

A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Transitions into and out of Alberta Correctional  
Facilities for People Living with HIV

by

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## Abstract

In this monograph-style thesis, experiences of transitions into and out of Alberta correctional facilities for people living with HIV were explored using narrative inquiry. The inquiry is informed by my experiences of working as a registered nurse within an Alberta correctional facility: the questions and insights guiding the study are grounded in my experiences, which are discussed in my narrative beginnings. Approaching the participants as living storied lives on storied landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), I negotiated relationships with them and came alongside them as they composed their ongoing identities and lives.

The study took place in a Western Canadian city over a one-and-a-half-year period from 2021 to 2022. Over this period, I regularly met with Kyle and Bruce, spending time with them in their diverse social contexts and places. I inquired into both men's experiences of transitions as we co-composed field and interim research texts. Their narrative accounts were situated within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework of sociality (internal disposition and external conditions of experience), temporality (past, present, and future), and place, which opened opportunities to imagine and retell their stories as otherwise (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Transitions were conceptualized narratively, calling attention to the complexity and individuality of lives. Narrative threads resonated across Bruce's and Kyle's accounts, emphasizing relational agency as a way to shape a life, and that going into and out of correctional facilities is part of an ordinary life. Throughout the inquiry, insights into the practices of health, social, and justice practitioners supporting and caring for people living with HIV and a history of incarceration are highlighted. By re-imagining the possibilities of creating trusting relationships and developing agency in individuals, the inquiry reminds practitioners, policymakers, and scholars to be

purposeful when attending to the wholeness and individuality of a life transitioning into and out of correctional facilities.

## **Preface**

This thesis is an original work by Morgan Wadams. The research projects that comprise this thesis received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name: “A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Transitions into and out of Alberta Correctional Facilities for People Living with HIV”, Study ID: Pro00099605, May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my wife, Harkeert Judge. We spent countless days and nights working together during the graduate program, and throughout everything you always supported me and my work. You have made me laugh, brought me countless moments of happiness, and have always made my life more.

This work is also dedicated to my ever-growing family. Without your love in my life and accompanying support for my studies, none of this would have been possible. You are each fabulous and have contributed in your own unique way to my life over the past six years.

## Acknowledgments

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## Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AHS	Alberta Health Services
ART	Antiretroviral therapy
ASO	AIDS Service Organization
AUD	Alcohol Use Disorder
ERC	Edmonton Remand Centre
FASD	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
HCV	Hepatitis C Virus
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IVDU	Intravenous drug use/user
MSM	Men who have sex with men
PLWH	Person/People living with HIV
PHAC	Public Health Agency of Canada
RN	Registered nurse
SDOH	Social determinants of health
STBBI	Sexually transmitted and blood-borne illness
SUD	Substance use disorder
TasP	Treatment as prevention
U=U	Undetectable Equals Untransmissible
WHO	World Health Organization

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Within my narrative beginnings, I will inquire into the experiences that have disrupted my ways of thinking and knowing as I entered and practiced as a nurse in the Edmonton Remand Centre (ERC).

### Help

Working in the same environment over and over again, my memories seem to blur together. Even practicing in a correctional facility, I notice how its design, color schemes, and layouts are meant to be repetitive, similar, and instill a sense of confusion, which makes it difficult to remember. I still find myself becoming disorientated within the building, as I face another off-white wall with its grey concrete runner and pastel, mint-green door. Yet, within all of my blurred memories, I remember an event during the middle of 2015. I was working an evening shift on a general population pod with another nurse whose name escapes me. An important aspect of the evening shift is the increased activity amongst incarcerated individuals compared to the mornings, when people prefer to eat their meals in private and sleep in. I received a call from the officer's desk that a man named Doug had written "help" in blood on the side of his cell wall.<sup>1</sup> After asking some quick questions about whether this is a medical code or not, the officers stated that Doug just cut the tip of his finger. I asked the officers to bring the fellow out to the medical assessment and treatment room, an isolated room away from the unit's

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<sup>1</sup> All the following names in my narrative beginnings are pseudonyms.

eyes. Doug was a young Indigenous male, probably around 18 years old. Doug's hair was ruffled and black, sections of it were standing straight up from where he had slept on it the night before. He had a familiar smell that you find in the ERC, a mixture of body odor and sickly-sweet oils resulting from when you repeatedly sleep in your clothes – I too have encountered this practicing within assisted-living facilities. Escorted by an officer and the officer's supervisor, his dark brown eyes averted looking directly at me and started to well up in tears as he entered the room. Doug walked with a shuffle and sat down on the bench in the room. He was silent. I asked Doug if he would like to talk about what the officers had told me. The young man talked through tears at this point, but not bawling your eyes out tears, they seemed like the tears you get when you're just frustrated, scared, and lonely. Doug stated that he really needed to talk to someone and did not want to be deemed inferior by other inmates, thus he wrote "help" in his own blood as a 'badass' call for help. His voice seemed quiet, forced, and timid. The officers and I proceeded to listen to Doug's story; it was his first time in jail, and he was afraid and frustrated with this current situation.

This experience disrupted my ways of thinking and knowing as I practiced in corrections. Before this experience, there were many moments of sympathy, sadness, confusion, excitement, frustration, or fear, but listening to Doug called forth something else in me. My experience with Doug changed me. I wonder what exactly it was that had disrupted me. The experience with Doug was profound; it fostered a sense of 'this (imagine me gesturing to everything within and constituting corrections) is completely messed up.' What would make someone like Doug, write help - in his blood – to just speak and express his emotions to someone? How did Doug make sense of walking onto a general population unit for the first time? What would have to be



different, or imagined otherwise, for Doug to have approached someone else on the unit to speak about how he is coping? While I never saw Doug again, my experience alongside him began to shift the ground on which I had built my nursing practice, it chipped away at my predominately clinical focus and left me questioning the closed world I found myself practicing within.

### **Comfort in Difference**

I came to practice within corrections by applying as an undergraduate nurse in the summer of 2014. Yet, *how* I came into corrections is not of interest to me right now; rather I wish to inquire into *why* I choose to not walk away from the call of working in a world so different from my own. In general, I have found people do not enjoy working with correctional populations, especially when incarcerated people are easily distinguishable as an inmate in brightly colored clothing. I believe part of this general dislike includes the many misinformed views of what ‘constitutes’ a criminal. I wonder who people think is a criminal? Is your neighbor who does not apply for a city permit to build a shed a criminal? What about the individual who pours their used engine oil down the sewer drain? If someone breaks the law, does that make them a criminal? I feel people, including me, tend to put up these sharply defined borders and categorizations of what constitutes a criminal, yet these borders are liminal spaces with not easily defined edges of right vs. wrong, moral vs. immoral, or lawful vs. unlawful. It makes me reflect on my internal disposition towards how I align the borderlands of right vs. wrong, or who is moral or immoral. To unpack this ‘why,’ I inquire into my past experiences growing up in a small, rural town in Alberta.

I held numerous part-time working positions since I was 14 years old in Rocky Mountain House, a small town a short drive from the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. These positions have ranged from a store clerk in a pharmacy to working as a laborer, shoveling piles of sulfur in a natural gas processing facility. Throughout these experiences, I was lucky to come alongside the lives of many diverse people. My longest-held position was working at a local Boston Pizza, a chain restaurant known for half-decent food at an affordable price. In this position, I took on roles that ranged from a cook, to kitchen supervisor, to server and host. Even now, I can hear the two-tiered, conveyer belt oven starting up with a roar. I can feel the warmth on my skin as the oven started to heat up the cool kitchen, located in the back of the building, on a crisp morning. Right now, I could even pick out the exact reddish-clay colored tile used on the kitchen flooring in a line-up. If I close my eyes, I can even feel myself shudder at the thought of having to drain the oil and clean out the bottom of the deep fryers. When I think back to what this place signifies to me, I land on the interstices of friendship, stress, laughter, and differences. Boston Pizza, in all of its red and blue color-scheme glory, brought me alongside the lives of many people who were different than me in age, socioeconomic status, race, or religious beliefs. I became friends with the 'metalhead' kids, was offered the position of being a cocaine mule (I did not take this job), and worked with people in the grips of substance use. I remember spending time with Mike during day shifts and evening shifts. He was an eccentric young man, fair-skinned and quite athletic - able to perform backflips on command. Many times, he would 'boot' (buy alcohol) for me and my underage friends; when invited to come along, he would politely decline and go do his own thing. He would let us know that if we ever wanted to buy weed, he could help with that too. While many people thought Mike to be quite weird, I enjoyed working with Mike. He enjoyed clown-base rap music, sword-fighting, and other notable activities while also being a

hard worker who could be trusted to show up on time and complete his tasks. After I left for university in Edmonton, I lost contact with him. When I inquire into why I choose to not turn my back on corrections, Mike symbolizes the many different people who I came to know during different points in my life. He was slightly different, eccentric, and non-traditional. What was remarkable and memorable about my experiences with him, was that they were unremarkable for most adolescents: I worked for a bit above minimum wage, burned my fingers on hot pans, socialized about weekend or evening plans, and complained about management. I also shared the common experience of knowing someone who sold weed. While yes, selling weed is trivial when compared to other criminal offenses, it is still a crime that people have been prosecuted for in Canada. By Canadian law, Mike was *technically* a drug-dealer and a criminal. Yet, to me, Mike was a kind, humorous, and outgoing young man whose impact has stayed with me over the years. While growing up, attending school, and working in a small community, I worked and lived closely with people who were different than me, pushing me to attend to my relationships in a positive way that focused on the individual and who they are in the moments we spent together, rather than what social influences may dictate. Mike could have easily been arrested, incarcerated, and ended up at the ERC, standing in front of me as I hand out medications. I believe I did not turn my back on working in corrections because I was curious about the differences in people and relationships within this ‘gated’ place – why would they be any different than the people I grew up with, went to school with, and worked alongside?

### **A ‘Closed’ World**

It was the summer of 2014. I had applied to the position, been accepted, and was waiting in the reception area of Canada’s largest correctional facility on my orientation day. I remember

waiting there and noticing two officers behind thick, plexiglass windows. To the left of them is a body scanner that visitors must walk through to enter the building. During the holiday season, they put up a large Christmas tree in the lobby, emanating tidings of good cheer. As I sat there waiting to be escorted to our orientation room, I felt more curious about this new endeavor than anxious. What would it look like inside? How would I adapt and deal with ‘criminals’ in my nursing practice? What kind of clinical skills will be required of me? As I sat on the bench, pondering questions, that day turned into two full weeks of orientation training. I ran simulation codes, learned about illicit drugs, and had many presentations from different justice and solicitor general members on security measures and how to keep myself safe in my practices. As I was being led through the building on a tour, I remember my clinical nurse educator stopping to talk with a group of officers stationed at one of the many escort points in the building. One of the officers in this particular group, in his dark, navy blue uniform with black boots loudly proclaimed: “you’re (as he pointed to the new health care staff) here to help people; we’re here to *hurt* people” - he emphasized the word hurt. I thought to myself: you, sir, are an aggressive tool. When I glanced over at our nurse educator, her eye-roll confirmed my thoughts. As the days of sitting in the large lecture theatre and running simulations in the training room passed, two priorities were made clear: a) I was to prioritize the safety of staff over inmates and, b) there is a rigid, tight structure with a predetermined hierarchy. I learned that within this context, correctional processes, such as lockdowns, codes, or cell searches are prioritized over the delivery of non-emergent health care to patients.

These words, correctional processes, and rigid structure made sense to me when I began at the ERC. Every shift I would place my hand in a bio-scanner and swipe my card to enter the

building. Every shift, I would stand in front of the heavy iron and mint-green doors separating the different corridors, units, cells, and rooms waiting for the ‘click’ that signaled the officer in central or pod control saw you and unlocked the door, allowing movement. Medication administration takes place at 0830, 1300, 1800, and 2100. Video courts take place Monday – Friday. No medical treatments during officer shift-exchange. As I entered this ‘closed’ world, I found comfort in setting up rigid boundaries in my practices between myself and incarcerated peoples: thorough rigorous mouth checks for medication administration or addressing inmates by only their last name. My boundaries acted much like the walls of the ERC, but instead of keeping people in, my boundaries kept people and their specific lives out. As I participated in mock medical and security simulations, my focus was on the clinical dimension. I remember practicing in my head the ABCs of first-responder care or going over what I do in an overdose. I plunged into the clinical dimensions of corrections, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. After orientation was complete, I found my clinical skills flourishing, from remembering different anti-psychotic medications, managing alcohol withdrawal, performing dressing changes, or learning about the many mental health diagnoses often found among incarcerated peoples. As each shift passed, I was surefooted, walking upon steady ground as I engaged in my clinical practice as a graduate nurse and then registered nurse. Yet, through these beginning years, because the ground was steady beneath me, I did not take the time to question who I was and how I was storied in the lives of people I practiced alongside.

### **How am I Storied?**

A key part of my identity is that of a young, white, urban professional stereotype pursuing academic work. Although my upbringing is marked by living in a small, rural and

somewhat sheltered environment, I am now finding myself working with diverse populations inside and outside an incarceration landscape. Many of my stories are situated within a place that traditionally stresses social control (Holmes et al., 2007). When I inquired into the ERC as a place and social context, a contextualizing factor arises for Canadian correctional facilities: Indigenous peoples make up approximately 42% of correctional admissions in Alberta and about one-third of admissions nationwide, but only account for about 5% of the total Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). As well, Indigenous peoples make up most individuals in my described experiences, posing the question - how does this social inequity tie into how I am storied? Part of my storied past is that I am a Caucasian neighbor on these lands, and when paying attention to my privileged upbringing, it asks the question: what am I doing trying to understand the experiences of predominately Indigenous people living with HIV (PLWH) as they transition into and out of Alberta correctional facilities? I am not sure I can always answer this question with certainty, but part of the answer is shaped by my sense of responsibilities in working *with* Indigenous people to change the experiences. Within narrative beginnings, it is necessary to ask these types of questions, to better understand how I position myself in the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

There is a power hierarchy amongst myself and those who are incarcerated, power that is inscribed by a system I have little control over. As a Caucasian male working as a RN in corrections, during the interactions I have with patients, I am the face of the health system located within the penal system. My face, skin color, gender, vocabulary, and accent bring with me to each experience with incarcerated people the past and current actions of Canada's penal system. At times, I am seen as the penal system within the context of a person's experiences.

When someone is the victim of ingrained racism within a correctional facility, I was and am a part of that experience. Upon first meeting many incarcerated people, I am not ‘Morgan,’ rather I am one of many ‘white male’ faces the penal system wears. In each initial experience I have with incarcerated people, I start from a place of representing the systems that have over many years served to create and perpetuate the many health and social inequities facing diverse peoples. It is from this storied position I can begin to inquire into who I was and am becoming in relation to incarcerated people and PLWH in corrections. I know I have to work hard to create relationships.

### **Transitions out**

I have fond memories working on the infirmary unit at the ERC. As I walk into the medical assessment and treatment room, I can imagine all the different experiences I have shared with incarcerated individuals, nurses, and officers in this small, cramped space that heats up in the summer months. During the early mornings, I would often keep only half the lights on, creating a ‘cozy’ ambiance within an otherwise cold setting.<sup>2</sup> As I would sit down to receive report from the previous nurses, I could smell the coffee brewing from the officer’s backroom. Gazing down at the floor, I notice the black, white, and grey speckles littering the epoxy coating on the concrete – when people are going through alcohol withdrawal, they frequently state it looks like bugs moving. I remember Travis from my experiences on the infirmary unit. I had many conversations with him, seeing him often due to his infected wound that required I.V.

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<sup>2</sup> This is debatable.

antibiotics and regular dressing changes. I can remember his face, with dark, bushy eyebrows and rustled up hair that would stand up in the morning. After breakfast was served, Travis would sit on the medical bench in front of me and we would have discussions about his future aspirations and his life outside of the ERC. When he spoke, his voice was a bit nasally, exacerbated by his crooked nose. He was currently awaiting sentencing for charges stemming from methamphetamine use. Over time, I would look forward to seeing if Travis was in a 'good' mood, which resulted in him telling jokes, or if he was dismissive and unwilling to engage. Many staff members had trouble working with him because of these reasons. As I changed his dressing one time, we talked about what may go on for him after he serves his sentence or has his charges dropped. We talked about how he wants to give up methamphetamine use and stay clean, perhaps look at getting a job somewhere, because as he stated, he was a hard worker. While engaging in optimistic conversations with Travis, I felt like I was halfheartedly lying to myself – I had a feeling he would be back soon after his sentencing was complete, or he was released. Many of the people I met, I would meet again – there were days where it felt like there were revolving doors. I wondered if our work would ever make a difference in the lives of people we cared for. Travis eventually left the infirmary, was sentenced or released, and I no longer saw him. In the odd moment while working, I would think about where he may be in life.

It was only 6 months later that I saw Travis in the halls of the ERC - he looked like hell. This moment cultivated a sense of frustration then replaced by a general apathy towards this situation. It was what I had expected, but not hoped for, an unsatisfying feeling of self-confirmation in the cycle of recidivism, posing the questions: why does this keep on happening? Travis, *buddy*, what do you keep doing that sends you back here? I have had optimistic



conversations with people, seen amazing progress, lost contact, and then seen them again, re-incarcerated. Seeing and feeling Travis in that moment when he passed me in the long corridor in the ERC, it shifted the steady ground I was surefooted upon; cracks began to creep along the concrete walls. If I asked Travis what happened to him to become reincarcerated, rather than what *he* did, I wonder what story he would tell? Would Travis find the words to describe his story? For Travis to live a life in which re-incarceration is not likely, what would have to be different?

