirit causing trouble. Either way I learned something.

Love, heart and life is brought forward by Arlene in her story about the life cycle. She states, *Celebrate life. All our teachings are about it. The circle of life and that celebration of it at every stage (not to fear dying). You're dying in this world but there's another world out there. And more out there. Your heart knows what your heart wants. And I believe in life, you know what's coming, you know your destiny ... People prepare me*. For Arlene heart is connected to one's intuition or destiny here in the physical world and how our heart can be affected negatively when death is feared. This fear can be connected to a lack of celebration for life at all stages. The cycle of life should be celebrated and by having others helping individuals understand life in this context allows for deeper relationships to each other, the community, and the cosmos. Arlene mentions the seven stages of life as explained by Murdena Marshall (2010). Murdena explores how we journey through our physical time on earth, highlighting that every 7 years there are significant changes in our lives, but it is around age 28-35 that one can realize their spiritual awareness. This is so significant for Arlene to bring up the stages of life because it was during

this age that I re-connected to my awareness. However, like all things this awareness is a journey. Arlene shares a story of her time with her family member who was 87 years of age. He was at the hospital, and he found out that he needed a pacemaker. While in the hospital people told him what things to eat, what not to eat, to exercise more to lose weight and so on. She states that they did not understand him. He would rather die of a heart attack than not eat the foods he enjoys. She said that people feared death rather than enjoyed their life here on earth. She said she asked him, *if you die tomorrow are you happy with life?* She said he replied quickly, *Yes, of course.* Her response was *well then you don't have anything to worry about right.*

This makes me think about Nicole and her thoughts on negative consequences that people have with death. Nicole mentioned, *sharing stories, you realize similarities and these ways of thinking are kind of entrenched and passed down ... which brings you closer to your spirit. And if we don't protect it there are consequences to that {negative connotations around death}. And I can't look at it as the ultimate end because it's not. Like some things would be said like if you don't do this you won't end up in heaven. I always felt it wasn't right.* Nicole brings up the historical context of religion which was used as a tool for assimilation. The concept of death as a tool of assimilation is something that I had not thought of before. Creating the idea of death being punishment and associated with one's soul or connection to the spirit world is not part of life for Mi'kmaw people. Additionally, it seems evident that understanding how spirituality and religion are different is so important to gaining a deeper understanding of wellness. For Arlene and Nicole, the heart is unwell if one's religious beliefs do not align with their spiritual beliefs and create inner conflict. I cannot help but consider the fact that if one embraces Mi'kmaq spiritual teachings that share how death is not the end, but that instead it's just another part of our life cycle, then what is left to fear? Does this mean that listening to one's heart and living life,

not simply existing, would release the ultimate pain that we carry as Mi'kmaw women? Perhaps the answer lies with our understanding of heart and how connecting to heart can reconnect one to a wellness. I remember vividly Dad saying, *Now don't come around me snorting and bawling* after I found out he was towards his physical end. I can see now that my dad needed the ability to have an environment free from sadness and pain when he was nearing the end of his physical life.

As Mi'kmaw women we are not only life givers, but we also help others travel into the spirit world. Perhaps we take on some of the pain from others in this role while also carrying our own pain either through past, present or current trauma; recognizing the blood knowledge can carry ancestral pain. Yet, our pain is often faced with laughter. We have known that laughter helps in healing and wellness. So as Dad made his journey into the spirit world and Arlene told me that after a sweat that herself and another friend had seen my dad in a canoe within the sky, I knew it was part of his story. I now was left to deal with my own emotional journey. Arlene reminded me that, *it's the time we spend together... how we're there to support each other. ...That stuff, you can't dream up its actions and its memories. Its stories and it's the reason behind the stories and why it is so emotional.*

As a Mi'kmaq woman she shares that heart is action. She too reminds me that memories are linked to the stories that we hold inside us all. These feelings, experiences and intuitive nature that each person has is not an individual experience. It means that when a person is healthy and attuned to their spirituality they are connected strongly and securely to heart, open to knowledge on various planes of experiences. Nicole reminded me that the heart and our connection is something that evolves. *Heart is not just an organ. Its family, community, friendships, relationships, connection to the world, connections to the environment, me taking*

time for myself, my own discovery of who I am, its who I am developing and growing into being. It isn't static. It is always changing and evolving. Nicole attempts to name all of the aspects she considers part of the word heart but is unable to verbalize it fully. She acknowledges that this understanding is not static but rather evolves with an individual. For my heart to be healthy, I have to continue to allow myself to change and evolve.

Connected

I felt so tired. I can't help but question, does anyone else?

The tiredness is lifting but I still remember that deep harsh ache.
I now stand at the front of the strawberry patch just at the edge of the growth.
I hear the trees rustling behind me and remember the feel of the rough bark
But my eyes are drawn to her.

I do not move.

My eyes are drawn to her.
A woman stands at the other end of the patch, her image welcomes my attention,
A feeling of familiarity washes over me.
Her long dark hair gently moves matching the movement of the ribbons on her skirt as the wind
blows.
I smile and do not move forward.