When compared to many incarcerated peoples, I came into corrections with the experiences of being an outsider, yet insider within the general Canadian population. I brought with me to these spaces, and relationships with others, the ingrained social perspectives towards who inmates are and what they may stand for. I brought with me feelings of frustration towards the endless cycles of recidivism. Accompanying these frustrated feelings was a focus on individual agency and responsibility for your actions. This is highlighted by one of my previous questions: what do *you* keep doing that sends you back here? I tended to focus on the dimension of recidivism that my experiences overlapped with the most, blinding me to the lived realities of many in the community. I did not appropriately attend to the structural processes and other dimensions of recidivism that position someone to become reincarcerated; for example, being released to the same impoverished community as before, thus placing someone to break their community supervision orders because the same lack of opportunities is prevalent. The steady ground, built by my focus on the clinical dimension of corrections, began to erode as I focused on what is happening outside the realm of personal agency and the walls of the ERC. However, focusing on the structural components is terrifying, because it creates a new and overwhelming

sense of frustration that can no longer be directed towards the incarcerated individual. Instead, shifting me to acknowledge the systems and mechanisms of society I am a part of that create and perpetuate inequities. As a new professional, I was preoccupied with my performing self and matters of technique and knowledge, yet my attention began to shift from these domains to ethical questions (Coles, 1989). Seeing Travis in the hallway disrupted my focus on the clinical dimension of corrections and individual agency, inviting me to see past him, through the rigid walls and structures of corrections, and instead gaze upon an unforgiving system. Staring down at my feet, and seeing the cracks spread upon my surefooted ground, it makes me question how the lives of Indigenous offenders may be different if the colonial system that created and continues to systematically marginalize Indigenous peoples in Canada was different? What if society worked *with* Indigenous communities? After release from the ERC, if people were not dropped off in downtown Edmonton, on a well-known street littered with drug-dealers, what may their life-trajectory look like? How can I help other people see past the orange jumpsuit of an incarcerated person, and instead gaze upon the life course of someone who has faced significant inequities? How can I redirect someone's eyes? How can I redirect my own gaze?

### **Health Assessment upon Intake**

As I continued to practice as a RN in corrections, my experiences continued to disrupt the steady ground I walked upon; cracks began to form, spreading and spiraling further when I entered the nursing graduate program. In the graduate program, I was afforded an incredible opportunity: to take a moment to read, learn, and reflect upon who I am and how I find meaning in life. Reflecting upon my experiences allowed me to question and attend to the silences in my practice in corrections. When I started working in the admissions and discharges (A&D) section

of the remand centre, I did not hear the initial silences of PLWH as they transitioned into the building, yet I did feel moments of disruption in my practice.

The ERC connects two places: the penal system and the community. It is in this meeting point, in the A&D section of the ERC, that my stories continue. Whenever someone enters the ERC, they must undergo a health assessment that follows a routine list of practices, such as mental health questions, vital signs, and histories of sexually transmitted and blood-borne illness (STBBIs) among others. The workload in A&D varies from ‘laid back’ to absolute chaos, depending on how many people are to be seen. I would keep tally of how many people I saw while working a shift by collecting the paperclips that held together a person’s file. While working in A&D one evening, as I grabbed yet another thick file off the top of the new stack recently dropped off by the unit clerk, I look at their Offender Records and Correctional Administration (ORCA) card, it states: “Cole.” Pulling off the ORCA card, I hand it to one of the burly correctional officers behind the desk and ask if I can see him next. Sitting down in the small, cramped room, I open the file and begin skimming the file, placing the appropriate date stamps, and getting the many pages in order. Cole is escorted to the door by the officer, his orange jumpsuit contrasting with the greyscale wall behind him. In the background, I can hear the slamming of the heavy iron doors as the different holding cells are opened and closed. I ask Cole to please have a seat on the medical bench. As he sits down, I stand up and walk over to him to place the blood pressure cuff around his arm, noticing his hands: dried and cracking, calloused, muscular, and ingrained with dirt – frequently seen when someone is living outside. I begin to ask Cole the many health questions associated with a generalized assessment. When asked about any current medications, he quietly states he is on antiretroviral therapy (ART) and

that he is HIV positive. He does not state anything else about this topic, nor does he come back to it during the rest of the assessment. Once I have asked my questions and recorded the necessary vital signs, I offer him a Styrofoam cup of water; he refills it and drinks another – there is now one paper clip in my pile. Later that shift, as the new admissions kept piling up, I saw a man with paranoid schizophrenia no longer taking his medications. The interview took 10 minutes, as he squatted on top of the medical bench, refusing to sit. He had three cups of water – I now had four paperclips in my pile. I assessed a man who I had to place on a homicidal status, because he said he would harm someone if he was roomed with them; the interview took 15 minutes, the files kept piling up, and he had a cup of water. Now there were 9 paperclips in my pile. I saw another man who was crying during the interview – he had lost his job and his wife had recently left him; that interview took 10 minutes, he left with a cup of water, and the files kept piling up. My paperclip pile had reached 14 now. By the end of the shift, I was a well-oiled cog in the process of incarceration – bringing bodies in, assessing them, silencing their stories, placing a checkmark beside the “medical assessment box” on their ORCA card, and moving them on to be reviewed by the unit placement officers; my pile of paperclips grew and grew. In these vulnerable moments, I felt like making a difference by offering a Styrofoam cup of water to someone, yet I know this is not the case. As people transitioned into the ERC, I interact with them during a moment in which their story was briefly illuminated. It was in these moments of feeling like I was a cog in the processes of incarceration that my practice was again disrupted. As I continued my health assessment, what was I missing as I silenced the stories of people? What is it like to be ‘body searched’ (the process of being strip searched to find possible contraband) and then go through a health assessment screening where I ask intrusive questions of past suicide attempts? about sexual behaviors? about substance use? Do I contribute to the barriers of

integrating into a correctional environment? If so, in which ways? How can I be a part of this awful process yet feel like I am making a difference in the lives of peoples who are incarcerated?

While I silenced the stories of people transitioning into the ERC, the silence of one group of people became louder than others as my practice was further disrupted. Reflecting on the health assessment with Cole, when he stated he was on ART, accompanied by the quiet statement he was HIV positive, I did not think much about this interaction beyond its clinical significance and need to quickly connect him with pharmacy. However, as my clinical focus began to be worn down by moments of disruption in my practice, I began to shift my questioning around these experiences. For an incarcerated person living with HIV, how is the community and correctional facility connected? How does someone transitioning into a correctional facility inform their experiences leaving to the community? What thoughts go through a PLWH as they are strip searched for contraband then asked questions, in a somewhat public setting, about any health diagnosis? What are the meaningful relationships PLWH find as they transition into and out of correctional facilities, and how do they make sense of them? How do I, as a RN who is a researcher-practitioner, facilitate or inhibit the experiences of PLWH as they go into and out of Alberta correctional facilities? When I think back to my experiences of completing health assessments with PLWH when they come into the facility, what would need to change for them to loudly speak they are living with HIV?

### **Hush-Hush**

It is 8:30am and I am standing with a medication cart behind a thick, plexiglass window on a general population unit in the ERC. The air is cool on my skin as I open the heavy metal

covering behind the window. One by one, people come up. Everyone is wearing the same bright, orange coveralls, creating a sharp contrast between the people and the dull, grey backdrop. Some people have been up for a while, evident by their combed hair and chatty demeanor. Others have just rolled out of bed, bleary eyed and groggy. Some inquire about their medications: “is this my heart pill?” or “did the doctor up my meds?” I answer their questions, they swallow their meds, show me their mouth, and move on. A man comes up and states his name: Josh. As I flip through the binder, thick with peoples’ medications taped on each page, I see Josh is on ART. I quickly pour out his medications. Josh looks in his medication cup for the obnoxiously large, colorful pills, swallows his meds, and moves on. Silence is the currency with Josh in this situation.

Throughout my experiences with PLWH in corrections, there has always been this wall to communication, almost a shroud of ‘hush-hush’ about the topic. I would never receive health service request forms from patients regarding questions about their HIV diagnosis or care, nor do I remember a single query about the possible side effects or questions about ART. I understand HIV is stigmatized, yet I did not appropriately attend to nor recognize the silences accompanying PLWH in my practices. These silences were emphasized by the moments of disruption that have occurred with me over the years, as a focus from the clinical dimension of my practice shifted to one that highlights and questions issues of social significance, ultimately shifting my questions: how does a PLWH transition onto a general population unit for the first time knowing they will be highly stigmatized and discriminated against if others find out they are living with HIV? How does a PLWH become silenced by the social parameters of their disease as they transition into a correctional facility? If you were a PLWH and wrote ‘help’ in your blood as a way of asking for help, would the nurse draw attention to your diagnosis and publicly decontaminate your cell,

causing other inmates to ask further questions? What is it like knowing there is a hierarchy of life in the penal system, and as someone living with HIV, you are potentially perceived to be at the bottom? What would HIV care in the penal system emphasize if it was not so hush-hush and a PLWH could openly discuss their diagnosis? How would a PLWH make sense of transitioning into a facility if there was not constant stigma and discrimination? When I hand out ART medications to PLWH on the units, what would have to be different for them to ask me a question without consequence?

As I attend to the silences of PLWH and the disruptions in my practices, I come back to the focus of my research, where I am interested in understanding how PLWH perceive their experiences when entering and exiting Alberta correctional facilities. These silences and disruptions shape my questioning around this puzzle: what is it like to be classified as a non-compliant patient or a non-virally suppressed patient, unlinked with community HIV services? What sense-making activities occur for PLWH to understand these surveillance level data categorizations? How do PLWH feel when they are reincarcerated and linked with HIV care? What if their HIV physician is no longer one who they feel connected to and a rapport with? How does a PLWH make sense of leaving one world, the community, behind and entering another world, the correctional facility? Is it appropriate to separate communities and correctional facilities when conceptualizing transitions? What drives me in this project is to gain a better understanding of how PLWH experience transitions around correctional facilities; this is broad yet is important to understand. As a nurse researcher-practitioner, how do I, among other correctional and health professionals, work to facilitate or inhibit these transitions between the community and correctional facility? What do I do that I do not know, nor are aware of? What

health and social supports should I, as a researcher-practitioner, emphasize? In what ways do I silence the experiences of PLWH as they transition? In which ways do I neglect the importance of other social mechanisms, such as the informal economy or gangs on the experiences of transitions? From my privileged position, what do I ignore that is significant in the lives of PLWH as they are incarcerated and released?

### **Why Narrative Beginnings?**

In narrative inquiry, a key part of the sense-making of others' stories involves making meaning of my past experiences, through narrative beginnings, as they intersect with the lives of future research participants (Caine et al., 2018; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dubnewick et al., 2018). This coincides with the idea that when I reflect upon who I am and how I am storied, I begin the process of becoming rather than being (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). When I inquire into my past experiences and try to illuminate what influences my current and future work, I often fall upon the day-to-day activities that constitute my experiences with a certain group (e.g., PLWH). Inquiring into these experiences requires more than just stating my position and relations I have with people, instead, narrative beginnings act as a form of reflexivity that involves reflective autobiographical work (Dubnewick et al., 2018). By understanding who I am and am becoming in relation to transitions around Alberta correctional facilities and PLWH, I begin the iterative process of narrative beginnings (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). In addition to illuminating the day-to-day activities, narrative beginnings support clarity in developing research justifications/puzzles, set the personal/practical/social implications, help me locate my experiences within the literature, and begins the act of being mindful and open to inquiry to



create shifts in relational knowing and being, shaping inquiry at the ontological level (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dubnewick et al., 2018).

I am complicit in the world I study, meaning I am not an objective inquirer; instead, I must be aware that a consequence of my narrative beginnings is the change that may occur to future relations with the people I will be working alongside (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Fine, 1993; Rosiek, 2013). Inquiry at the ontological level is based upon Dewey's (1938) pragmatic philosophy, where the regulative ideal of inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human and their environment, life, community, or world (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). So, when I pay attention to how I story myself, my research focus, and the participants I work with, I am in a position to build respectful, trusting, and reciprocal relations with participants, while remaining wakeful to hear, see, notice, and feel how participants story their own lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dubnewick et al., 2018). In narrative beginnings, it is important to reflect upon 'who I am' in order to gain a sense of coherence among my identities and relations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dubnewick et al., 2018). I, too, am negotiating my researcher-practitioner identity, finding an understanding between being a researcher and RN practicing within corrections (Dubnewick et al., 2018). The process of narrative beginnings develops a sense of introspection, enabling me to look at how I am storied and retelling these stories, which may provide a new relation with myself to relive my experiences. However, when I relive my experiences, I may become more aware and able to attend to the structural barriers, engrained stigma, and inherent racism towards PLWH and other correctional populations in Canada. As I engage in this practice, it is in the transitions between two places, correctional centres and

communities, where my proposed research hopes to understand the stories lived and told by PLWH.

### **Research Puzzle**

As a researcher-practitioner working within corrections, I am interested in the experiences of people who have faced significant health and social inequities. I acknowledge the value that narrative inquiry, as a relational methodology, brings when inquiring into the experiences of incarcerated and previously incarcerated people who have faced marginalization. My research puzzle centered on the experiences of transitions for PLWH into and out of Alberta correctional facilities. Advancing understandings of transition from a life course perspective and providing insight into stories to live by, I worked alongside two PLWH who had experienced incarceration in Alberta. This study is grounded in Dewey's (1938) pragmatist theory, where the experiences and personal knowledge of PLWH as they transition into and out of correctional centres is vital. Transitions are conceptualized narratively – calling attention to the complexity of a life by attending to social context, time, and place. I approached the participants' experiences from an inequity stance, imagining otherwise - alongside the participants - the identified barriers and injustices experienced by PLWH when transitioning into and out of Alberta correctional facilities.

## Chapter 2: Turning to Transitions

### Background

Transitions into and out of correctional facilities are complex and at the intersections of health, social, and criminal justice systems. To attend to the complexity, I will contextualize and discuss the incarceration landscape in Canada, the diverse peoples who make up incarcerated populations, HIV care and PLWH within Canada, and explore both transitions around correctional facilities in general and for PLWH specifically.

### *The Incarceration Landscape in Canada*

When I speak of correctional facilities in Canada, I am referring to the four ‘general stages’ of the carceral housing system: police holding cells, remand centres, provincial/territorial sentencing facilities, and federal sentencing facilities. Police holding cells are for those initially arrested and awaiting transport to a remand centre. Remand centres serve those charged and awaiting court and/or sentencing. Provincial/territorial sentencing facilities are for those who are sentenced to two years less one day and federal sentencing facilities serve those sentenced greater than two years. In 2020/2021, the annual rate of adults incarcerated was 62 per 100,000 in provincial/territorial facilities and 42 per 100,000 in federal facilities, a 21% and 9% decline,

respectively, from the previous year (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20).<sup>3</sup> Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan had higher provincial incarceration rates than the national average, at 76, 159, and 187 adults per 100,000, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). The territories (i.e., Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon) also had higher incarceration rates than the national average (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). Most offenders are under community supervision in Canada, with an average of 80,523 adult offenders under probation, conditional sentences, day/full parole, statutory release, long term supervision, and provincial parole daily, representing 71.7% of the total correctional population (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). In addition, the operating expenditures of keeping adults in custody are, on average in 2020/2021, \$408/day per federal offender (i.e., \$145,248/person annually) and \$341 per day per provincial/territorial offender (i.e., \$121,752/person annually) (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). The standard for health care in federal facilities falls under the federal Corrections and Conditional Release Act (Government of Canada, 1992). In provincial facilities and remand centres, the Canada Health Act (Government of Canada, 2020, February 24) is the governing legislation that is upheld by differing health services, such as the provincial health authority in Alberta (Alberta Health Services). Under both governing health legislations, the goal is healthcare delivery of an equivalent standard for incarcerated populations when compared to non-incarcerated Canadians. The incarceration landscape is complex and composed of multiple health and justice services. To

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<sup>3</sup> These declines are the largest ever recorded since initial data collection in the late 1970s. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected – in multiple ways - the number of adults and youth held in, and admitted to, correctional facilities (remand, provincial/territorial, and federal) across the country (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20).

speak to this complexity further, I will highlight ideas that contextualize the incarceration landscape in Canada, informed by my experiences and the literature.

**The Penal System.** There are many meaningful and insightful ways to conceptualize how the penal system should function, including: inhumane/'hard' conditions or humane/'soft' conditions, rehabilitative or punishment, abolishing prisons or building more (Weinrath, 2016). These ideas extend from ongoing discourses around the philosophy of punishment and its respective goals: retribution, deterrence, rehabilitation, incapacitation, or restoration (Miethe & Lu, 2005). These goals shift and change over time as a society's social structure and cultural values also change (Garland, 1990; Miethe & Lu, 2005). In addition, for each conceptualization of 'how' the penal system should function, there may be effects: if an institution is too inhumane and 'hard,' it may produce hardened and more skilled criminals, while if a setting is too 'soft,' it may not deter offenders (Weinrath, 2016). Ultimately, a society's penal policy is complex and changing; it is a reflection of its own culture (Garland, 1990).