What a beautiful strawberry patch before me.

The wind continues to gently blow and I faintly get a hint of cedar across my nose.
I feel the sun shining upon the skin of my face and hands engulfing me like a soft hug.
I briefly wonder if the woman will turn around so I can see her face but the thought leaves
quickly as I instead welcome the feeling of inner peace.

Something catches my eye. Wait. Do I know this person?

One foot in front of the other I am drawn towards the woman.
Walking step by step I take in the large sea of green which displays beautiful red strawberries
sprinkled throughout.
I am struck by the beautiful offerings from mother earth and slowly inhale the sweet scent.

She does not turn around. Wait. I do know this person.

I walk and walk, one foot in front of the other. Time is of no matter because I am living within
this moment and enjoying the experience as I journey forward.

She just said my name.

Heart Berries, strawberries. Thump, thump. Thump, thump.

As my eyes flutter from the mornings light my hand moves to not cover them but rather to my chest.

Thump, thump. Thump, thump.
I awake more fully and smile. Thankful for her and the beautiful message.

Is that my daughter I hear awake?

Thump, thump. Thump, thump. My heart was pumping hard and fast as I watched the tea seep from the teabag in my mug. I kept glancing at my watch waiting for the right time to log into the meeting with the four women. I had met with each woman individually, but now we were coming together for a final conversation. Interestingly as it got closer to tonight when we were scheduled to meet that there was a sudden storm system which moved in, which was eventually called a hurricane. I wanted to make sure everyone was doing okay in the terrible weather so not long ago I had messaged the group to ask if they thought we should continue on even though we might have connection issues. Sabrina said, *no let's try this*. I smiled to myself as I raised my mug, steam warming my face up like the hot summers sun, waiting. I checked my watch again. Ten minutes, I should join the video early.

I quickly realized how excited everyone was to share their experience and to hear from each other. So, as I prepared to discuss with the women what amazing gifts, they gave to me in sharing their stories, it became evident quickly that I was not prepared for their thoughts. My first and really only question I had planned for this meeting was: *what, if anything, did you want to share about your experience of expressing what heart meant to you; did anything stand out*. Nicole began to share that she realized when she feels less connected to the land and to her ancestors and that she knows she needs to ground herself. This grounding is a combination of going on the land and creating her art. So, she shared that how after our talks and she felt unwell, struggling to find joy in her work that she realized she needed a change. She made a career move, leaving her job to take a position in another company.

Erica, I want to say thank you. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this research because without our conversations and you probing me, I probably would not have been able to make the move that I did, to a new job. By talking to you and sharing I was able to really stop and think about things differently, which I wasn't giving myself time to do.

How interesting this is to me because it was through this experience that I was able to stop and really think about things differently. The research. My research. Our research. Myself. My connections. The conversation flowed easily, between friends.

Charlene said that she realized a very similar thing as Nicole. That by sharing her stories of harvesting food and her relationship to creating food for others she was able to begin an exploration of what her connection was with food. Telling the stories of how she would go on the land with her parents and the experiences of learning how to harvest animals with respect and dignity was her connection to physical activity but most importantly the land. It was when she shared how she attempted to change her diet and eat a meal plan prescribed by a trainer that her mental health really went in a downward spiral. She felt that she was disconnected from how she showed love and caring to others. By sharing and talking about this she came to the realization that she has also been disconnected to other things within her life. She gives the example of when she is not in balance with her teachings and her deep connections to who she is as a L'nu woman that she isn't well. Charlene tells the others that it was this process that allowed her to begin to bead again, something that she attempted to do for a while, but just had no creative energy. She said, *Tuning into my heart needs allowed me to pick up the beads again. I haven't picked up my beading needle in a couple of years now, but I was inspired by this group of very strong women. Thanks to you Erica for asking me to be part of this work but thanks to all of you, it inspired me.*

The women were my inspiration. I watch Sabrina as she worked on her craft and listens attentively. Sabrina started this research during a time when she had a close family member who was unwell and admitted to the hospital. She had apologized and expressed that she felt sorry that she couldn't contribute more. However, even during a difficult time she still send me notes and we chatted whenever I reached out to her. I looked at her image in the video screen and wonder if she realizes how much insight and knowledge she shared. Sabrina shared her experiences digitally. Funny how it speaks to her youth and how resourceful we as L'nu are. We continue to evolve and grow. Sabrina shared that the research allowed her to reflect on where she was to who she is now.

That having a group of women to meet with while beading and chatting really speaks to our need for relationships with kin. Kin in the sense of building relations with each other as well as connection to our non-living kin; the land, the animals, spirit, and all things.

The taste of lemon and ginger overpowers my senses as I sip my tea again. It is a bitter and sour taste all mixed together. I notice the tea bag has broken open leaving pieces of the leaves floating about. This doesn't deter me from another small sip. I remember it was Arlene who introduced me to Ginger one time when I was sick with a sore throat. I am drawn back to the conversation as I hear Arlene's laughter. It is a deep kinship that I have with Arlene. Arlene shares with everyone that the research has given her a renewed sense of moving forward in a good way. She has seen her father-in-law (Elder Dr. Calvin White) give so much to the University and to research over many years, providing valuable information. She said that while those experiences were definitely not always great that my research is a continued step forward for our Mi'kmaq community here in Newfoundland. She said that because as a Mi'kmaq researcher situated in community that I hold voice in academia and at the grassroots level. I have the lived experience.

She said she was super proud of how I found my voice and continue to move forward grounded in community ethics. The change that occurred for Arlene was a renewed sense of collective growth and a belief in the possibility of research. *You're doing great work, I can't wait to see it all done. You have some strong people around you to move forward.* Arlene is definitely one of the strongest L'nu women I know.

So, after everyone shared it was my turn. I realized quickly that I wasn't prepared for how everyone expressed what the research experience had provided to them. Our work together had allowed them to vocalize what they needed for their heart health. It was time to share with them my heart journey.

I am honored to have had the chance to hear your stories and your thoughts but also to have the experiences with you all. I am so touched that you all felt you got something from this research because I know I was given such a gift to share with others. It was through this research that I not only examined what heart meant to you all as Mi'kmaw women but what it meant to myself and what it meant to be a Mi'kmaq researcher. I had been situated within a very Westernized school system but when guided by heart I became the 5th participant answering the research question: What does heart mean to me?

As I shared my realization it was Arlene's firm voice that I heard say, *oh I knew you would get here.* She shared with everyone how when I first went to Edmonton to have my semester on campus that I experienced such distress and heartache. How I almost quit and came home. My eyes start to burn as they fill with tears. I remember that struggle and the pain from missing my family combined with the uncertainty of continuing my work. My eyes sting for a different reason though, not because of the pain but because of what she said next. *You're a trailblazer who followed with her heart.* Arlene continued to say how she feels that I have been breaking a

path and finding my voice. I realize in this moment strongly that my path was always set. By allowing myself to understand that I gained so much from this experience on all levels of my being that I was able to contribute to not only the research outcomes but to the overall experience for each woman. I was connected long before. Our stories began long before the research and they will continue long after. The wind blew and the windows shook.

Getting here was not easy. I had to do my own work. However, I realize that work was never done alone. I always had my kin with me in some way. Reflecting on this I ask the women how they envision this hard work going forward. *If you all could dream any dream, having no limit, what do you think would help your heart health.* It was a collective conversation where everyone shared, agreeing on the answer. *We know what we need. We need each other, our community and all the things we talked about when we talked to you about heart. The answers simple but we got to be able to do it.* So, we talked. We vented. We laughed and we reflected on these things as we envisioned a place that did not try to separate or single out pieces of oneself to be focused on but rather a place that empowered our Mi'kmaq beliefs around wellness. We all knew a significant piece of land would be key. This land would have a building that included areas for large gatherings, small workshops, a kitchen, crafting area, medical equipment but not sterile hospital style areas, ceremonial spots, and very much L'nu designed. Someone mentioned that sitting rooms for short term stays could help not only those currently unwell but also allow a place to stay for those who need time to connect, those seeking temporary shelter, others who need transitional housing and even for those invited to share in some way. Someone else mentioned it would be important to design it to be accessible to all regardless of age or needs. Someone else mentioned that on the land it could have a community long house, a sweat lodge area, walking trails, gardening areas, and a food bank. Also, having a pond or area with water

was seen as essential. We talked about how important it would be to have things accessible in all seasons. It was also important for everyone that our language would be foundational at the center. As we talk generally about our collective vision Sabrina shares how she would love to see our community come together for a collective hunt. As a community to share teachings around the hunt, the sharing of meat equally and bringing the youth together with the Elders. However, Sabrina is a wise youth and mentions, *we don't need it all at once. We can take things slow and start small to just get started.* I can't help but think of how right she is. We have always taken our time and moved slowly through this world. Arlene speaks up and says, *thank you for doing this hard work, the work for the next 7 generations.* A cold shiver runs from the base of my neck all the way down my spine sending the hairs on the back of my neck up straight while I shudder. I feel them. They are with me. Then I am brought back to my children and how I want them to have the ability to have healthier lives, healthier hearts, and more understanding of what heart means to them. It is community work. This "heart" lodge we envision would essentially be at the center of wellness for L'nu within the west coast of Newfoundland. One of the women stated, Heart means everything.

Thump, thump. Thump, thump.