In Canada, the punishment associated with incarceration is "the deprivation of liberty," where "offenders are sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment" (Zinger, 2018, p. 4). This statement by the Office of the Correctional Investigator conceptualizes how correctional services in Canada should function; however, a key issue that concerns Weinrath (2016) and me is why people (i.e., correctional staff, healthcare, or the general Canadian population) generally do not view corrections as a place for people to change their lives for the better. Rather, many people are consumed by the 'penal populist' rhetoric underpinning political discussions that appeal to 'common sense' and misinformed views on normality and morality (Garland, 1990; Weinrath, 2016). This may be somewhat evidenced by the overall decreasing crime rates in the Western

world, yet increasing or plateauing rates of incarceration (Weinrath, 2016). While there is much debate and a complex history of thought on how the penal system should function (Miethe & Lu, 2005), interwoven with this ‘how’ is the nature of punishment and incarceration.

**The Nature of Punishment and Incarceration.** The current nature of punishment and incarceration embodied within correctional facilities has changed: it has become ‘tighter’ (Crewe, 2011). In general, while there are more material comforts and the power exerted upon prisoners is less traditionally authoritarian, prisoner movement is more restricted, security has been tightened, risk assessment is more prominent, and there is a higher degree of uncertainty (Crewe, 2011). This idea of risk assessment and ‘tightness’ extends to the community, where there is increasingly restrictive conditions and a more enforcement-orientated probation culture (Crewe, 2011, p. 525). Even though Crewe (2011) is contextualized in the United States (U.S), it is in line with the shifting focus in Canada from serving time within correctional institutions towards probation and community supervision (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). In the current nature of corrections, the carceral experience now “harnesses and appropriates it for its own project” (Crewe, 2011, p. 524). Where interventions are based upon utilitarian principles rather than the direct benefit of the prisoner (Crewe, 2011). In other words, the prisoner can no longer submit to authority, rather they must make a commitment to correct one’s offending behavior (Crewe, 2011). For example, someone can no longer become incarcerated, serve ‘their time,’ and then leave without being subjected to behavioral modification programs. This very nature of corrections has an associated and unpredictable power, shifting toward a machine of uncertainty and ‘tightness,’ where treatments, interventions, and reforms seen as positive institutional interventions generate frustrations on behalf of prisoners (Crewe, 2011). Within this system,

“everything is loaded with meaning, and can be perceived as a test or a threat” (Crewe, 2011, p. 514). Prisoners are unsure of where they stand in this system, how they may reduce their sentencing, and for some, how long they have left in their sentencing, here “the sense is of mobile targets, which always slip away” (Crewe, 2011, p. 514). Overall, for people who have experienced incarceration, it is time-dependent, as the very nature of incarceration and punishment has shifted over the years, changing to a nature that forefronts uncertainty and a sense of ‘tightness’ encompassing a person’s incarceration experience (Crewe, 2011). In line with my experiences in the ERC, this described ‘tightness’ speaks to me: every cell has a security camera, sentencing involves reforming programs, and incarcerated people are often unsure of when their next court date will take place. Within this changing environment, different social identities and subcultures have also shifted.

**Prison Subcultures.** People living in prisons are a part of communities that are shaped and governed by diverse social mechanisms, such as prison subcultures (Gibbons & Garrity, 1962; Wheeler & Cline, 2020). Prison subcultures are multiple and represented by a set of informal social norms or ‘convict code/inmate code’ that shapes individual and group action (Irwin, 1988; Sykes & Messinger, 1960; Weinrath, 2016). These codes are complex and shifting, their rules and norms changing based upon one’s physical environment (prisons, streets, or schools) and past/present conditions of living (Anderson, 2000; Bell et al., 2021; Irwin & Cressey, 1962). In addition, specific language is associated with prison subcultures and the inmate code (Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Wheeler & Cline, 2020).

Prison subcultures and their associated languages have an evolving history (Bell et al., 2022; Gibbons & Garrity, 1962; Irwin & Cressey, 1962). For example, the vocabulary utilized

towards individuals who lean towards more legitimate dispositions, such as those more likely to follow society's rules or a situational offender who is not usually caught up in criminal subcultures, has been referred to as a "Square John" (Irwin & Cressey, 1962; Wheeler & Cline, 2020). In my experiences working as a nurse, I have often heard the word "Square" used by people with histories of incarceration to refer to people who do not predominately live a street life. Throughout the inquiry, I acknowledge the history of prison subcultures and their associated languages as being value-laden and shifting over time and place. Integrated within the social fabric of prisons are prison gangs.

**Prison Gangs.** The violent effects of prison gangs as they consolidate power within correctional facilities has been voiced (Weinrath, 2016). In addition, prison gangs can add to the issues and problems inherent in correctional facilities, because of their involvement in violence, drugs, and inmate victimization (Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010; Wood et al., 2009), posing a danger to both correctional staff and fellow prisoners (Weinrath, 2016). Within a Canadian prairie context among Indigenous gang members, it was explored that prison gang members were more likely to have criminal associates, negative attitudes towards law enforcement, little or no employment history, and be more hostile (Grekul & Laboucane-Benson, 2006). I address prison gangs when speaking to the incarceration landscape, because from my experiences, any project seeking to come alongside the lives of people who are or have been incarcerated will, in some way, attend to the social orders within Canadian correctional facilities. Inherent in these social orders are prison gangs, which contribute to the diverse social processes and practices within correctional facilities.



## *People Within the Incarceration Landscape*

Incarcerated peoples are composed of diverse ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups with a multitude of both vulnerable and non-vulnerable peoples (Dhaliwal & Hirst, 2016). Within the correctional system, males are overrepresented (87.7% of adult admissions) when compared to females (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). Indigenous peoples are grossly overrepresented, accounting for about 5% of the general Canadian population but making up approximately 31-33% of corrections admissions nationally, and alarmingly, these rates are increasing (e.g., general Indigenous admission rates in 2006/2007 was about 21% nationally) (Malakieh, 2019, May 9; Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). Also, there are great disparities among correctional admissions for Indigenous peoples in Canada, where Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta have Indigenous admission rates of 77%, 77%, and about 42% respectively (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). Indigenous females are over-represented when compared to their male counterparts, accounting for approximately 40-42% of all female correctional admissions in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). Indigenous youth represented 50% of admissions to correctional services in 2020/2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). There is also an over-representation of other visible minority groups, specifically Black peoples who represent 10% of adult admissions but make up 4% of the report provinces' populations (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20).

In addition to the disproportionate rates of incarceration facing minority populations in Canada, a narrative review by Kouyoumdjian et al. (2016) describes substantive disparities in the social determinants of health (SDOH) for correctional populations in Canada, such as Indigenous status, lack of housing, low employment and education rates, low income, and family

violence/absent parents in an individual's early life. When these disparities are understood in the context of the over-representation of Indigenous men, women, and youth in the correctional system (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20), a compounding factor for further health disparities is the non-equitable health and support services oriented towards Indigenous peoples (Zinger, 2020). With the idea that the SDOH are the non-medical factors responsible for the health inequities we see in society (Raphael et al., 2020; World Health Organization [WHO], n.d.), it does not surprise me that the SDOH, disproportionate incarceration rates, and health inequities may be linked. Furthermore, there really has not been the needed and noticeable push to advocate and raise awareness among the general Canadian population of the effects of the SDOH on health outcomes experienced by and associated with correctional populations. To me, the general Canadian public lacks a sense of connection and understanding regarding the complicated relationships between the SDOH, an individual's life course, and how inequities are created and perpetuated among incarcerated peoples. In this same line of thought, I will briefly discuss the general health of incarcerated peoples.

The health of persons who are incarcerated in Canada is poor when compared to the general Canadian population (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2016). There is a gross over-representation of people with poor health experiencing health disparities, such as increased rates of mortality, suicide, mental illness, HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), sexually transmitted infections (e.g. chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), substance abuse, addictions, non-medical prescription opioid use, chronic diseases (e.g. hypertension, asthma, cervical cancer), and tuberculosis (Binswanger et al., 2009; Correctional Service Canada, 2012, August 21; Hawks et al., 2020; John Howard Society of Ontario, 2017; Moher et

al., 2022; Murphy et al., 2015; Plourde et al., 2012; Popova et al., 2015; Popova et al., 2016; Poulin et al., 2007; Sapers, 2014; Subramanian et al., 2016; Taweh et al., 2021; Wobeser et al., 2002). In addition to these health disparities, populations with a history of incarceration report inadequate access to primary care, unmet health care needs, and high emergency department use (Green et al., 2016; Puing et al., 2020). For incarcerated people living with chronic illnesses, such as HIV, asthma, or hypertension (Binswanger et al., 2009), they often lack appropriate social support systems, which produces reliance upon health care providers to offer support in these areas (Rozanova et al., 2015).

### ***People Living with HIV in Canada and the World***

Within a global context, in 2021, there were about 38.4 million PLWH, an incidence of 1.5 million, and about 650,000 HIV-related deaths (WHO, 2022, November 9). Key populations at an increased risk of acquiring HIV include men who have sex with men (MSM), intravenous drug users (IVDUs), people in prisons, sex workers and their clients, and transgender people (WHO, 2022, July 29). In general, PLWH are diverse and often experience structural marginalization (Crabbe et al., 2021; Dauria et al., 2022; Montague et al., 2018; Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2015, January 14; 2022). At the end of 2020, there were an estimated 62,790 PLWH and an incidence of 1,520 new HIV infections in Canada (PHAC, 2022, July 25). Out of these new HIV infections, Indigenous people are over-represented, and make up 18.2% of all new HIV infections (PHAC, 2022, July 25). Approximately 44% of new infections were among the MSM population and 19.8% among IVDUs (PHAC, 2022, July 25).

## *Living with HIV*

Acquiring HIV is a life-changing diagnosis (PHAC, 2015, January 14) leading to increased susceptibility to infections and some cancers while being directly tied to a significant disparity in morbidity, mortality, stigmatization, and survival rates among individuals when compared to the general population's health status (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2020; PHAC, 2015, January 14; WHO, 2022, November 9). One group of infections with a synergistic relationship with HIV are other STBBIs, specifically HCV (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange, 2021, March; PHAC, 2015, January 14; Taweh et al., 2021). PLWH who are co-infected with HCV are more likely to have a history of substance misuse, homelessness, and experience significantly more depression (PHAC, 2015, January 14). In addition to this, further health disparities associated with PLWH include elevated levels of depression, apathy (Bogdanova et al., 2010; Kowal et al., 2008), anxiety, nervousness, dizziness, and insomnia (Realize, 2018, March 31); or, for PLWH who are on ART, a higher-than-average rate of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and bone loss (PHAC, 2015, January 14). For many PLWH, HIV is an episodic disability, whereby periods of good health are interrupted by periods of poor health and disability (Anderson & Brown, 2005, March; Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange, 2021, March; O'Brien et al., 2008; Realize, 2018, March 31). Currently, and in light of these health disparities, the landscape of living with HIV is changing: when connected to treatment, HIV is not the death sentence it used to be, instead viewed as a chronic, manageable disease that may allow a fulfilling life with more readily available and accessible treatment (for some populations) (Canadian AIDS Society, 2018, January; PHAC, 2015, January 14). This is in part based upon the science that HIV is untransmissible when someone adheres to ART, achieves

an undetectable viral load, and maintains an undetectable viral load, i.e., the idea of ‘treatment as prevention’ (TasP) or ‘Undetectable = Untransmissible’ (U=U) (Bavinton et al., 2018; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022, July 21; Cohen et al., 2011; Panel on Antiretroviral Guidelines for Adults and Adolescents, 2022, September 21; Rodger et al., 2016; Rodger et al., 2019; Thompson et al., 2012). Even though this is the case, it may take a long time for a PLWH to come to ‘terms’ with their diagnosis, with each person experiencing an individualized process of acceptance (Harris & Alderson, 2006; Harris & Larsen, 2007; Harris & Larsen, 2008; Hawkins et al., 2009; Mill et al., 2007; Weir et al., 2003). When a PLWH does not receive ART, their HIV infection will progress to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), which is becoming far less common in Canada, as adherence to ART shifts HIV to a chronic, yet episodic, condition (PHAC, 2015, January 14).

The guiding model of TasP is the HIV care continuum. Canada has endorsed the 95-95-95 targets set out by The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and the WHO (PHAC, 2022, July 25).<sup>4</sup> The 95-95-95 targets - 95% of people living with HIV know their status, 95% of those diagnosed are on ART, and 95% of those on ART achieve viral suppression – are a representation/example of the HIV care continuum or cascade (UNAIDS, 2021, June 9). For an example of these targets and what the care continuum looks like in Canada for the 2020 report, see Appendix A. The HIV care continuum is the ‘sentinel image’ of the targets and objectives of HIV care interventions and their associated evaluative criteria (e.g., increased CD4 counts,

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<sup>4</sup> In June 2021, UNAIDS raised the 90-90-90 targets to 95% (95-95-95), which is in line with their objective to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

reduced viral load counts, ART prescriptions completed, etc.) (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2020; Mugavero et al., 2013). As you can see by Appendix A, in 2020 about 10% of PLWH were unaware of their status (PHAC, 2022, July 25).

Even though Canada has made great progress towards the 95-95-95 targets and the science has evolved around TasP, the stigma lingers for PLWH. A very real example of the effects of an HIV diagnosis on the lives of PLWH in Canada is within the context of criminalization of non-disclosure, whereby PLWH may be charged if they fail to disclose their HIV status before engaging in sexual behaviors that pose a ‘realistic’ possibility of transmission (CATIE, 2020, April 21). As of 2018, about 184 PLWH have been charged with criminal offences in Canada under this legislation (CATIE, 2020, April 21). These charges and discriminatory environment have created significant challenges for PLWH, including increased feelings of stigma, fear, and potential for violence in intimate relationships (Fernet et al., 2011; Gurevich et al., 2007; Hawkins et al., 2009; Schilder et al., 2008). In addition to the discriminatory environment, PLWH require forms of support that go beyond their medical needs, such as educational, financial, emotional, or nutritional support (Canadian AIDS Society, 2018, January). For example, for a PLWH on ART, a healthy diet composed of complex carbohydrates, fats, and proteins with little processed foods is essential to supporting the immune system and lean muscle mass (Canadian AIDS Treatment Information Exchange, 2021, March; PHAC, 2015, January 14). In general, the needs of PLWH should be addressed in non-discriminatory ways and protect human rights, while promoting access to appropriate services, fostering self-determination, and offering the opportunity to participate in decision making (UNAIDS, 2007, April 10). Many vulnerable people experience structural barriers to health and wellness, such as

poverty, unstable housing, mental health and substance use issues, and racism, putting them at greater risk than the general Canadian population for acquiring HIV and further perpetuating inequities (Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research, 2018).

### ***Incarcerated People Living with HIV***

HIV disproportionately affects incarcerated populations in Canada at an estimated prevalence rate of ~0.92% in provincial/territorial and federal facilities vs. ~0.17% in the general population (PHAC, 2022, July 25). Rates of HIV amongst incarcerated peoples is also six times higher than the general population on a global level (UNAIDS, 2021, June 9). Part of these disproportionate rates result from an increased prevalence of high-risk sexual behaviors (e.g., unprotected sex, multiple sexual partners, and sex while under the influence of substances) (Simonsen et al., 2015) and injection drug use, while lacking access to comprehensive needle exchange services in correctional facilities (CATIE, 2015, January 22; Zinger, 2022). Despite the advances in HIV medical care and TasP, high levels of HIV-related stigma within correctional facilities in Canada and the U.S. remain (Blue et al., 2022; Erickson et al., 2021; Muessig et al., 2016; Wadams, 2022), which has significant consequences for PLWH within prison settings, including discrimination, verbal abuse, and physical assaults (Andrinopoulos et al., 2011; Blue et al., 2022; Culbert, 2014). The stigma affects incarcerated and non-incarcerated PLWH in numerous ways – it decreases their social and emotional wellbeing and their willingness to access health services, while increasing their risk of discrimination, violence, poverty, harassment, and abuse (AVERT, 2022, February 28). HIV-related stigma is conceptualized by Parker and Aggleton (2003) as a social process, functioning at the “intersection between culture, power and difference” (p. 17), and central to the constitution of a specific social order. In their

conceptualization, HIV-related stigma is more than a “thing which individuals impose on others” (p. 17), rather they emphasize the broader social, cultural, political, and economic forces structuring HIV-related stigma as a social process linked to structural inequalities (Parker & Aggleton, 2003). HIV-related stigma in prisons stems from a perceived high-risk of transmission (i.e., exposure to blood and bodies, a perceived lack of control over the environment, or sharing of kitchen utensils and clothing), lack of HIV knowledge, and the perception of other inmates as “dirty or diseased” (Muessig et al., 2016, p. 112). In addition, inmates in the U.S. context are afraid of being labeled as HIV positive, which would lead to potential isolation, discrimination, and abuse (Muessig et al., 2016). In line with the isolation experienced by PLWH, Swan (2016) reported when previously incarcerated PLWH sought to access health services, they exhibited high levels of anticipated stigma via feelings of shame and embarrassment when seen at an HIV clinic (Haley et al., 2014). Overall, PLWH are resilient and diverse peoples, who are at risk of experiencing further health and social inequities in Canada due to their HIV status.