As the meeting ends and I take a moment to let the tears that filled my eyes earlier flow I am stuck on what a beautiful gift I have been given. I also realize that this research is not over. That I have more work to do for myself and for community. Also, that my relationship with the women have only been strengthened through the research and that they will continue long after tonight. It was the stories and experiences that led me to this place. This place being an awareness to how heart is connected to place and place being more than a space or location. I realize that this journey has led to me to challenge myself to reflect on a multitude of things and to question things even more from a L'nu viewpoint. This type of research must involve heart, not just the brain. Therefore, the research has evolved to also include an exploration of what it means to be a Mi'kmaq researcher. Initially I thought because I was Mi'kmaq and from community that I could claim the identity of being a Mi'kmaq researcher. However, what I was really saying when I first started in my doctoral work was that I am Mi'kmaq conducting research. Only by allowing myself to center the work on Mi'kmaq worldviews, was I able to remain true to my identity as a Mi'kmaq person. My work has been prioritizing my Mi'kmaq teachings, community protocols and our ethics. I have come to a place where I would say I am L'nu or Mi'kmaq who continues to explore and experience different situations to learn, grow and gain knowledge to share with community. I do not focus on what is my work, but rather what I can do with community.

I parallel the Mi'kmaq creation story to the creation of this research, really this heart work. There are 7 stages to the creation story. Within the first stage the sky represents the giver of life and a mystery. Research of heart should be thought of as a mystery and that someone besides us has more answers, but that no one will ever have them all. Additionally, I should not be seeking answers but rather to explore knowledge through a multitude of experiences, like

dreams for example. In the second level the sun represents the connection between one's spirit and the physical world. One's shadow represents identity and the spirits of ancestors. Research must recognize that we are connected to spirits beyond this world and thus we carry inherent or known knowledge. Within this work the heart has been identified as a gateway to the spirit world and to complete research we must be aware of these connections which are not to be questioned but respected. The third level is represented by mother earth and she is interconnected with creation. As a Mi'kmaq person doing this work, I know I must walk gently and caringly on mother earth. In the same way, I must enter into research gently and in relation to all things. The next level is represented by the creation of Glooscap, the first person created by a lightning bolt connecting with mother earth. Glooscap receives a sign that he will be joined soon by his family to help him understand his place in the world. To me this is my understanding of my relational responsibility to all things, including all the people or things that I interact with to tell a story. Leading with heart. Level five Glooscaps grandmother is given life from a rock and this represents respect of things that are known such as the stars, the seasons, or the plants. To me this is the known knowledge that is held. It is the teachings and traditional ways I know that our L'nu people hold and I have a responsibility to ensure that it is not only highlighted but recognized, respected, and honored. The sixth level is represented by Glooscaps nephew. The nephew symbolizes youth and how our young turn to the Elders for guidance, as Glooscap has the responsibility to guide the nephew. This to me represents how I must be aware that research knowledge is gained in multiple ways and that multiple people guide us on our journey. However, it is also recognizing that this knowledge is held within youth because we have to look beyond age and understand that they hold ancestral inherent knowledge within them as L'nu. Additionally, I must continue to honor our Elders and knowledge keepers by uplifting and

turning to them for direction. The last and seventh level is represented by Glooscaps mother who brings the gifts of understanding and love so that we can share and care for all things. This was brought out in multiple ways within the heart work, the research. We, as women, have to recognize that heart is connected to trauma but also to love. I try every day to live up to my responsibility as L'nu woman. With this I recognize the relations which allow for our survival and that our survival for thousands and thousands of years upon these lands has been because we have been connected beyond the physical understanding of things. We did not think of research as personal exploration to seek an answer to a question, which was tied to personal gain, but rather something that required putting community first and being open to the journey, the experiences.

Kamulamun {Heart} Connected

They will be tired but I share that it will not last.

I know of the deep harsh ache but show them the peace, the love.
The love of kin, connection and everlasting ancestral knowledge.
I hear the trees, feel the trees, talk to the trees.
I hear the footsteps behind me.
My eyes open.

I do not move.

My eyes are drawn everywhere and no where.
The L'nu stops and draws the attention of the forest.
Feelings wash over me.
I envision her long dark hair gently moving, matching the movement of the ribbons on her skirt
as the wind blows.
I smile and do not move.

I get the familiar scent of strawberries invading my senses.

The wind continues to gently blow and I faintly get a hint of cedar across my nose.
I feel the sun shining upon the skin of my face and hands engulfing me like a soft hug.
The L'nu is stopped a distance behind and I continue to welcome the feeling of inner peace.

Waiting.

Waiting, I acknowledge the other scents which suddenly brings forth the scents of dandelion
flowers, blueberries and bakeapples.

One foot in front after another I hear them approaching me from behind.
Walking step by step in no hurried fashion.
I wonder if they are taking in the large sea of green which displays beautiful red strawberries
sprinkled throughout.

I do know this person.

I hear them walk and walk, one foot in front of the other. I have been waiting awhile but time is
of no matter because I am here in this moment, enjoying the experience, remembering my own
journey.

The woman behind me says my name.

Heart Berries, strawberries, heartbeats, drumbeats.

My hand moves to my chest.

I am thankful for her and the beautiful message.

This is my daughter.