### ***Transitions Around Correctional Facilities***

Attending to transitions into and out of correctional facilities in Canada requires contextualizing information. In 2020/2021, about 24% of adult custodial releases served one month or less within facilities across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). Remand centres composed 67% of all adults in custody within provincial/territorial facilities and represent 62% of total custodial admissions in this same period (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). Since 2016/2017, there has been a ~17% decrease of adults in remand centres (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20), but between 2004/2005 and 2014/2015, there was a 39% increase (Correctional



Services Program, 2017).<sup>5</sup> These long-term changes have been attributed to a cultural shift in the justice system, in which to minimize risk to the public and reduce reoffending, courts choose to remand more individuals as they wait for their trial/sentence (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20; Webster, 2015). In addition, overall admissions to adult correctional services totaled 238,149 to provincial/territorial adult services and 12,226 to federal services in 2020/2021 (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20). In this context, admissions represent each time an individual “begins any type of custody or community supervision program [... and that] a single person could experience more than one admission throughout the year” (Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20, para. 9). This data contextualizes the vast numbers of people, with their specific lives, transitioning into and out of the different phases and facilities that make up the Canadian penal system.

### ***Transitions into and out of Correctional Facilities for People Living with HIV***

Transitions into and out of correctional facilities are complex and require the interaction and cooperation of social, health, and justice systems, with many individuals in the criminal justice system experiencing multiple health care transitions (Binswanger et al., 2012; Pluznik et al., 2021). In general, transitions between correctional facilities and communities are difficult for PLWH (Iroh et al., 2015; Pluznik et al., 2021). Barriers to reintegration into the community or correctional facility are prevalent (e.g., stigma, employment, housing, addictions, social

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<sup>5</sup> The decrease in remand admissions has been attributed to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on adult admissions at the provincial/territorial level. Prior to 2020, admissions to remand centres had been increasing on a year-over-year basis.

relations, ongoing mental health diagnoses) (Baillargeon et al., 2010; Baron et al., 2008; Crable et al., 2021; Dauria et al., 2022; Dong et al., 2021; Gojkovic et al., 2012, March; Kemnitz et al., 2017; Krsak et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2015; Metcalf et al., 2001; Moher et al., 2022; Muessig et al., 2016; Pager, 2003; Rozanova et al., 2015; Springer et al., 2011; Swan, 2016; Woznica et al., 2021). A key gap in knowledge for people in correctional settings, and especially PLWH, is the “coordination, oversight and monitoring of transitions in physical and mental health care (e.g. transfers between Correctional Service Canada facilities, releases to the community)” (Zinger, 2018, p. 98), which has been echoed by numerous academics working with PLWH (Binswanger et al., 2012; Moher et al., 2022; Pluznik et al., 2021; Springer et al., 2011; Subramanian et al., 2016; Valera & Kratz, 2014; Visher & Travis, 2003; Woznica et al., 2021).

Transitions around correctional facilities for incarcerated peoples and PLWH have predominately focused on the conceptualization of transitions as a fixed phenomenon with a specific state and position becoming replaced by another fixed state. For example, transitions around correctional facilities for PLWH have predominately been organized by the spatially segregating metaphor of the HIV care continuum. From my experiences as a RN, HIV medical services follow and adhere to the HIV care continuum, where traditionally ‘successful’ transitions between correctional facilities and communities for PLWH are measured in the HIV care continuum’s evaluative criteria, which includes improved CD4 counts, ART adherence, reduced HIV viral loads, and adherence to the HIV care cascade (Baillargeon et al., 2010; Dong et al., 2021; Gardner et al., 2011; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2014; Subramanian et al., 2016).

Transitioning into correctional centres in Canada and the U.S. may be considered an opportunity to diagnose, engage, and treat HIV alongside other social and physical deficits affecting HIV care outcomes (Dong et al., 2021; Iroh et al., 2015; Meyer et al., 2014; Milloy et al., 2014; Muessig et al., 2016; Subramanian et al., 2016; Wood, 2009). Upon transitioning into correctional facilities, both ART adherence and viral suppression rates increase (Subramanian et al., 2016); this is viewed as positive, as the HIV care continuum's targets are met and even surpassed within Canadian federal facilities (PHAC, 2022, July 25).<sup>6</sup> These increased rates of ART adherence and viral suppression may be partially attributed to the very low loss to follow-up, assured dosing schedules, and lower levels of other substance use (Milloy et al., 2014).

Alternatively, upon release from correctional centres, ART retention and viral suppression rates decrease among PLWH, which is a cause of concern among practitioners and academics and often attributed to diverse individual and structural barriers (Iroh et al., 2015; Kemnitz et al., 2017; Krsak et al., 2022; Moher et al., 2022; Montague et al., 2018; Pluznik et al., 2021; Springer et al., 2011; Swan, 2016; Taweh et al., 2021; Woznica et al., 2021). Some of these individual and structural barriers encompass: untreated or insufficiently treated Substance Use Disorders (SUDs) and/or psychiatric disorders, which decrease the ability to adhere to HIV treatment (Baillargeon et al., 2009a; Krsak et al., 2022; Moher et al., 2022; Springer et al., 2011); homelessness, contributing to decreased treatment adherence as a result from migration and

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<sup>6</sup> Recent work by Blue et al. (2022) conducted in U.S. jail settings in North Carolina highlighted the impact of jail incarceration on the continuity of HIV care. Contrary to Canadian settings, half of the participants reported that jail incarceration negatively impacted the HIV care they received, specifically limiting access to ART due to a lack of and/or inconsistent healthcare funding for the facility at a county level (Blue et al., 2022).

social destabilization (Kushel et al., 2005; Lim et al., 2015; Springer et al., 2011); unemployment, resulting in being unable to meet basic needs, such as housing and food security (Greifinger, 2007); housing instability (Lim et al., 2015); stigma, leading to missed appointments and doses of medication (Kemnitz et al., 2017); and, other comorbidities such as concurrent HCV infection, which complicates ART (Altice et al., 2010; Springer et al., 2011). Interventions to overcome these diverse individual and structural barriers to achieving ART retention and viral suppression when transitioning out of correctional facilities include: medication assisted therapy for the treatment of Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD)/SUD (Dauria et al., 2022; Kinlock et al., 2005; Krsak et al., 2022; Metzger & Zhang, 2010; Subramanian et al. 2016; Springer et al., 2011); focused case management (Dauria et al., 2022; Spaulding et al., 2013a; Subramanian et al., 2016); active involvement of community partners in care coordination (Booker et al., 2013; Spaulding et al., 2013b; Teixeira et al., 2015); use of text/phone reminders (Dauria et al., 2022; Springer et al., 2011); adherence counselling support (Springer et al., 2011); contingency management (Springer et al., 2011); directly administered ART (Springer et al., 2011); diagnosis and treatment of mental illness via community mental health treatment programs incorporating prearrest programs (Springer et al., 2011)<sup>7</sup>; HIV education delivered to PLWH during incarceration (Booker et al., 2013; Rich et al., 2013); transportation arrangements (Booker et al., 2013; Rich et al., 2013); stable housing initiatives (Booker et al., 2013; Lim et al., 2015; Rich et al., 2013); patient/peer navigation (Dauria et al., 2022; Fernando et al., 2022; Koester et al.,

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<sup>7</sup> Prearrest programs incorporate trained police officers serving as liaisons to the mental health system, mental health professions that offer consultations to police officers, and coordinated efforts between police officers and mental health professionals (Springer et al., 2011).

2014; Moher et al., 2022; Myers et al., 2017; Woznica et al., 2021), focusing on non-medical support services (Fuller et al., 2018); the investigation/use of long-acting injectable ART for PLWH leaving correctional institutions (Brinkley-Rubinstein et al., 2017; Krsak et al., 2022; Pluznik et al., 2021); telemedicine/telehealth SUD and HIV care services prior to release (Krsak et al., 2022); incentivized undetectable viral load monitoring (Toegel et al., 2020); provision of basic necessities, such as cell phones (Moher et al., 2022); and, supportive social networks, including relationships with families and friends (Rozanova et al., 2015) and providers and facilitators of HIV care who are attentive to the effects of HIV-related stigma (Bailey et al., 2017; Fuller et al., 2018; Kemnitz et al., 2017). In addition, PLWH who are rapidly moving through correctional facilities are particularly vulnerable to missed linkages to HIV care upon release (Loeliger et al., 2018).

Overall, transitions into and out of correctional facilities are a timely area of prison research (Binswanger et al., 2012; Zinger, 2018; Pluznik et al., 2021), particularly in Canada where there is less research conducted around provincial correctional facilities. Understanding transitions is critical, because it will improve interdisciplinary service coordination and practices that support incarcerated and previously incarcerated peoples (Zinger, 2018). HIV research in correctional settings is primarily focused on the evaluation and implementation of structural interventions to increase access to HIV testing, as high rates of non-diagnosed PLWH are found in correctional facilities (Eastment et al., 2017; Iroh et al., 2015; Milloy et al., 2014). The research on transitions for PLWH has tended to focus on transitions into the community, as this is where the HIV care continuum targets are not met. It has been recognized that re-enforcing ART adherence upon release to the community can be productive, but most PLWH recognize the

need for adherence to therapy, yet face salient vulnerabilities, such as unstable social support networks, that preclude them from getting care (Fuller et al., 2018; Pluznik et al., 2021; Woznica et al., 2021). Within a U.S. context, racial disparities along the HIV care continuum persist (Baillargeon et al., 2009b; Stein et al., 2013), calling attention to the need for specific interventions suited to minority PLWHs' needs (Iroh et al., 2015) – in Canada this need exists in relation to Indigenous PLWH (PHAC, 2022, July 25). There is a call to conceptualize new interventions to improve post-release HIV care (Crangle et al., 2021; Iroh et al., 2015; Pluznik et al., 2021; Woznica et al., 2021) and better understand the factors influencing individual's post-release linkage to community care, medication adherence, and maintenance of viral suppression (Wohl et al., 2017).

**Practical and Social Justifications.** The above call to action is one of many and focuses on improving overall health outcomes for PLWH, which begins to contextualize the practical and social justifications of my work. The goal of changing current practices serves as the practical justification of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). In my research, I began to understand the experiences of PLWH transitioning into and out of correctional facilities knowing that this knowledge will help correctional and community-practitioners to rethink their practices and how they understand the experiences of PLWH. The social justification speaks to either theoretical or policy justifications (Clandinin, 2013). Theoretical justifications entail contributing to a disciplinary knowledge base and/or understanding methodological questions (Clandinin, 2013). Policy justifications in narrative inquiry focus on social action to highlight inherent complexities, contradictions, and inconsistencies in current policies while making visible the intricacy of an individual's life (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). A significant aim of my study was

to provide insight into the sense-making processes and experiences of people who have experienced significant inequities. This has allowed me to rethink the effects of policies impacting the lives of incarcerated and previously incarcerated PLWH.

It is from my experiences of working as a RN in corrections that I further understand the significance of my work. These experiences grounded my understanding about transitions into and out of correctional facilities; they shaped my questions about the experiences of the participants, which included: what happens once PLWH are incarcerated or released? how do PLWH reorganize their lives and re-enter their respective worlds – both inside and outside correctional facilities? what sense-making processes are involved for those who experience inequities due to their social positioning? what actions do they take to overcome these inequities? how do inequities experienced by PLWH affect their access to, and organization of, health and social care? In line with these questions, I begin to disrupt the traditional conceptualization of transitions.

### **Turning Towards a Narrative Understanding of Transitions**

Transitions can be understood in many ways, with each conceptualization dependent upon the specific discipline, practice-setting, or associated goals/outcomes. I will consider a narrative understanding of transitions, which makes the particularities of an individual and their experiences across time visible. While there are noticeable conceptualizations of transitions in

the literature, specifically Schlossberg's Transition theory<sup>8</sup> (1984) and Transition theory<sup>9</sup> (Meleis, 2010), these do not reflect a narrative conceptualization of transitions. As part of my narrative beginnings, I hope I have made it evident that transitions into and out of correctional facilities in Alberta for PLWH connect diverse fields of knowledge, practices of constituting knowledge, and lives in the making that are marked by significant health and social disparities.

In my work I turn to narrative ideas that help me conceptualize transitions. Turning towards narrative ideas involves more than the focus on an individual story and its associated characters, plot, or language used (Clandinin, 2013); instead, a turn towards narrative responds to the complexity of a person's experiences that constitutes their life course. This allows me to understand experience as a narratively composed phenomenon (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The ideas of several individuals contribute towards the fundamental link between narrative and experience: a) Carr's (1986a) ideas about the narrative structure and coherence of lives as brought together through ideas of temporality contribute to my understanding that stories are the closest way we can come to experience (Clandinin &

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<sup>8</sup> Schlossberg's transitions theory (1984) focuses on the transitions experienced by adults and how they cope and adjust; it has been predominately established for counselors in the field of developmental psychology to help guide adult clients going through different life transitions, such as a divorce, unexpected death, employment change, etc. (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1984). This conceptualization and application of transitions are helpful, but it misses how experiences are narratively constructed.

<sup>9</sup> Transition theory is a middle-range nursing theory based upon symbolic interactionism; it has multiple purposes, which include to describe, explain, and predict experience in different types of transitions, such as health/illness, situational, developmental, and organizational transitions (Meleis, 2010; Liehr & Smith, 2014). Transition theory has been implemented in diverse practice settings, and used for different purposes, such as defining the milestones at which nursing care is needed, the nature of nursing care, the appropriate teaching moments, and to provide a framework of planning the most appropriate intervention (Meleis, 2010). While this theory has had a recognizable effect on some nursing practices (Meleis, 2010), I believe it does not appropriately attend to the individuality of an individual's experience and the stance of a narratively composed view of experience.



Connelly, 1994); b) Crites (1971) work proposes the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative; c) Bruner's (1986) work on paradigmatic knowing and narrative knowing is important. Bruner sees paradigmatic knowing as a scientific way of knowing that seeks to logically categorize worlds while narrative knowing is concerned with the meaning placed upon experiences told through stories; and d) Polkinghorne's (1988) exploration around narrative knowing, which connects narrative and practice to narrative and theory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) through the ideas of descriptive and explanatory inquiry. When I understand experience as a narratively composed phenomenon, I can begin to disrupt the current conceptualization of transitions as linear and time limited processes into and out of correctional facilities for PLWH.

In my experiences, transitions surrounding correctional facilities for corrections staff appear almost a-theoretical, involving a stance towards a fixed phenomenon with a specific state and position replaced by another fixed state. While I cannot speak to the guiding transitional theories, if there are any, informing other disciplines' actions, such as social work, pharmacy, addictions, or psychology, I understand that in correctional nursing I have never had a conceptual discussion with someone when speaking about transitions. I, and others, have tended to view and define transitions in terms of either their institutional setting, such as going into and out of jails, remand centres, or sentencing facilities, or a transition's clinical implications, such as the need to connect a person with a plastic-surgery follow up appointment or ensuring a PLWH has the necessary ART upon release. In response to this, I believe the ideas by Clandinin et al. (2013) about the five qualities of a narrative understanding of transitions help me understand transitions in new ways.

Clandinin and colleagues (2013) explore transitions within lives, specifically with youth who left school early. They noticed that many people storied the youths' experiences of leaving school early with an implied abruptness, focusing on the two ends of a process (Clandinin et al., 2013). Based upon their work, Clandinin and colleagues (2013) outline five qualities of a narrative understanding of transitions that can inform the theoretical development of my research:

1. Transitions shift over time and place; it would be dangerous to define transitions, because when I try to define something so dynamic, it risks reducing the particular individual within that experience into some pre-conceived category – a definition or label (Clandinin et al., 2013).
2. As an individual composes their life, it is a continual process of change; “as we experience, we change” (p. 220). Transitions speak to a life unfolding, whereby what I may view as a singular event, such as incarceration or release, is occurring in the midst of an individual's ongoing life and story (Clandinin et al., 2013).
3. Transitions are liminal spaces (i.e., spaces meeting at the intersections of boundaries), characterized by uncertainty, opportunity, (Heilbrun, 1999) and grinding up against institutional narratives (i.e., dominant social, political, familial, cultural, or economic plotlines) (Clandinin et al., 2013).
4. Improvisations are part of transition; when a person's life is disrupted by a transition, they need to compose new stories so that they can live their life in a way that makes sense to them (Clandinin et al., 2013), to create a sense of narrative coherence (Carr, 1986a).

Someone may improvise a new story when the alternative no longer makes sense in their life, composing their specific life across a transition (Bateson, 1990; 1994).

5. Transitions involve imagination and relationships; the relationships people have with others, their family, friends, or co-workers, allows them to imagine new ways to compose their lives and live in transitions (Clandinin et al., 2013).

These five narrative qualities begin to disrupt transitions from a predefined and given. A narrative understanding of transitions begins to apply an “initiating, constructing mind or consciousness to the world,” opening up the opportunity to posit alternative ways of living and knowing (Greene, 1995, p. 23). In order to appropriately attend to conceptualizing transitions narratively and building upon these five qualities outlined by Clandinin et al. (2013), I will contextualize how individual experience is based upon a Deweyan-inspired view of experience in narrative inquiry.

### *A Deweyan-inspired view of Experience*

Narrative inquiry is located within a pragmatic framework, where it is the understanding that “what you see (and hear, feel, think, love, taste, despise, fear, etc.) is what you get” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 7). I, as a narrative inquirer, begin with individual experience and end with individual experience (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin, 2013). Within its pragmatic foundations, narrative inquiry may be described as both methodology and phenomenon

(Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).<sup>10</sup> In this section, I will highlight the Deweyan-inspired view of experience that narrative inquiry, as a phenomenon, is built on.

Narrative inquiry is constructed upon a Deweyan-inspired view of experience (1938), with its two criteria - interaction and continuity enacted in situations (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin, 2013) - and its transactional or relational ontology. Interaction enacted in situations involves the simultaneous awareness of the internal and external conditions of experience (Dewey, 1938), where one's internal disposition (e.g., an individual's feelings, desires, moral dispositions, beliefs, etc.) are in constant interaction with one's external conditions of experience (e.g., culture, social order/processes, physical environment, etc.). It is the continuous interaction of human thought with our "personal, social, and material environment" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 5) that is important. These interactions are not necessarily in conflict or synergistic with one another, rather they interact and have effects. When a PLWH transitions into a penal facility from the jail holding cells, how does their internal disposition interact with their external conditions of a remand centre or provincial sentencing facility? What processes in their external condition of living silence their desires or beliefs? Continuity enacted in situations is the

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<sup>10</sup> As a research methodology, narrative inquiry aims to understand and make meaning of experiences through understanding people as leading storied lives, with story being the portal through which a person enters the world and makes sense and meaning of their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry may also be understood as a phenomenon itself. The notion of inquiry at the ontological level is based upon Dewey's (1938) pragmatic philosophy, where the regulative ideal of inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human and their environment, life, community, or world (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). When narrative inquirers engage in retelling stories, we may elucidate newfound understandings that allow us, and participants, to relive our future experiences in a different way. After inquiring into ourselves, and discovering newfound meaning, it may shape our future relations and actions with the populations we work with (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dubnewick et al., 2018).

understanding that past experiences shape current experiences, while also laying the foundation for a plausible future - “every experience both takes up something from the present moment and carries it into future experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 34). When a PLWH becomes incarcerated, what relations do they bring to this experience from their past? How do these relations affect their sense-making of the present or future? If a PLWH is re-incarcerated, how is their experience of transitioning into a remand centre different from their first time becoming incarcerated? In addition to these two criteria of experience, relational aspects of experience are also important in narrative inquiry (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin, 2013). Located within a pragmatic framework, the relational aspects of experience in narrative inquiry stem from the transactional and relational ontological commitment of Dewey’s (1938) theory of experience. In his theoretical approach, the regulative ideal of inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human and their environment, life, community, or world (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). It is these three aspects of a Deweyan-inspired view of experience - interaction (i.e., internal and external or social), continuity, and relationality - that I understand narrative inquiry as a phenomenon and how individual experience is theoretically constructed. From this point, I can think with these ideas further.

### ***Thinking with Dewey/Pragmatism About Transitions***

If I discuss the five narrative qualities of transitions within the two principles of experience outlined by Dewey (1938) – interaction and continuity - a few insights are highlighted.

**Interaction.** Thinking back to the purpose of this study, when I consider interaction as a criterion of experience (Dewey, 1938), I am brought to the complexity of a life. Transitions, and how they may either be described or lived out by a person is contingent upon how an individual makes sense of these experiences. I believe sense-making processes are strongly informed by the complex interplay of improvisation, imagination, and relationships, as described by Clandinin and colleagues (2013). To me, this speaks to the idea that “experience does not occur in a vacuum” (Dewey, 1938, p. 40). Turning towards Heilbrun’s (1999) work regarding transitions, I can unpack these ideas further.

Heilbrun (1999) defines transitions as threshold experiences, contingent upon a condition of liminality, which is defined by its sense of unsteadiness and lack of clarity. During a threshold experience, a person is unsure of where they belong, what that they want to do, or what they should be doing (Heilbrun, 1999). Thinking with the idea of transitions as liminal spaces calls forth a sense of unsteadiness and uncertainty. Thinking back to my narrative beginnings around health assessments for people coming into corrections, I am reminded of the embodied silences and uncertainties that characterized these experiences for me. When a PLWH transitions around correctional facilities, I wonder what moments of liminality characterize their sense-making of these experiences? For many, correctional facilities are ‘closed worlds’ separate from outside communities, yet for a PLWH entering and exiting, these ‘worlds’ are inherently linked with one another through their experiences. The links between corrections and outside communities are further highlighted by the co-composing cultures, dispositions, and social order/processes which influences the “total social set-up of the situations in which a person is engaged” (Dewey, 1938, p. 45). Overall, while entering, existing in, and leaving facilities PLWH may engage in sense-

making activities, involving improvisation, imagination, and relationships, as they live within liminal spaces on storied landscapes.

**Continuity.** Composing a life as a process of change involves viewing transitions as occurring in the midst of an individual's ongoing story (Clandinin et al., 2013). As a nurse researcher-practitioner who works in the field of HIV and corrections, I tend to view transitions in terms of the spatially segregating metaphor of the HIV care continuum (Gardner et al., 2011). This conceptualization is comfortable, as it splits transitions for PLWH as those going into correctional facilities and those leaving. Yet, if I think with Dewey's continuity in individual experience, whereby "every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35), the sharp boundaries of transitions into and out become blurred; entering and exiting correctional facilities may then become contextualized and viewed as experiences that are a part of the stream of a PLWH's ongoing story. When I understand experiences as a part of an individual's continuous story, I realize that my future, present, and past jointly determine one another as parts of a temporal whole, or "unity in multiplicity" (Carr, 1986a, p. 36). Unifying this temporal whole is the individual, who assumes a storyteller's point of view (Carr, 1986a). Overall, we structure time in narrative form, because it is our way of living in time (Carr, 1986a). For many PLWH, a part of their ongoing story is significant health and social disparities. These disparities are often influenced by the SDOH, which begin in an individual's early life and extend into adulthood (Raphael et al., 2020). If I think about a PLWH's life course with Carr's (1986a) idea of a temporal whole and Dewey's (1938) principle of continuity, I arrive at this statement:

As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. (Dewey, 1938, p. 44)

To me, this quote speaks to many ideas. Without an understanding of a person's story, I cannot understand how they make sense of entering and exiting correctional facilities. Further, how a PLWH 'defines' a transition either into or out of a correctional facility is contingent upon who they are and their ongoing story. Dewey's (1938) principle of continuity may nudge us towards the idea that transitions into and out of correctional facilities resist the conforming pressures common when trying to create standardized processes and definitions. Transitions are more than one state or form being replaced by another. To me, this poses the question: if each person's story is unique, why fit them into pre-defined categories or reductionistic (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) thinking? If every experience is a "moving force... it's value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into" (Dewey, 1938, p. 38). I wonder, what do transitions move PLWH toward? Is a PLWH's world enlarged and shifted to new areas for self-growth (Dewey, 1938)? Or are they further confined to parts of their world that distort further growth and experience (Dewey, 1938)? Informed by the ideas of feminist pragmatist scholars,



how do people involved with transitions recognize alternative standpoints?<sup>11</sup> How do I involve the voice of PLWH in their transitions? These questions were something to think with when I consider what health care and correctional systems value regarding transitions for PLWH.

As I think with Dewey's (1938) principles of experience about transitions around correctional facilities for PLWH, the phrase, "living in transition" (Clandinin et al., 2013, p. 222) is significant to my work. Living in transition seems to capture the ethos of understanding transitions narratively. A person does not necessary 'undergo' a transition; they live in transition, bringing with them the complex interplay between their internal disposition, external environments, and past experiences, present moments, and plausible futures (Carr, 1986a; Dewey, 1938; Clandinin et al., 2013). It is important to think of my proposed work in its theoretical justification (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). I believe that the idea of living in transition around correctional facilities for PLWH may build upon narrative inquiry's methodological foundations and move forward nursing's disciplinary knowledge in these fields. Furthermore, living in transition begins to attend to the individuality of life, speaking to the idea of identity making inherent when composing a life.

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<sup>11</sup> I am referring to predominately Jane Addams' work (1910a; 1910b) that revolved around the need to promote social progress. Her unique mixture of theory, advocacy, and action highlighted the experiences of marginalized peoples and sought to involve and provide opportunities for them to advocate and act upon their living conditions.

## *Identity Making*

I wish to make clear the emphasis of multiplicity and plurality that becomes interwoven with the idea of living in transition for PLWH. Part of this multiplicity involves the identity making that goes on for an individual, but also the imposed identity making placed on the individual.

**Individual Identity Making.** Identity making speaks to the ideas of being and becoming central to narrative inquiry, where a life is always in motion, being shaped and reshaped over time by our experiences and relations (Clandinin, 2013). Central to a life in motion are surprises, fluidity, discontinuities, ambiguity, and interruptions, which cause people to reshape and reinterpret who they are and are becoming (Bateson, 1990). Central to ambiguity and uncertainty in life is the idea of identity making, which to me appears to be synonymous with an individual's construction of their sense of self, or the question of who we are (Bateson, 1990). Identity making runs parallel with Dewey's (1938) principle of interaction in individual experience, whereby interaction enacted in situations involves the simultaneous awareness of the internal and external conditions of experience (Dewey, 1938). As a PLWH lives in transitions, they are engaging in identity making as they compose their lives – their internal disposition is interacting and making sense of their external conditions of existence (Dewey, 1938). During this time an individual's consciousness orientates itself in a world, creating a sense of self and reality (Crites, 1971).

There are many ideas from a narrative field of thought that are involved in identity making and the maintenance of a sense of reality. Carr (1986a) speaks to the need of narrative

coherence: “things need to make sense [...] what we are doing is telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story of what we are about and what we are” (p. 97). Bateson (1990, 1994) proposes that improvisation and peripheral vision act as processes of identity making over a life course, acting as ways of making sense, learning from, and coping with life’s discontinuities and uncertainties. In this context, improvisation may be thought about as sifting through and combining both familiar and unfamiliar materials in new ways that are attentive to the context, interaction, and response of lives (Bateson, 1990). When people live in transition, they make sense of who they are, or may become, by improvising. As a note, in the ongoing moments of improvisation, I am not speaking about extraordinary events, rather the day-to-day events and activities that are the building blocks of life (Bateson, 1990). To me, this idea extends to living in transition for PLWH, whereby I was not interested in the spectacular events of an individual’s life, but rather the daily activities that constitute their story. Part of these daily activities involve the ongoing processes of self-invention, where a PLWH is constructing a sense of self from past, present, and future materials (Bateson, 1990). Even though the self is central throughout time, a sense of self is not identical, it shifts and reshapes over time and place (Bateson, 1994) while intersecting with storied landscapes (Clandinin, 2013). Thinking with this idea, I wonder how a PLWH’s sense of self shifts across diverse geographic places? How has their sense of self changed over time? These questions stayed with me as I engaged in this work.

When I think about how a sense of self may have changed over time and across diverse places, as someone lives in transition, I understand that a narrative cannot have a single strand that encompasses the whole, but rather that identity is multiple (Greene, 1995); it shifts over time and place while being contingent on relations with others and oneself. Part of what holds these

different identities together is imagination and, as previously discussed, improvisation (Bateson, 1990; Greene, 1995). Playing with imagination, it is important to note that imagination does not necessarily resolve anything, rather it awakens the unseen, unheard, and unexpected (Greene, 1995). As a narrative quality of living in transition, imagination opens up the opportunity for someone to explore how their relations may contribute towards the multiplicity of identity making – to imagine and think otherwise. Thinking with this idea, I wonder how a PLWH imagines their sense of self as being informed by their relationships with others? If they could reimagine their sense of self, what may they say when they are going into a correctional facility or leaving to a community? Overall, an identity is always in construction – shaped and reshaped (Bateson, 1990) – which asks the question: if someone’s identity is always in construction and multiple, what is my role, as a researcher-practitioner, in working alongside this sense of self?

The past experiences of an individual shape self-definition and act as a filter to future perceptions and possibilities of learning and self-growth (Bateson, 1994). This idea is in line with Dewey’s (1938) principle of continuity in experience, whereby each experience takes something from the past and carries it into a plausible future. Here is the idea that there is an ongoing sense of self. A part of past experiences, and what contributes to the processes of identity making, is being a part of a greater whole, which includes the groups or communities a person, willing or not, belongs to (Carr, 1986a).

**Imposed Identity Making.** Another dimension of identity making is the identities I impose upon others as a researcher-practitioner. As an individual constructs, tears down, and reconstructs their sense of self, I project identities upon others in the experiences I share with them. For example, as I work alongside a PLWH transitioning into a correctional facility during

a health assessment, I am sharing an experience with them in which I may identify them as someone they are not. As an active listener, I give shape to the story I hear, informing how I may look at a life, what matters becomes visible in the details I emphasize or the imagery I use in interpretation. In addition, when I listen to someone tell their story, I begin to integrate their experiences into my own (Coles, 1989), highlighting the relational nature integral to sharing stories. In line with my ethical responsibilities, what matters when listening to a story is what I decide to do with it (Coles, 1989). This idea is dangerous and asks me to be a good listener, or I risk reducing individual stories into an objective set of circumstances or categories (Coles, 1989; Greene, 1995). I, too, risk imposing a new identity onto a person and silencing their sense of self. Thinking with the danger associated with imposing identities upon others, I ask the question: what must I do to see someone? to let the individual's story be the discovery (Coles, 1989)?

### ***Life Making***

Life making may be understood as a dynamic process that acknowledges lives are shifted and shaped over time and place and through multiple relationships (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin et al., 2013; Clandinin et al., 2018). As a process, life making is contingent upon a Deweyan-inspired view of experience, with a focus on the principle of continuity and interaction (Dewey, 1938). Synonymous with life making is the idea of composing a life, which involves an openness to possibilities and the ability to put somewhat familiar pieces together into something structurally sound (Bateson, 1990, 1994); this speaks to a sense of narrative coherence, where a life manages to 'make sense' and hang together for the individual (Carr, 1986a). In general, life making is complex and dynamic, composed of multiple processes and ideas.

Greene (1995) brings to life making the idea of imagination, where someone can assemble a coherent world and look at things as if otherwise. In this sense of imagination, someone does not seek to provide an alternative reality, instead imagination involves coping with the world they are in (Carr, 1986a). Bateson (1990) speaks about the process of improvisation as we compose a life. Improvisation is tied to the ideas of life making and learning, where people act and interact with others without complete understanding (Bateson, 1994). This resonates with Carr's (1986a) idea that we "are forced to swim with events and take things as they come" (p. 59).

Understanding people as always in the making attends to the uncertainty and ongoingness of lives lived and told (Clandinin 2013; Greene, 1995). Life making is also marked by ambiguity, discontinuities, differences, and interruptions (Bateson, 1990; 1994), where a focus on a central goal often shifts to multiple things on the periphery of our experience (Bateson, 1994). Although there is often an assumption that people have singular goals, few individuals lead such a 'single-minded' life (Carr, 1986a). Rather, an individual's many spheres of life, such as pursuing a career, raising a family, or becoming incarcerated run parallel with one another (Carr, 1986a). I am curious about how the many spheres of life for PLWH intersect and how they compose their story. As a person engages in life making, the whole of their past experiences are with them, yet these are always subject to discovery and reinterpretation (Carr, 1986a); this also means that there will never be a final story (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

I can only understand the experiences of PLWH within the context of a life in the making (Caine et al., 2018; Caine et al., 2022). Coles (1989) reminds me that what I hear in my interactions with PLWH is their story. However, when I listen to their story, I become implicated

in their experiences. In this line of thought, Geertz (1995) discusses the idea of a metaphorical parade. As researchers we enter this metaphorical parade as we engage in relational ways. In these liminal spaces, between stories lived and told, there is plurality and multiplicity of lives in the making rather than a single dimension. Coming to a PLWH's life in the making means recognizing how an individual's story and their interpretation of it also depends upon the broader social, political, familial, and cultural narratives that interweave with it (Carr, 1986a). These broader institutional narratives (social, political, familial, etc.) are held together by the individual stories that constitute them, which speaks to the ongoing communal life making that occurs (Carr, 1986a).

In summary, there are many overlaps between the ideas of identity making and life making in the context of living in transition. Identity and life making contribute to the understanding of the plurality and multiplicity of lives, while highlighting the differences between one individual or communities' story and another. I am reminded by Greene (1995) that sometimes individual improvisations can act as shared models of possibility for others (Bateson, 1990). As I worked closely alongside PLWH living in transition, I depended on my vision on the periphery, which ensured I paid attention to the differences between myself and the participants and others, because for each different way of seeing I was exposed to, I continued to learn (Bateson, 1994).

### **Chapter 3: Narrative Inquiry**

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experiences (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Clandinin and Caine (2013) outlined 12 qualitative touchstones that highlight the significant qualities marking a narrative inquiry – I will address these touchstones throughout this chapter.

Narrative inquiry is both a methodology and phenomenon (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).<sup>12</sup> As a methodology, narrative inquiry focuses on the experiences of people, including personal and social interactions, the continuities of experiences, and how place intersects with these (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry does not treat stories or narratives as simply a mode of data representation, but instead it understands experience as a narratively composed phenomenon (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

#### **The Three-dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space**

There are three features of the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space that attend to a Deweyan-inspired view of experience: temporality, sociality, and place

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<sup>12</sup> See footnote #5 for narrative inquiry as a phenomenon.