Tal-lukwen?²⁸/Chapter 6

Paper 3

The following paper, entitled *The Next 7 Generations: At the Heart of Care Alongside Mi'kmaw Women* was submitted for publication in 2023.

²⁸ What are you doing? L'nui'suti 3.0.5. (2019). M'kmaw Kina'matnewey.

The Next 7 Generations: At the Heart of Care Alongside Mi'kmaw Women.

Abstract

The strawberry is connected to heart teachings for Indigenous people. A plant that produces beautiful things. However, when exploring the topic of Indigenous women and heart health the focus of the conversation is most often around deficits. Indigenous women have diseases related to the heart at a higher proportion than both non-Indigenous women and Indigenous men there is a lack of understanding specific nations relationships to heart. There is a lack of research available specific to Mi'kmaw women and heart health. The focus of this community based participatory research work was to explore and gain a better understanding of what "heart" means to Mi'kmaw women on the west coast of Newfoundland. Four Mi'kmaw woman joined the research and shared their experiences to co-create knowledge about heart health. This knowledge in turn shaped my understanding of nursing practice.

Keywords

Keywords: Indigenous, heart health, Mi'kmaw, women, nursing.

The Next 7 Generations: At the Heart of Care Alongside Mi'kmaw Women.

Erica Hurley

AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples.

I [Arlene] had a dream last night and I was on the ferry. I bumped into someone in a nursing uniform and we got chatting and she was like “oh yeah Erica is on board with one of her friends, she is down stairs covering some nursing duties”. I went downstairs and your friend (she was very dark) was in the bed hooked up to all kinds of machines. Knitters were sitting in the room and the room was quiet, I went in and said, “My god you are always nursing no matter where you go (you were in full scrubs, doing reports and monitoring the patient)”. You said, “shhhh we don’t want to disturb her”. I said oops and then the patients sits right up and says, “got any water I’m so thirsty?”.

(White, 2023 personal communications)

As I [Erica] reflect on the research that unfolded alongside four Mi'kmaw women, who call the west coast of Newfoundland home, I cannot help but inquire into who I was and am becoming, as a person and as a nurse. I am a Mi'kmaq woman, who grew up in a family with deep cultural connections. These cultural connections fostered my strong and lifelong community connections. I am the daughter of James Samms and Gail Hunt, granddaughter of Wilson Samms and Yvonne Gallant²⁹, great granddaughter of Angelina Webb and Jack Samms, and great great granddaughter of Mary Francis Webb and John Jr. Webb. My family are tied to lands within the Bay St. George area, with distinct and strong ties to Flat Bay, Newfoundland. Through my mother's mother, we have a connection to the community and lands in western Newfoundland towards the great northern peninsula. It is through my knowledge and connections with the community that this research emerged. Mi'kmaq community members told me that the topic of heart is important to them. The importance of heart health is amplified by the

²⁹ Yvonne Gallant-Great great granddaughter of Frederick Gallant and Mary thistle, great granddaughter of Alonzo Gallant and Elizabeth (Jane) Greene, and granddaughter of Yvonne Gallant and Wilson Samms.

knowledge that Indigenous women are experiencing health issues at a greater rate than non-Indigenous peoples (McBride et al., 2021) and that Indigenous women experience cardiovascular disease/issues at a rate 76% higher than non-Indigenous women in Canada (Conklin et al., 2019).

This research is grounded in a Mi'kmaq worldview and aligns with community-based participatory research (Jackson & Masching, 2016). Four Mi'kmaw women were invited into the research, all of whom had lived experience as L'nu³⁰, were from the west coast of Newfoundland, and identified as a woman. The focus of the study was to explore experiences and the women were invited to engage in talking circles, conversations, storyboards, or other ways of sharing experiences. Over time the women and I negotiated other ways of engaging that reflected their insights. The formal work took place over approximately a nine-month period and began by asking each of the women "*What does the word heart mean to you?*". Interestingly three of the four women wanted to meet outdoors to engage in conversations about the initial question posed. The fourth was unable to meet in person but the connection to the outdoors was evident in our online conversations. Given my close link to the community, I knew each one of the women before the research. This created a basis of trust and allowed for an ease of conversation. This trust was equally important for me as I began to share with the women how my own understanding of "*heart*" changed throughout our journey together.

As I think about who I am in this research, I am reminded of the dream Arlene shared with me. I can see in her dream that I am storied as someone who has a deep calling to be a healer. In conversations with Vera, she pointed out:

... this work is life work. ... you see a healer's role as not simply keeping one alive but helping give others life. And I think it's really important in the way that you also bring

³⁰ L'nu meaning: the people, the Mi'kmaq people.

those relationships with you, who you are as a nurse is a response to these relationships and to the call to breathe life into what you do. I can see that Arlene recognizes that the elders are close to you, like the knitters in her dream they are present.