(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).<sup>13</sup> By focusing on the three-dimensional space, and its four directions – inward (i.e., internal/personal conditions), outward (i.e., external/social conditions), backward, and forward while rooted in place, this metaphor opens up imaginative possibilities for thinking otherwise (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I attend to the sociality and external and internal conditions, it is important to attend to the relational responsibility and relational ontological commitments I have to myself and the participants’ stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).<sup>14</sup> As I engaged with the two participants, I entered lives on storied landscapes, and when I left the study and participants (‘for now’), their lives continued.

### *Living/Entering in the Midst*

In the field, I sought to co-create meaning by coming alongside the participants in the midst of their storied lives. When I say that narrative inquirers enter into research relationships in the midst, I mean it as the following: in the midst of a researcher or participant’s personal and professional lives or in the midst of researcher or participant’s lives within institutional or social narratives - I enter, live alongside, and exit (in a sense of ‘for now’) in the midst of ongoing

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<sup>13</sup> Temporality is closely associated with Dewey’s (1938) criterion of continuity enacted in situations (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Narrative inquirers describe events, people, objects, places under study as having a past, present, and implied future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Sociality addresses the existence and interaction of internal (i.e., personal conditions) and external (i.e., social conditions) conditions associated with Dewey’s (1938) criterion of interaction enacted in situations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). The final dimension is place, where a narrative inquiry occurs within a specific place or sequence of places (e.g., specific concrete, physical, and topological boundaries) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Each place is a storied landscape; each place has a past, present, and implied future shaped by other people and events.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas King, an Indigenous scholar, speaks to this responsibility, stating, “the truth about stories is that’s all we are” (2003, p. 2). When I walk alongside participants and their stories, I remember my relational responsibility to their stories and my relationship with them.

experience (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Part of living in the midst acknowledges that there will never be a final story, instead new opportunities for experiences to be retold and relived are always present (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). When a research project ends, this sense of ‘for now’ begins to attend to the relationships I will continue to hold even when the study is completed.

## **Relational Methodology**

Narrative inquiry is a relational methodology, which calls for living in ways that allow for attending to the many relations before, during, and after a narrative inquiry.<sup>15</sup> I acknowledge the complex relations embodied in my storied life as it intersects with the storied landscapes I shared with the participants, and they shared with me. I recognize that the participants living in transition are composed in and of their relations with everything around them. Since PLWH are often heavily stigmatized within correctional facilities (Erickson et al., 2021; Mugavero et al., 2013; Wadams, 2022), I wondered how Bruce and Kyle storied me – did they see me as being implicated in an unjust system? How did their stories of who I was shift over the inquiry as we spent more time together? Within living relationally, I collaborated with participants and community-stakeholders to attend to issues of equity and social justice, while I also co-composed

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<sup>15</sup> What I mean by a relational methodology is not just the relational ontological commitment previously discussed; instead, a key tenet is the relational living that occurs between researchers, participants, and communities’ lives as a narrative inquiry unfolds (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). There is relational living between the researcher, participant, and their worlds; place and person; events and feelings; in the intergenerational; and in temporality between past, present, and future (Clandinin, 2013).

and negotiated the living, telling, retelling, and reliving of stories alongside Bruce and Kyle (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

### ***Living, Telling, Retelling, and Reliving Stories***

Narrative inquiry is a space that allows for the living, telling, retelling, and reliving of experience and creating newfound relations between the researcher, participant, place, community, social conditions, and temporality.<sup>16</sup> When a narrative inquiry begins, it can occur through either living stories or telling stories (Clandinin, 2013). When I begin with telling stories, I meet with participants and listen to them tell their experiences (Clandinin, 2013). This may occur through unstructured conversations. When I begin with living stories, I come alongside participants as they live their lives (Clandinin, 2013), such might occur by meeting a participant in their home, surrounded by their family (Clandinin, 2013). Underpinning all these initial experiences alongside participants is the heart of narrative inquiry, its relational ethics framework.

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<sup>16</sup> Living, telling, retelling, and reliving means we live our lives, and we tell our stories, with our stories being the medium of how we interpret and make meaning of our experiences. When we inquire into our lived or told stories, or the lived and told stories of participants or communities with the three-dimensional space, we begin the process of retelling these stories that allow for newfound relations to be discovered. We might relive our stories and lives with new meaning, purpose, and insight gained from understanding another's lived and told story (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This relationship between retelling and reliving is clearly demonstrated in the transactional or relational ontological commitment of a Deweyan-inspired view of experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

## Relational Ethics

Narrative inquiry is an ethical undertaking (Clandinin et al., 2018). When I understand the relational ontological commitment of a Deweyan-inspired view of experience as previously described, I may see the heart of narrative inquiry; relational ethics, a stance attentive to peoples' ongoing life making which creates an opportunity to be attentive to my relational responsibility with the participants and their communities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin et al., 2018). Clandinin et al. (2018) outline five interrelated dimensions of the relational ethics of narrative inquiry:

(1) engaging in world traveling through loving perception and playfulness (inspired by the work of Lugones [1987]), imagination, and improvisation (p. 193);

(2) moving slowly in ways that allow for listening and living, where we may attend to the stories told, but also not told (p. 195);

(3) understanding ethical responsibilities as always moving/in process, in the making, and attending with wakefulness to the ongoing experiences of researcher and participant (p. 197);

(4) engaging with a sense of uncertainty and not knowing, causing us as researchers to embrace uncertainty and dis/ease while imagining otherwise, i.e., not knowing is a part of living ethically (p. 198); and,

(5) understanding that ethical relations are lived embodiments, composed inter-generationally, which carry knowledge shaped by our familial, cultural, social, and institutional narratives (Clandinin et al., 2018, p. 199).

These dimensions cannot be separated from one another, but are instead interwoven, intersecting, and co-composing (Clandinin et al., 2018). My relationships with the participants were guided by these dimensions. As a researcher, when I came alongside the participants, I recognized the ethical commitment I have towards them exceeded the ethics application statement requested by the University of Alberta (UofA). The ethical dimensions of Clandinin et al. (2018) encourage me to continue to reflect upon how I experienced uncertainty alongside the participants or how I moved slowly with them, attending to the silences in their stories.

### **Why Narrative Inquiry?**

Several narrative inquiries have engaged PLWH (Caine, 2001; Dela Cruz et al., 2016; De Padua, 2015; Genoway et al., 2016; Maina, 2015). In the following section, I will discuss why narrative inquiry was an appropriate methodology for conducting research alongside PLWH living in transitions into and out of correctional facilities.

Narrative inquiry is posed as an appropriate methodology to conduct research alongside PLWH in Canada because of its focus on attending to issues of social justice and inequities, while promoting personal and social growth in participants, researchers, and communities (Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Put in other words, narrative inquiry seeks “how to put knowledge in the service of enhancing human experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 12). Instead of seeking to create generalizations, a goal of narrative inquiry is to

elucidate new ways of thinking about issues and problems, generating novel insights (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013). I avoided framing Bruce's and Kyle's individual experiences into pre-set categories with reductionistic thinking, such as someone facing solely housing instability or HIV-related stigma (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

I recognize the need to address issues of practical and social significance that arise from this inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). I attended to this by starting with my narrative beginnings, which helped me begin to name the personal/practical/social significance, research justification/puzzle, and initiated the act of being mindful and open to inquiry to create shifts in relational knowing and being (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dubnewick et al., 2018). My narrative beginnings also helped me begin to see otherwise, to imagine ways in which to create a safe and ethical space for people I worked alongside. Narrative inquiry attends to the commitments towards participants through emphasizing a relational responsibility and living in relational ways with participants and communities (Clandinin & Caine, 2013); as a narrative inquirer, I paid close attention to the stories and experiences that might have been silenced in the inquiry process.

The relational ethics of narrative inquiry has multiple dimensions. For example, the attitude of not knowing for certain - that other ways of living and interpreting life are possible - comes when one lives relationally with participants and communities (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Paying attention to uncertainty means to create ways of knowing otherwise, and to situate knowing within ideas of social justice and the opportunity to listen to the silences in peoples' stories (Caine et al., 2018). The five dimensions of narrative inquiry's relational ethics are perfectly situated to come alongside the lives of PLWH, which often face uncertainties and must

imagine other ways of knowing while improvising (Clandinin et al., 2018) in the face of structural inequities. Often enough, attending to the lives of PLWH does not consider or appropriately acknowledge the systemic structural inequities and stigma experienced by PLWH. However, as I engaged in the inquiry, I attend to, acknowledged, and created intentional and unintentional possibilities for new insights and possible personal growth (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Evolving from an epistemological and ontological standpoint based in pragmatism, narrative inquiry emphasizes the dual processes of theory and action as one in the same – theory cannot exist without action and vice-versa; to me, these ideas are seen in Jane Addams (1910a, 1910b) and Dewey’s (1938) ideas of pragmatism and the commitment to advocacy. Even though many researchers live in relational ways and attend to the communities they work with, I believe many methodologies stop at the representation of experience as someone’s story, with not enough emphasis on living in relational ways, advocacy work, or understanding research as entering/living in the midst.

## **Inquiry Design**

The following sections discuss the methodological pieces of the inquiry relevant to the experiences of two participants living with HIV and their stories of going into and out of Alberta correctional facilities. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and its ongoing effects on in-person research, the study progressed in unexpected ways and over diverse places. Although I completed my candidacy in March of 2020, the initial timeline was pushed back as I could not begin in-person work until the late spring of 2021.

## *Effects of COVID-19*

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been felt globally, disrupting essential health services, causing excess deaths, and negatively impacting peoples' individual health and livelihoods (WHO, 2020, October 13; WHO, 2021, May 20). Correctional facilities in Canada have also not been excluded from the diverse effects of the pandemic (Ricciardelli et al., 2021; Zinger, 2021). COVID-19 has also significantly affected those in academia. In-person activities and research were severely limited to non-existent during the first year of the pandemic and these restrictions were felt by graduate students throughout its waves (Ramos, 2021). Because I could not engage with participants in person, I was offered – and took – a temporary leave of absence during the Spring/Summer 2020 semester, returning to my PhD work in the Fall of 2020. In compliance with the UofA's guidelines on conducting in-person research during the pandemic, I completed a Human-Participant Research Field Activities Plan that was approved and implemented. The effects of the pandemic on myself, the participants, and the diverse communities we are a part of is woven throughout the following sections.

## *Recruitment Criteria*

I had initially wished to invite three to five men living with HIV in Alberta, but the inquiry progressed with two participants - Kyle and Bruce. This was primarily because of the pandemic's effects on my doctoral work's timeline. Both men were living with HIV and had a history of incarceration in Alberta, with Bruce last leaving a provincial facility almost four years ago and Kyle in April of 2021. Women were excluded from participating, because from my experiences working alongside incarcerated women who experienced significantly increased



rates of marginalization, sexual assault, victimization, and past trauma, I believed my lack of research experience and social positioning as a Caucasian male would interfere with establishing an ethical relationship and space that they would feel safe in. In line with the health inequities experienced by PLWH with current or past involvement in the penal system, both participants lived with/had lived with diverse co-morbidities, such as substance use. Prospective participants were excluded from the study if they were diagnosed with a cognitive impairment, such as FASD or had an appointed guardian. For study feasibility, both Kyle and Bruce lived within the greater Edmonton area or no more than a one-hour drive away. Participant recruitment was not limited by further demographic information, such as time of initial HIV diagnosis, viral suppression, ethnicity, sexual-identity, race, or socioeconomic status. Although the study did not specifically seek out Indigenous participants, Kyle was Indigenous, which is congruent with the disproportionate rates of Indigenous peoples incarcerated and living with HIV in Canada (PHAC, 2022, July 25; Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20).

### ***Recruitment Strategy and Location***

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, which is commonly found in narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). The study was conducted over a 1.5-year period (i.e., spring of 2021 until the fall of 2022). Recruitment occurred through a local non-profit AIDS service organization (ASO) that serves the needs of people living with, and affected by, HIV in the greater Edmonton area. After consulting with the ASO's executive director, programs and services lead, and outreach workers, they voiced their support of the inquiry. The outreach workers identified and connected me to the two participants who fit the study inclusion criteria. Both Kyle and Bruce are clients of the community agency (i.e., ASO). An additional

organization involved in recruitment was a local community health centre - an Edmonton non-profit organization that provides care to the most marginalized people in Edmonton and which has voiced significant interest in better understanding the experiences of transitions. After meeting with the executive team at the community health centre, they supported the project and facilitated recruitment, connecting me with HIV care providers and their frontline staff. An information letter was forwarded to the staff, and I was invited to speak at one of their team meetings. Unfortunately no recruitment occurred through their organization, because: a) the frontline staff at the centre struggled to identify and recruit potential participants that were agreeable to engaging in a year-long project; b) the pandemic caused widespread disruptions and challenges to health services that provided care to those living within Edmonton's inner city, specifically the health centre, who took a primary role in delivering these services; and, c) I had already recruited two participants through the ASO by the end of summer 2021.

Participants were recruited one at a time, as most of the energy of the project went into initially engaging and building relationships with each participant. I met Kyle first in July and Bruce in August of 2021. Honorariums were provided to both participants in order to compensate them for their time. In addition to these honorariums, as a narrative inquiry takes place in the field, I met Kyle and Bruce at diverse local food venues and malls where I purchased meals and beverages for them.

**Sample size.** I worked with two participants; a sample size this large is commonplace in narrative inquiry, because the design holds a longitudinal approach with ongoing engagement of participants within their social contexts (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This sample size is also congruent with the goals of narrative inquiry, which involves understanding

“how to put knowledge in the service of enhancing human experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 12) and to elucidate new ways of thinking about issues and problems, generating novel insights (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013).

### *Ethics*

I submitted the standard ethics application through the UofA’s Research Ethics and Management Online portal. Because of the ongoing and changing COVID-19 pandemic and its status as a public health crisis, two amendments were required. These were subsequently approved, and I was able to conduct in-person research beginning in the spring/summer of 2021. I also received operational approval for the study from the community health centre and ASO. I did not seek operational approval through Alberta Health Services (AHS), because both organizations fell outside of AHS. In addition, I did not seek Alberta Justice and Solicitor General administrative approval because: a) the work with Kyle and Bruce occurred outside of correctional facilities as they reflected on their experiences, and b) the focus of the project was on the sense-making experiences of PLWH living in transition once they had been released from correctional facilities. I acknowledge that gaining institutional ethics board approval was not the end of my relational commitment to Bruce and Kyle and their stories. The five dimensions of the relational ethics framework previously discussed guided my intentions, participation, and questions throughout the inquiry (Clandinin et al., 2018). Before I formally entered the field alongside Bruce and Kyle, the project began by acknowledging that I am walking into the midst of lives on storied landscapes framed by dominant narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

## *The Green Shack Program*

In my narrative beginnings, I inquired into my storied past as a Caucasian neighbor working alongside predominately Indigenous PLWH and a history of incarceration. I began to position myself in relation to the inquiry. These insights have guided me as I engaged in the inquiry. I was invited alongside, and into the midst, of the dominant institutional and colonial narratives – alongside the counter-narratives - shaping participants' lives when I began the inquiry by listening to, and learning alongside, both an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper and an Elder.

It was a privilege to be able to connect with an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper about the project's goals and how to remain attentive to my sense of responsibility to work with Indigenous people to change the experiences around transitions. Sitting down with him and my supervisor, sharing a coffee and donut, and offering protocol was fundamentally a piece of beginning to live my life in a relational way alongside those whose experiences may differ from my own. He shared with me his own stories of living positively and within the walls of facilities. These stories and knowledge shaped my further experiences and my relationships alongside the participants and how I thought about, and with, the inquiry. After I met with the Indigenous Knowledge Keeper, I was invited to speak with an Elder.

The Elder, ASO executive director, Sean, Vera, and I were supposed to meet up to have a fire and potluck before the summer of 2021, but the ongoing pandemic and its effects on all of us prevented that. Once the restrictions from the pandemic began to lift in the early summer, I felt

my excitement and nervousness grow, I was about to speak with and learn alongside the Elder. I reflect on a field note:

*It was windy outside and the rain could not make up its mind to either stay or go. Vera, Sean, the ASO executive director, and I met up with the Elder at McCauley Park, right across from the downtown Italian Centre. Vera had picked up Italian sandwiches for us and some drinks. Together, we set up our little lawn chairs and sat with one another outside in a small circle, some coverage from the wind provided by the large trees and adjacent green building. It was the first time we were able to come together since the pandemic restrictions were implemented. In the circle, I can remember Sean's neon colored rain/sports jacket and its contrast with the concrete pad underneath his feet. I was nervous to meet the Elder, my pulse quickened, I became more aware of my breaths, and I tried to slow my mind down; yet he was so friendly from the outset. All I wanted to do was be respectful and listen with everything I had. As we sat down together, I was invited to offer protocol. Handing over the tobacco pouch wrapped in a colorful piece of brocade fabric, I felt a sense of stillness and peace as we smudged together after – it was my first time being a part of a ceremony outside. I watched the sage slowly turn to embers and the ashes be taken away by the wind. The Elder shared with us a song bound by the beat of his tanned hide rattle – the eagle on one side dancing with the deer on the other. As he sang, I could feel my feet connect to the earth, reaching down and through the concrete pad to the dirt below. In that moment, as my toes moved up and down together, I was disconnected from the city but connected to those in that shared experience. The Green Shack Program, as Sean put it, had begun.*

I listened to the Elder's stories about his experiences of working within facilities and alongside the diverse lives of Indigenous peoples living with and without HIV. Stories of racism, stigma, and structural inequities came forth, along with the need to build connections – within, outside, and across individuals - and trusting relationships with one another, regardless of our perceived differences. The lives of people within facilities and outside are connected by stories and relationships that longed for honesty and being able to trust one another. While I cannot describe all that I learned alongside the Elder during our time together, my learnings guided my relational responsibility to the participants and those with similar experiences of incarceration as I entered and lived within the field.

### ***Entering the Field***

In narrative inquiry I negotiated with Kyle and Bruce ongoing relational inquiry spaces, referred to as the field (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). When beginning to think about negotiating entry into the field, or relational spaces with participants, it can occur through either coming alongside participants as they live and tell their stories or by listening to individuals tell their stories (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2000). Most commonly, narrative inquiries start with participants telling their stories through conversations (Clandinin & Caine, 2013), which was how Kyle and I created a relational space. Sitting with one another across at a table in the mall food court, we had our first conversations together. When I first met with Bruce, I entered the field by coming alongside him as he lived and told his stories, spending time with him throughout the day as he ran errands and met with others. With both participants, I went with them wherever they would take me (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Bruce and I spoke of his family as we ran errands and spent time together out at

his friend's farm. Kyle and I mostly spoke together at a local Tim Hortons but would occasionally walk together to complete errands. Both participants invited me into their lives as I lived alongside them, sharing stories through conversation (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

### *Initial Conversations*

The initial conversations with both participants were contextualized by my anxiousness to begin the inquiry and learn alongside them – my palms would be sweaty, and I could feel a slight pit in my stomach as I called Kyle or Bruce. These first conversations, when I entered the field, were informed by my ethical commitments to the UofA. I had a short list of questions and topics to discuss the first time we met together, such as: a) what would you like me to say if someone you know sees us together? b) would you prefer an alias in the work? c) what is your weekly schedule like, and where and how can I reach you? and, d) where would you like your gift cards to come from? These questions were not all we spoke about, but they contextualized our first conversations together. They also highlighted the ethical challenges of conducting work alongside people who live with a history of incarceration.

**Potential Illegal Activities and Imminent harm.** It is important to discuss the delicate discourse between maintaining participant confidentiality and my 'duty to report' when working with participants with a history of incarceration. I attended to the tension between the requirements of the law and guidance of ethical principles (TCPS2, 2018). The TCPS2 (2018) states that when thinking about designing and conducting research, ethical questions should be approached from the perspective of the participant, while also striving to comply with the law in the application of ethical principles (TCPS2, 2018). To navigate this area of maintaining my

ethical and relational commitments while upholding my duty to report, I employed a number of approaches in the project: a) as per the TCPS2 (2018) recommendation, I had a plan to consult with colleagues (i.e., my supervisor and supervisory committee), the Research Ethics Board, and other relevant professional bodies (e.g., Canadian Nursing Association's code of ethics [2017] and the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta's practice standards and ethical conduct guidelines [2010, May; 2013, April]) to help resolve any conflicts and guide an appropriate course of action; b) I identified possible legal issues and associated laws that may occur in the conduct of the project (TCPS2, 2018); and, c) I forefronted in our initial conversation the guidelines for our discussions, stating that we cannot have direct conversations around illegal activity and I am, as per the Smith vs. Jones decision (Supreme Court of Canada, 1999), obligated to report instances where there is an identifiable person at risk of imminent bodily harm. Thankfully, the project's work was not subpoenaed nor were there instances relating to illegal activities and imminent harm that I needed to consult my supervisor or relevant professional body about.

### ***Field work***

The field work involved regularly meeting with Kyle and Bruce in person over the course of the inquiry (July of 2021 until August of 2022). During this period, Kyle and I met on 18 occasions while Bruce and I met 11 times. Our interactions together were mostly conversations and unstructured dialogue, documented via tape recorder and field notes, which allowed for the development of relationships and an unrestricted representation of their experiences. These conversations primarily composed the field texts and created an equal space for Bruce's and Kyle's stories to be heard (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Although my initial list



of questions was required by my institution's ethics board, narrative inquiry is not guided by predetermined questions to guide a conversation, nor do narrative inquiries intent to be therapeutic, or resolve issues and solve problems (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I was invited to accompany Bruce and Kyle to appointments and activities they engaged in around the Edmonton area, such as going to the pharmacy, visiting their cellphone provider, or meeting up at the ASO, which further opened the space for their stories and voices to be heard.

**Engaging Participants.** The focus of the project was the engagement and relational knowing of PLWH with a history of incarceration and living in transition. I acknowledge there are a multitude of ways to engage with PLWH over a long period of time.<sup>17</sup> The reality in this longitudinal study was the likelihood that Bruce and Kyle may be highly mobile and difficult to

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<sup>17</sup> PLWH can be difficult to engage in longitudinal designs (Deren et al., 2005; Kidder et al., 2007; Lankenau et al., 2010). There are two types of retention strategies discussed in the literature: baseline tracking procedures and follow-up procedures (Lankenau et al., 2010; Wright et al., 1995). Baseline tracking procedures are implemented during the first interview and occur between the participant and researcher, which may include: collecting detailed locator information about the participant, including their address (if possible), phone number, email address, and social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram) (Cottler et al., 1996; Scott, 2004; Wright et al., 1995; Ziek et al., 1996); locator information on participant's families and friends or social networks (if willing) (Cottler et al., 1996; Wright et al., 1995); educating and motivating participants about the importance of the study and what you hope to accomplish (Scott, 2004; Wright et al., 1995); and creating a project identity with a title that participants may remember (Des Jarlais et al., 2005; Wright et al., 1995). Follow-up procedures may involve methods and tools to connect with participants after the initial meet-up (Lankenau et al., 2010), which may involve searching electronic databases for information on participants, including jails and prisons (Cottler et al., 1996); sending email reminders with follow-up information (Cottler et al., 1996; Scott, 2004; Wright et al., 1995; Ziek et al., 1996); sending messages with check-in and follow-up information, with no identifying factors, via the participants' preferred social media platforms from the researcher's specific project phone number and/or social media account; holding frequent project stakeholder meetings and engaging in creative team work regarding retention and tracking (Cottler et al., 1996; Leonard et al., 2003); intensively tracking participants using locator information, participants' social networks, agency contacts, and/or visiting field hangouts identified by participants (Cottler et al., 1996; Kidder et al., 2007; Leonard et al., 2003; Pollio et al., 2000; Wright et al., 1995; Ziek et al., 1996); and increasing incentive payments to build interest and motivation for follow-up interviews (Cottler et al., 1996; Des Jarlais et al., 2005).

engage and remain in contact with. Because of this preconception, I concentrated my efforts on initially building relationships and getting to know Kyle and Bruce at the outset of our first contact. This focused on understanding the places they spend time, what their life schedule is like, and what agencies (and specific individuals within these agencies) they trust. After our first conversation together, I would attempt to meet weekly with Kyle or Bruce to further build our relationship and engage with them in the inquiry. Although there were times I was ‘slightly’ distressed about an unanswered text message, disconnected phone line, or a failure to meet up in person, neither Kyle nor Bruce lost long-term contact with me throughout the inquiry.

Another focus of the project was engaging with Kyle and Bruce if they became re-incarcerated. While both participants never became reincarcerated, there was a plan if they were: I would have gained contact with them and organized a visit, if they wished, to continue our relationship. During these possible visits, our discussions would not have been tape-recorded, and I would not have collected field notes about the correctional institution. Kyle proudly shared that the time we spent together was the longest period he had not revisited a facility in recent memory. I could hear the pride – and slight surprise - in his voice when he stated this. Ultimately, I negotiated with Bruce and Kyle their engagement and benefit of the research.

**Negotiation of Relationships.** Relationships are central to narrative inquiry. This includes relationships within us as narrative inquirers, and between ourselves and the participants, other people, and the storied landscapes we find ourselves on (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Within the inquiry, I lived alongside Kyle and Bruce in the field as we co-composed field and interim research texts. Within these shared experiences, I constantly negotiated my relationship with them - what it looked like and

how it was beneficial to them (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In this sense, negotiation refers to a continuous dialogue with participants, involving ongoing relational work that engages them in conversations, actions, and commitments to our relationship (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Part of negotiating my relationships with Kyle and Bruce included exploring purpose, transitions, intentions, and helpfulness with them (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). At the beginning of my relationship with Bruce, we negotiated the helpfulness of my role as a researcher. Bruce was living at a friend's farm Northwest of Edmonton and needed a ride back. Unfortunately, I was bounded by institutional constraints (i.e., lack of insurance) and was unable to drive him back. That was challenging for me, as the simple act of 'driving someone' became complicated, raising questions of helpfulness, intentions, and purpose of the work. In addition, I spent prolonged time in the field with both participants and it was important for me to acknowledge how my professional responsibilities, personal practical knowledge, and social positioning became intertwined in the negotiation of our relationships (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Kyle would share that he enjoyed his conversations with me, because I was different from the people that he would normally interact with.<sup>18</sup> My social positioning as a young urban researcher was a piece of how Kyle negotiated our relationship, and although it was different than his positioning, this opened up opportunities to negotiate a relationship between us. Even though the formal inquiry has now ended, my relationships with Bruce and Kyle have not, rather they have entered a stance of being

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<sup>18</sup> Kyle also thought I looked like Jimmy Neutron, Boy Genius: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy\\_Neutron:\\_Boy\\_Genius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy_Neutron:_Boy_Genius).

finished ‘for now.’ In this sense of ‘for now,’ I still attend to their stories and my relational responsibility.

### ***Collecting Field Texts***

Field texts served as primary data sources that were composed and co-composed by Kyle, Bruce, and me (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They included autobiographical writing, journal writing, field notes, conversations, and personal-family-social artifacts (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each of these field texts are important to the ways people tell and live experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Personal-family-social artifacts included photographs, memory box items, annals, and chronologies (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Throughout the study I collected field texts during each interaction with Kyle and Bruce, while also paying attention to the storied landscapes they lived on. From Bruce’s friend’s farm in a small-town Northwest of Edmonton to the High Level Bridge spanning the North Saskatchewan River in Edmonton, these storied landscapes were a part of their stories and our time together. In narrative inquiry, the term data is often not used, instead text refers to the experiential and intersubjective features of field texts (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I came alongside the participants in the midst of their lives, the texts I collected and experiences I shared with them is subjective, open to interpretation in the context of our relationship, and reflective of the three-dimensional space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In addition, when entering Kyle’s and Bruce’s lives, I joined the social milieu of which they are apart (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Standing alongside Bruce as we waited for the bus together or walking with Kyle for him to have a smoke, it is important for their individual

narratives to be embedded and contextualized within the social, cultural, familial, political, and institutional narratives they are informed by (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). During the inquiry, I would walk down Whyte or Jasper Avenue, seeing individuals with street identities in the midst of composing their lives; my experiences in these contexts would inform how I continued to make sense of Bruce's and Kyle's stories. The collected field texts also reflect the aspects of my researcher-participant experience that our relationship allowed (Caine, 2002), which speaks to the relationality of narrative inquiry. Sometimes participants may write, collect, or develop their own field texts, which include journals, poetry, or fictional stories (Clandinin & Caine, 2013); however, beyond annals, support webs, and chronologies, both Kyle and Bruce would often say they preferred to engage in conversations. Our relationships and the inquiry progressed over the months, and we began to move from field to interim and final research texts.

### ***Moving from Field to Interim to Final Research Texts***

Working from field texts to interim texts and final research texts is an iterative process (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Throughout these steps, I continued to live in relational ways and negotiated interim research texts (i.e., narrative accounts) with Kyle and Bruce (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

**Field to Interim Texts (Narrative Accounts).** Interim texts serve as the beginning place of attending to research puzzles (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The interim texts, or narrative accounts, make sense of the many and diverse field texts, calling forth additional experiences to be told, lived, retold, and relived (Clandinin,

2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The process of creating interim texts involved reading/looking at field texts, writing interim texts, re-reading/looking again at field texts, and re-writing interim texts, all the while paying attention to the three-dimensional space – temporality (past, present, future), sociality (internal and external), and place (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). I situated the field texts within the three-dimensional space, which moved deeper into the experience, highlighted the complexities, and bridged the field texts into interim research texts. During this process I also acknowledge that the interim texts were only partial, remaining open to further writing (Clandinin, 2013).

Narrative accounts, one form of interim research texts, were written for and negotiated with Kyle and Bruce (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Chapters 4 and 5 reflect their experiences, as well as my relationship with them. Over the inquiry I would meet with Kyle or Bruce and share small pieces of their narrative accounts. Sitting down together and reading the accounts, we would co-compose further, discussing further questions I had and their thoughts around the highlighted complexities. I remember feeling surprised, my eyebrows raising, when both participants first read pieces of their accounts. They spoke about how the account read as a story or book, rather than a research article. Once the interim research texts were appropriately attended to, I moved to compose the final research texts.

**Interim to Final Research Texts.** Formulating final research texts is an iterative process. These texts may take the place of traditional academic publications and presentations, such as doctoral manuscripts, and the form of textual, visual, and audible works (Clandinin, 2013). Composing final research texts is also often marked by a lack of smooth lines and generalizations, rather the complexity of an individual's life is highlighted (Clandinin, 2013;

Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In Chapter 6, this complexity is discussed; resonant threads are identified during this chapter, whereby I metaphorically laid down the narrative accounts of each participant and followed particular plotlines and echoes that extended over their accounts (Clandinin, 2013). These resonant threads are not classified as generalizations, because they are not applicable to all PLWH living in transition, instead they may be understood as shared models of possibility (Bateson, 1990).<sup>19</sup> As my doctoral project continues to evolve, and even though the formal inquiry has ended, further final research texts in the forms of journal articles, conference presentations, and workshops will be explored and developed.

**Being Attentive to Voice, Signature, and Audience.** When formulating interim and final research texts, I was, and must be, attentive to voice, signature, and audience (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Within a narrative inquiry, there is a multiplicity of voices and signatures (Kyle, Bruce, myself, and other diverse theorists and researchers), and it is my responsibility to appropriately attend to this multiplicity within the diverse textual structures and accounts (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I must be mindful: for whom does the text speak for? how can I ensure that my voice does not silence Kyle's or Bruce's in the diverse texts? how do I balance Kyle's, Bruce's, and my voice with the theorists' ideas that are used to unpack and highlight complexities in the experiences of transitions? how does my particular way of being present in the text - my

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<sup>19</sup> Bateson (1990) speaks to the individuality behind life making, yet she addresses that individual improvisations may be understood as shared models of possibility for others. Shared models of possibility in this sense does not mean generalizable or universal; rather, when my life or self-identity no longer makes sense, I can draw inspiration and insight from how others have improvised to work towards a sense of coherence.

signature - interact with and flow alongside the words of Kyle, Bruce, and those that have contributed towards a narrative understanding of transitions? I am also reminded that final research texts must also be written with public audiences in mind (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Attention to the public audience is paramount during the co-construction of research texts that reflect the stories lived and told by Bruce, Kyle, and myself within the context of larger social, cultural, familial, and institutional narratives (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). When attending to public audience and scholarly community, particularly in Chapter 7, I attend to questions that speak to larger practical and social significance: ‘so what?’ and ‘who cares?’ (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Specifically, I ask, how does this inquiry provide insights into the sensemaking of Kyle and Bruce as they lived in transition? And how do these insights affect the practices of those who work in the fields of transitions? Within these questions, I pay attention to ways I and the participants have grown in the retelling and reliving of experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Overall, this has been a challenging process, because I must attend to the personal, practical, and social justifications of my collaborative work while also engaging audiences to rethink and reimagine otherwise (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

### ***Relational Response Communities***

In narrative inquiry, response refers to the ways in which Kyle, Bruce, and me worked in relational ways, attending to the relational responsibilities I had with them (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). However, in narrative inquiry, I also engaged in response



communities, where I was supported by my social networks throughout the inquiry. I shared my experiences and stories of the inquiry within my communities, opening the possibility to engage in conversations about my work. In addition, the response communities highlighted the necessary interplay between different texts in an inquiry and reminded me of narrative inquiry's iterative nature (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). In my response communities, I shared and discussed my research puzzle, methodological challenges, interim research texts, and final research texts (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Engaging in response communities helped to position my experiences besides the inquiry, highlighting how my story intersects and shapes the participant and research puzzle (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My response communities included people whom I value and trust. As of now, these entailed my diverse supervisory committee, where each person has experiences working alongside marginalized populations that compose diverse incarcerated and previously incarcerated peoples. They were also composed of other graduate students who undertook – and are undertaking - a narrative inquiry study. When organizing my response communities, I set up regular meeting times (monthly or every two months); this created a sense of accountability, confidence, and community support while maintaining trust, respect, and a sense of care as I engaged in the inquiry (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### **Introducing the Narrative Accounts**

In the next two chapters I share Kyle's and Bruce's narrative accounts. These two texts compose the interim field texts of the project and were guided by my relationship to the participants and ongoing responsibilities to their stories. The accounts were co-composed with

the participants and begin to highlight the complexity of their experiences as they engaged in their ongoing life and identity making. Because both accounts were negotiated, the men requested the following stories be shared.