I am thinking about how the relationships I hold were *brought into* the research. Over time, I have learned that it is critical to have relationships that extend beyond the doing of research to engaging with Indigenous peoples in ways that are meaningful and in ways that do not set out a predetermined pathway. During the research, I recognized that I could not ‘other’ myself or place preconceived labels on any aspects of our work. This allowed the women and I to express what heart means to Mi’kmaw women and to care for each other well beyond the confines of the research. The relationships we hold are not easily defined, they have an openness and ease that helps all of us connect. As I learned to trust these connections to guide the research, I also wondered if this was an approach that could guide nursing practice in new ways.

I believe this approach goes beyond what is often referred to as relational work, an approach that misses critical elements of a Mi’kmaq worldview. Through the connections the women and I have, I experienced the spiritual comfort and connection which is grounded in our understandings of what it means to be L’nu; msit no’kmaq. It also called forth intergenerational relationships I hold, relationships with my grandmother and mother, as well as my daughter.

Early on in my work, in which I journeyed with Jackson (Hurley & Jackson, 2021), wrote that the research

requires careful attention to the historical, social, political and relational aspects of the researcher’s life, as this speaks to the Indigenous knowledge they hold. Weaving Indigenous ways of knowing into all aspects of the research not only places value on Indigenous knowledge, but also significantly changes the contributions research can make to the knowledge development within Indigenous communities (p.45).

Moving slowly away from the ideas of weaving, it became important to center Mi’kmaw ways as the foundation of the work. Elder Murdena Marshall said that knowledge is spirit and a gift from

our ancestors (Atlantic Policy Congress, 2012). The women in this research shared that heart is connected to spirit and that heart holds knowledge.

Mi'kmaw Women Open Their Hearts

I came to this work as a nurse who was trained in a western approach to care and health and for many years, I have felt a (dis)ease and uneasiness in relation to care. As I listened to Nicole³¹ I realized that it was important to carefully examine my understanding of heart.

Heart is not just an organ. Its family, community, friendships, relationships, connection to the world, connections to the environment, me taking time for myself, my own discovery of who I am, its who I am developing and growing into being. It isn't static. It is always changing and evolving.

Nicole recognizes that for her heart to be healthy she needs to be entuned to the connections she holds and to the ways in which these help her to recognize who she is and is becoming. She also shared how we each carry things that deeply affects how we preserve our heart and thus our connecting with individuals. Some of these connections might not be safe to hold.

So, you put yourself away. You tuck it away... You ask, am I going to be okay with you (that person). Am I going to be safe with you?

Nicole calls us to see that maintaining a healthy heart requires close attention to who someone is; it is personal, and it is always changing.

I am brought back to a day at the sawmill with my Dad when I was young. We were often at the sawmill while Dad worked, but this time my Uncle was also there. I remember watching how my Dad was moving pieces of wood using a pulp hook, while my Uncle was using his hands. On the drive out of the woods I remember sitting in our single cab truck as we bounced up and down over the ruts and holes of the road and asking my Dad why he used a pulp hook and

³¹ Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Alberta Health Research Ethics Board (RES #000) and the Mik'maq Ethics Watch. All of the women provided written consent and chose to use their real name in this research.

Uncle only used his hands. He said, “there is more than one way to skin a cat”. I remember finding that gross and weird saying, “ewwwww you’ve skinned a cat?”. He laughed out loud and said, “only the wild ones”. Then he proceeded to say, “I don’t always use a pulp hook”. Thinking back to this now I realize that his response, which seemed simple at the time, entailed certain lessons. Dad was sharing that laughter is medicine, that the outdoors is a playground with medicines, and that being around others and in relation brings teachings. In that moment I also learned that people have reasons for their choices and that these choices can change.

I am called back to think about the dream Arlene shared with me and how *the patients sit right up and says, “got any water I’m so thirsty?”*. When I had asked Arlene “*What does the word heart mean to you?*” Arlene shared her complex understanding of that word.

First and foremost, it’s a part of the body. It keeps you alive, but then heart also means water. You need water to keep the heart pumping also need water to survive.... women protect the water, you know to sustain mother earth.

This link to water is significant in both the dream and also in Arlene’s response to my question. While acknowledging and understanding how water is essential to the physical body and thus the heart, she extends her knowledge about heart to include her cultural understanding. She connects the heart to women’s role as water protectors. Arlene makes visible that Mi’kmaw women have the role of water protectors, but more significantly they are seen as being stewards or kin to the lands. She states that our heart is tied to all aspects of the planet. If there are negative impacts to the plants and lands and our kin, Mi’kmaw women are negatively impacted. It takes me to reconsidering the depth of responsibilities this calls forth and also the implications that this would have for nursing. I wonder: If nurses are removed from the lands, and from relationships that exist between L’nu and both living and non-living things, how can they understand the

inherent responsibilities that Mi'kmaw women carry in their heart. How can they understand the stress/trauma, but also the love that is connected to the land and planet?

Arlene continues to express how the westernized medical system ignores women's responsibilities; responsibilities that are not only tied to the land, but that are also directly tied to the relationships one holds.

We are forced into a system where we are just numbers not people who have changing needs. I have recently been in a situation with a family member where healthcare providers do not include the people closest to the person in all aspects of care, not understanding the responsibility we all hold in our relationships. It does not matter that they are considered "capable" of understanding, it does not mean they are in a place where they can process fully the language being used nor necessarily want to without their support people. They don't see in their 5 minutes visit the times that our family member tries to exercise herself. That's because they think communicating between each other and not with us is okay when it is not. This lack of communication, consultation and real understanding hurts not only my family members heart but all of ours. No one sees the family stress, worry, anxiety and increased distrust towards everyone within the system. We know what we need but no one is listening.

As the research unfolded, the women requested that we all meet together. While I contemplated the request, I came to understand that it was important – thinking about what heart means was and is a much more collective undertaking. What happened when we came together was beautiful. During our time we came together as women who bonded and found strength in each other.

During this event Sabrina pointed out,

That by spending time with like minded kin who gather together, for various reasons as crafting, talking circle, teachings, or so on, in a respectful way that the once empty cup is filled back up.

Sabrina shares that by surrounding herself with things that she loves, things that grounds her and supports L'nu connections she is able to fight off the heart sickness. She talks in terms of fighting heart sickness long before one is sick. By utilizing one's gifts such as crafting or singing

women are engaging in healing and protecting their heart. I too can see this in the stories of the other women – a strong understanding that connecting to one’s spirit and grounding within cultural ways of life our heart is cared for and in some ways protected. As we came together, I am reminded of the laughter my dad shared with me often – for him laughter too was medicine, it came from deep within. For others it is the sound of the drum that acts like medicine and that allows for a deeper connection with the land. I wonder why we continue to pay so little attention to healing practices that sustain our heart health from a young age – practices that recognise the connections to the land, to relations, and to our teachings. Instead, we as L’nu women are continued to be asked to conform to westernized expectations.

Nursing With Two Ears

No one is listening. Symenuk et al. (2020) state that while nursing may say that it has undertaken a lot of work looking at its role in harm towards Indigenous people, it fails to do so with a true examination of its current role within a colonial health system. The authors state that the system ³²has and continues to perpetuate harm. I recognize that these harms are multiple. For Symenuk et al. (2020) nursing has not yet committed to reconciliation and as a profession is complacent with the harms that are caused. As I contemplate the heaviness associated with this notion of complacency, I stop and think back to the strength the women displayed when telling

³² While hospitals were established in the 1600’s it was after Nightengale’s apprenticeship model was implemented that the status of hospitals and the direction of “nursing” changed (Grypma, Wolfs, & Reimer-Kirkham, 2012). Nursing focused on becoming a formally educated regulated profession while trying to maintain an approach that focused on the profession being both an art and a science. Stake-Doucet (2020) challenges individuals to reconsider what was considered the dominant historical narrative of nursing by asking where the profession originated and how it situates within the current health care climate. Stake- Doucet states that available writings of Nightengale prove her thoughts were racist and exposes her political role in the genocide of Indigenous people. Additionally, the author states that Nightengale counseled many key political figures expressing her belief that Indigenous lives were a small price to pay in trying to expand the British Empire.

their stories, particularly I am drawn to the story Nicole shared earlier. She continued within that conversation by sharing the following.

Am I going to be safe with you? And after a while if you are you start to let a little more down. Is it trauma that is passed down to us that we feel we need to be so guarded or is it called preservation.

For Nicole being guarded is a survival skill. The women's stories allow me to think about how each Mi'kmaw woman entering the health care system does so in different ways. I am mindful that the idea of creating a relationship within a system that harmed and continues to do harm and relationships with persons within a profession that continues to do harm is difficult. Working within institutional settings I can see that nurses are often inattentive to actual and perceived power imbalance, that they do not inquire into intergenerational coping mechanisms related to historical traumas, that they rarely ask about connections to the land or place. Hearts cannot be fixed without attending to the deeper connections to peoples and places over time.

Charlene shared how an interaction within the healthcare system affected her health for years and continues to do so.

A long time ago I was struggling with a rash on my leg which had lasted for years. Someone said to me maybe it's dirty blood? I'm like dirty blood? Yes, because you are native but your blood has mixed so you probably have dirty blood. For years I actually believed this was possible until I found a healthcare professional, I was actually comfortable with, someone I felt I could actually talk to and they said that wasn't true. However, to this day I don't like going to the hospital to get blood work. I am thankful for a few kind people in healthcare who have recently made me feel safe and comfortable to ask questions because there are a lot of them that I would never talk to about things like that. Maid, I got good blood now (laughter).

Ending the painful story with laughter was Charlene's way of healing from the impact of the experience. Similar to Charlene, the trauma and pain Arlene, Nicola, and Sabrina associated with their hearts, was countered by laughter and love. Laughter and love are very important piece of heart health for Mi'kmaw women.

Holding Hands Forward

While engaged in this work I was often reminded of my Grammy Webb³³, a well-known traditional healer from Codroy Valley and later Flat Bay. Nowadays she would be known as a midwife, as she helped deliver hundreds of babies. The health and healing knowledge that she held was sought after by many people, not just community members, within the western region of Newfoundland. She gained her knowledge from being on the land learning, from being mentored, and through intuition. No one questioned where she obtained her skills, or if her skills were legitimate, instead people believed in her abilities. As I think about Grammy Webb, I am reminded about Arlene's dream. Through sharing this dream with me, Arlene shows me how our ancestors (described as knitters) who while they are quietly sitting and watching, are also sending us messages in many ways. They are the representation of the knowledge shared for thousands and thousands of years; knowledge that is held by Mik'maw. As I think about what this means to nursing, I am being wakeful that Arlene's dream calls me as a nurse to think about my work in ways that reflects healing, that attends to the heart health of L'nu women through being attentive to their connections with water and land. Perhaps my work as a nurse is to connect L'nu women with those who are identified as healers within our communities.

Arlene has a deep connection to her spirituality and her role as a cultural leader. The knitters in the story are representative of our knowledge keepers who hold experiences, wisdom and foresight, but wait patiently to provide support when asked. Arlene is a pipe carrier, sweat lodge conductor, jingle dress dancer, and much more within community. It is Arlene who helped

³³ Grammy Webb, is also known as Mary Francis Webb. She was a traditional healer who was well known on the west coast of Newfoundland. Born in 1881 she lived to be 97 years. She was one of the best known and most respected Midwives from region. She was also a healer using traditional Mi'kmaq medicines. She was a craftswoman and in addition, she farmed, raised animals, fished, hunted, trapped, and cut wood.

the research to unfold as it has. She provided guidance and feedback to me, and placed responsibility in my hands. Arlene helped me understand even more deeply not only the responsibility I have to uphold but also the strength I carry in all the heavy lifting. The word research is no longer, and perhaps never was an adequate description of the journey I found myself living alongside other L'nu women. We found ourselves, co-creating knowledge through the unfolding of our connections and relations. Arlene showed us a generosity and patience that helped us gain new insights into what heart health means, perhaps more so what it means to live heart health.

Thinking about this work, I came to understand that nurses need to help people live rather than try and keep them alive. One of the first steps in the practice of nursing must be to listen and to engage in experiential learning, to create the possibility to value different ways of knowing. There is need to connect and to understand cultural values that align with each community. Each person and each relationship is gifted with knowledge; knowledge that helps us to know how to best care for Mi'kmaw women and their heart.

At various times in this work, I too asked myself: *What does heart mean to me?* The experiences I have had during the times I spend alongside the women resulted in a various array of emotions, thoughts, and clarity. These were called forth by experiences that include close family members journeying into the spirit world, which create a self-awareness and an engagement in ceremony. It was the relations I held with the women that allowed me to recognize the colonial impacts on my experiences as a person and nurse. I too was reminded of my connections to my mother. As mother and daughter, we are so deeply connected on both an ancestral level and through our hearts that having her in my life through this process was something never wavering. My strength through these experiences and thus this research process

was also connected to hers. I watched my Mom take care of her father at home during his last days on earth. This care included laughter, comfort, and peace. My mom, like other L'nu women, have been supporting families to connect better with their hearts. L'nu women have been said to be leading the way in communities, and it is time to ensure that they are supported to allow them to have the healthiest hearts. To help them live not simply stay alive.

As I think with my experiences over the past few months, I am drawn to the word life. A definition found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d) describe life as “the period from birth to death” or “the sequence of physical and mental experiences that make up the existence of an individual” (np). There are over twenty different definitions within the dictionary, which alludes to the complexity of trying to understand this word and its importance. Yet, there are even more meanings associated to this word when Mi'kmaq meanings are acknowledged. In the experiences of the women, I noticed a deep connection between the word life and heart, which has made me realize that nurses would benefit from understanding how L'nu women sustain life. To understand how a person experiences life, is to understand how one can and does care for one's heart. Through the relationships with Mi'kmaw women, I learned how much our heart is integrated and shaped by the multitude of relations, the well-being of the land, and the wisdom of generations before us and those yet to come. As a nurse, even as I take care of the person in front of me and their family, it is important to see the care I provide in relation to the next seven generations and in relation to the land.

At The Heart of 7 Generations: A Mi'kmaq Nurse's Perspective

Registered nurse, practical nurse, nurse's aide, nurse.
Medicine person, midwife, caregiver, healer.
Titles, jobs, roles, names.

Myself. Erica.

My soul and who I am is the most important thing I can offer the next generations.
Not a title, not a name.
Offering, not assuming.

Clients, patients, charts, healthcare numbers.
Illnesses, diseases, conditions, sickness.
Labels, categories, branded, classified.

Them. A soul sustained by generations to come.

Their soul and who they are is the most important thing they can offer.
They are not to be labeled, not a number.
Hopeful, not assuming.

Us. Equal. Balanced.
Seven Generations are at the heart of what matters.

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