The time I spent with Kyle and Bruce followed the changing seasons, but their lives and stories shifted and took new shapes over the course of the inquiry. Throughout our time together I was reminded by Heilbrun's (1999) ideas on threshold experiences and liminality; Bruce's and Kyle's experiences were marked by a sense of unsteadiness and lack of clarity. The men's lives did not unfold in linear ways, and the following accounts mirror their experiences. Each conversation with Kyle or Bruce was marked by diverse people, ideas, and topics of interest, and I would often walk away to sit in my vehicle after we said our 'goodbyes', taking a moment to organize my thoughts. There were periods of time when the participants felt lost and a sense of incoherence in their lives, and these tensions in their identities and a sense of confusion in their stories were felt by me during the inquiry but may also be sensed in the following accounts. Both Kyle and Bruce made sense of their experiences by weaving together imagination and improvisation to rethink their lives and identities as otherwise. I acknowledge that as the inquiry unfolded and I built relationships with Bruce and Kyle, I also felt lost at times trying to make sense of the stories I was a part of, as well as told.

## Chapter 4: Kyle's Narrative Account

### Introduction

Kyle and I first met at an empty food court on the southside of Edmonton.<sup>20</sup> It was a cloudless day and during one of the hottest summers on record in Alberta, nearing 33 degrees outside. As I sat at a table, I noticed that very few people were waiting in line to purchase hot and fried food. Kyle and I had talked previously on the phone, where I invited him into the study and he agreed to talk with me in person. I remember our first phone call - it was full of awkward silences and interruptions. Looking back, I think those awkward moments were mostly caused by me. I remember struggling to know what to say. It was the first time I was inviting someone to be part of a research study. When I hung up the phone that day, I recall thinking that it was a wonder that Kyle still wanted to meet up with me.

Yet, here I was sitting in the food court waiting for Kyle. I had arrived early so I could prepare what we would talk about and settle my nerves. I really was so nervous. I sat there shifting through my papers and writing my field notes, all the while organizing my thoughts. It was my first-time meeting with a participant, and I was both excited and unsure of how our conversation would go. Questions were forefront in my mind: even though Kyle shared that he has been a part of numerous research projects, what if he just walks away after hearing more about the study? What if this study or our conversations are of no interest to him? What if I say

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<sup>20</sup> Kyle and I first met July 29, 2021 and continued to meet up regularly until we finished his narrative account August 16, 2022. Over this period of a year, we met 18 times.

something foolish and he just rolls his eyes and disengages? Despite my uncertainty, I was excited to meet Kyle in person and get to know him and his experiences.

I recall writing in my field notes: *As I look down, the table's nostalgic green and beige patterns are interrupted by geometric shapes and triangles that feel out of place against my body. Irrelevant questions ran through my mind as I sat waiting at the hard and uncomfortable cafeteria table. [...] I started tapping my old sneakers on the ground as my thoughts continued to find random nooks and crevices to explore. [...] Can I handle what I have prepared and planned to do for the last four years? As I sat on that hard cafeteria chair before I met Kyle, my mind was full of internal dialogues and about as clear as the faded geometric patterns in front of me.*

I looked up from my papers and saw Kyle for the first time. He was tall with medium to olive colored skin, a compliment to his striking brown eyes. Two small gold hoop earrings marked his right ear, with a set of designer sunglasses resting on top of his hat. Everything about Kyle was crisp, clean, and well put together - an outfit picked with purpose and a refined taste of design. In the moment of first meeting Kyle, I was called to think about who I had imagined Kyle was. What preconceived notions did I carry?

Looking back towards our first meeting, I also recall other things. I smile as I think about Kyle's beverage choice - Dr. Pepper. A drink of refined taste and a number of flavors coming together to create something unique; arguably, people either fall in love with or turn away from Dr. Pepper as a beverage. Yet, it is most definitely unique. Thankfully, Dr. Pepper was a mainstay in my fridge as I grew up, so I took this as a good omen for how our relationship might

play out. I was searching for signs that I would be able to engage in a research relationship with Kyle. This idea of Dr. Pepper and my conversations with Kyle have made me reflect on ideas of uniqueness situated within a world of ‘sameness,’ where one may resist systems and stories meant to create copies and replicas of predefined molds and stories.

From our first conversation as we went over the required institutional documents, such as consent, to our most recent discussions, Kyle has drawn me in when he tells his stories. To me, he is the star - the Mariah Carey - in the stories he tells about his life and relationships. Some people refer to her as the ‘Songbird Supreme’ – my experience alongside Kyle was that perhaps he was the ‘Storyteller Supreme.’

Our conversations have been marked by his blending of humor and life experiences as he shares with me just a glimpse into his experiences. As he spoke, I cannot help but pay attention to the way he incorporates jokes, sassiness, and articulates a poetic use of swears. I remember he said, *My biggest joke was that I had more track marks than the CN railroad line* when discussing a previous thrill in his life.

I am drawn in as a listener as he has spoken about a lifetime of experiences that are nothing short of incredible; his experiences were so foreign to me. Many of our conversations involved me sippin’ on my Tim Horton’s tea or coffee, writing down field notes, and repeating, ‘yeah?’ or asking, “wait, what does that word mean?” As I listen to the recordings and look at the transcripts, I can see how much I was processing everything. After each conversation, I was excited to think again about how Kyle has lived and told his many stories throughout the different worlds he is part of. As I walked towards my vehicle after each conversation and took a

deep breath, I could not help but feel gratitude towards Kyle for letting me see parts of his incredible life and lived knowledge. I know that his insights and ways of thinking and making meaning will help me and others learn about what it means to think with and about transitions.

Throughout our conversations we have discussed many of Kyle's stories that involve diverse ideas, people, places, experiences, and emotions. While some of these stories have touched on or highlighted Kyle's previous experiences of incarceration or transitioning around correctional facilities in Alberta, they have extended beyond the walls of any correctional facility. His unfolding stories provide a unique starting point of a life that is so different from what I know. It is marked by a deviation from dominant narratives seeking to define how an individual should live their life or fit into a prearranged plan.

### **Don't Fuck with my Home or my Freedom**

From the outset of our conversations, Kyle spoke often about the strict rules and boundaries that he creates in his life towards certain people, ideas, and practices. These rules seem to protect Kyle and that which he cherishes most: his home and freedom. During the heat of August, as Kyle sipped on his Ice Capp he told me:

*They fucked with a lot, but if you fuck with my home, or my freedom, I will hurt you.*

*Those are my two biggest rules. Two things you don't fuck with, you know? And it's like, you can fuck with anything else, but don't fuck with my home or my freedom.*

While I have a general idea that 'to fuck with' can mean invading, threatening, taking away, touching, or putting at risk, I wonder what this looks and feels like for Kyle. When was the

last time someone ‘fucked with’ Kyle’s home or his freedom? Are there varying levels of ‘to fuck with’? Can one mildly ‘fuck with’ Kyle’s home or is any ‘fucking with’ considered significant? Personally, I grew up with the word ‘fuck’ utilized often and sometimes eloquently. For example, my father used it to describe certain tasks or objects that are not functioning as they should or taking particularly long to complete. Its use has also extended into my experiences working in corrections. Yet, this passage that Kyle shared poses further questions: when did these rules first become part of his life? Did he always find it troublesome and a threat when someone fucked with his home or freedom? What was the first time that someone or something fucked with his home? Was this in childhood or when he was older? Who or what first challenged and fucked with his freedom? Is this person or thing still in Kyle’s life today?

In my field note I write: *Driving back home one day I reflected on my shared time with Kyle. I often enjoyed the chance to take a break in the vehicle, as it allowed me to slowly digest the experiences that Kyle shared with me as I entered his worlds. However, in the moment of reflection, a huge grin came across my face as I remembered one of our specific conversations from today:*

*The month of July has been a **fucktastrophe**.*

Morgan: *That’s a good word.*

*...Sighs\* “I want a roommate, but I hate humans.*

I begin to slowly unpack the creativity and imagination behind Kyle’s choice of word - fucktastrophe - and its application to his dilemma of having to navigate the interstices of social

relationships; specifically, the will to share a meaningful place with another person and his previous experiences of interacting with other ‘humans.’ Kyle does want a person to live up to his expectations and become his roommate, yet knows that he can only room with humans who, from his previous experiences, are prone to letting him down, crossing his boundaries, and hurting him. In Kyle’s words, a true “*fucktastrophe*” in the making.

### ***Home***

As Kyle and I began our conversations, he would often speak with admiration and a sense of pride of his home on the southside. One day he shared that an uninvited police officer even commended him on his home: *He’s (the police officer) like, you have a beautiful fucking home, my home isn’t even that nice and I make good money!*

However, running parallel to Kyle’s feelings of admiration and pride, I also noted a small edge and sense of secrecy regarding his home. When Kyle spoke of his home, it felt like a secret hideaway - the same sense of mystery and intrigue that likely surrounds the places that celebrities would visit when they need to escape the watching eyes and listening ears of the outside world. And although I have not seen it in person, I can only imagine how well put together his home is. I would assume that the furniture, rugs, and decor all fit within the same guidelines and fashion sense that Kyle himself portrays. Surfaces are tidy and dust free. Dishes would not be left in the sink. When you walk in, you would also be greeted by an inviting fragrance, as Kyle spoke often about his love for mechanical and timed Airfresheners. As Christmas time approaches, Kyle even spoke about how he *loves Christmas time* and engages in the act of going to *Dollarama* and *grabbing a bunch of decorations* to make the space more



festive and warm. It makes me wonder where this sense of home and practices of cleanliness, tidiness, and organization came from in his life: were these approaches that Kyle has always had towards maintaining a home? Or were these fostered during his childhood, adolescence, or adulthood? When did Kyle first really feel a sense of home and belonging - a place that is his and no others?

*As time moves on, I note in my field notes: Snow has now begun to cover the ground outside as the short fall season turned into an abrupt winter landscape. Kyle and I are sitting at our usual coffee spot and having a conversation when he shows me the screen on his smartphone. The screen of the phone standing out against the wooden table, Kyle shows me an image of a couch and living room area on the small screen. He shares with me that this is a live-feed of a hidden camera that he keeps in his living room where company usually stays:*

*If I actually have to go to the bathroom when I have company, most of the time I turn it on before I get up off the couch. It's got a two way radio on it. You know, so if someone gets up - 'nu uh uh.' (moves his finger back and forth). I left Aaron there one night. [...] see him go over to my side of the couch. Push my little button and 'eh HEM!' (laughter). Addicts, you can't trust them.*

*As Kyle looks out the window and sips on his drink, my mind goes to my friends, families, and my own living room with their lack of surveillance equipment.*

As soon as people enter Kyle's home, he begins to set up boundaries with those entering his domain. These boundaries begin to manifest via dialogue and requested actions. *When I bring*

*people over to my place the first time, I always tell them - especially drug addicts - I have a home, not a trap house.* Kyle shared that when visitors come over to visit, they must first wash their hands before they touch anything - one story that stemmed from this was a friend who came over who is *constantly fixing mountain bikes, so their hands are just black from the grease.* This individual then proceeded to touch some of Kyle's shining white walls and door frames. Needless to say, a Mr. Clean Magic Eraser (a sponge harder than glass) was promptly brought out to do its work. I can only picture how that conversation must have occurred between Kyle and that individual: Kyle would have told them to stop touching everything, head to the washroom and promptly wash their hands, and then they can come back to the entrance. Kyle would have then handed them the Magic Eraser and told them to clean it themselves, all the while watching to make sure the job was done correctly and up to his standards. These boundaries also extend to the lives, identities, and identifying characteristics of his visitors.

*Me and Travis have been best friends for 20 years. [...] I invited him over to this place when I first moved in in May, and I told him, 'Hey, leave your shopping cart somewhere else and not to bring it near my building'. You know? Like, I have my rules and he knows them. Don't bring a million bags with you. Your bags can stay at my front door, and not come near my living room, bedroom, or bathroom.*

While Kyle spoke of invited guests, many conversations were held about those who showed up without invitation or warning to his doorstep and into his home. I can just imagine the annoyance on Kyle's face if someone arrives unexpectedly, citing a previous encounter with him that somehow justifies their excursion into his home. These intrusions upon his personal domain are unacceptable and ultimately threaten him and his cardinal rules. I remember a story that Kyle

shared about an individual who he let stay at his home for a brief period of time after getting kicked out of a treatment centre for a *fight with a staff member*. This man proceeded to get too high on pint<sup>21</sup>, became paranoid, and then called the police in fear of a ‘slamming sound’ outside Kyle’s front door.

*It was literally a week he lasted. [...] When I came home, he had the cops sitting there, it was psychosis. [...] He thought someone was trying to kick in my door. He was psychosis, really super paranoid. He is telling me in-text to call the cops. I’m like, ‘dude, I don’t fucking call the cops. If I come home and there’s cops in my place, you should just get them to escort you off the property.*

These intrusions upon his home by others are also often accompanied by their careless drug use and street lives. In the above experience, one of the police officers spoke to Kyle:

*He (the police officer) is like, ‘your friend is not a very good friend if he told you that he got kicked out for getting in a fight with one of the staff members (at a treatment centre). He didn’t get into a fight with a staff member, he got kicked out because he came back with a dirty piss test.’ [...] He goes, ‘so I walk into your living room, and sitting on your coffee table - right in plain view - is a bat, a baggie of dope, and a torch. [...] Just imagine, all sitting out on perfect display for me to see, almost like it was a setup.*

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<sup>21</sup> Pint is a common term used interchangeably throughout the inquiry by Kyle to refer to methamphetamine.

As Kyle shared how he had to navigate this scenario, I could only wonder what went on for him. While I can relate to unexpected visitors or the slight annoyance that occurs when someone rings your doorbell on a Tuesday evening, experiences of careless drug use, street lives, and the police intruding into my home are situations that I hold no insight into. It makes me think, how do you protect your home from so many threats? If someone can turn up at any moment, high or asking for you to pay for their cab ride, how do you learn to navigate these scenarios? How can service providers or systems support Kyle's boundaries and how he maintains his home? During these conversations about Kyle's home and the people he invites (or does not invite), it made me reflect on my home and how it is often something I and others take for granted. I cannot imagine what it would be like to have your home threatened by someone or ultimately lose your home to the thoughtless actions of others. In Kyle's many stories, his home has been linked to his freedom: *He put my freedom at jeopardy. Yeah, you mess with my home and my freedom at the same time...*

### ***Freedom***

*While Kyle and I sit at our usual and blindingly sunny spot on the bench seats at Tim Hortons, we are often interrupted by the sudden influx of school kids in the early afternoon. One by one, throngs of junior high students come through the door accompanied by their associated laughter, yelling, and orders of sugary goods. Their jumbled voices and yelling jump into Kyle's and my conversations, often creating a realization of where we currently are and a backdrop to the ongoing stories that Kyle shares about his experiences and ideas of freedom. (Field Note)*

*I hate kids (laughter).*

Morgan: *Why?*

*I dunno, cause I miss being one (laughter). I miss being young.*

The ability to do what we wish, when we want, and where we want is something that many people take for granted and cannot comprehend as being at risk or taken away. Yet, intertwined in Kyle's many stories were these ideas around freedom, autonomy, and ultimately, threats to these fundamental pieces of our identity and being.

*Fucking cops showed up at my place the other day. They didn't have a charge for me or anything. [...] They were like, 'did you buy anything off of someone last night?' I was like, 'yeah, why?' They're like, 'tablet?' Yaaa... 'it's stolen...' I knew it was too good to be fucking true. They're like, 'hand it back, Kyle.' Yup! 'We figured you'd give it back to us. You've been great with your probation orders. [...] we know who you are, and we are not here to fuck with you or fuck your home up - nothing. We just want the tablet back.'*  
*[...] The main cop is really, really, good. She isn't hard and she is really nice and polite.*

Kyle's stories made me reflect on what it would feel like to actually or potentially have so many of your relationships, resources, hobbies, and activities and people that sustain you and provide you meaning in life taken away or be threatened. I wonder: how would I describe what freedom means to me? what would I do to prevent my freedom from being taken away? what lengths would I go to in order to protect the relationships I hold with others? how would I protect myself from any perceived threat to the activities and connections that I find meaning and fulfillment in? In asking these questions, I feel a sense of unease, as these are ideas and feelings

that I am unfamiliar with, let alone capable of navigating. I cannot imagine losing my freedom, nor the accompanying lack of ability to keep in touch with others.

*Getting out of jail to nothing is the worse fucking feeling a human being can have.*

*Knowing you have family but they won't even come see you. They don't call you, nothing.*

*Try to get a hold of you to help you out - not a fucking thing.*

As Kyle and I talked over the months, it became evident to me that his experiences brought forth understandings and insights of freedom that most people might never understand.

I recall one of my field notes: *It was in October when I saw Kyle in a state of discomfort for the first time during our relationship together. I remember being taken off guard, as he was someone who was always joyful, joking, and talkative in our previous conversations. As we sat at our long bench in the Tim Hortons, Kyle was sitting there and talking, staring out the window, and appeared to be lost in his words and another world that I am not a part of. He shared with me that he was at a low point in his life and facing uncertainties: he had little dope, little cash, and a gut feeling that he should not risk his home nor his freedom to acquire either of these. As he stared out the window and spoke, I could see the disruptions to his previous certainties:*

*I am feeling like I am going too far [...] like doing crime and stuff like that... it's just like, am I pushing it? Am I gonna end up back in jail?*

*Kyle shared with me that while he had always just increased his rate of acquiring cash or dope through chasing thrills in these previous circumstances, something was different this time. I remember his voice slowing down and adding extra emphasis when he said,*

*I don't want to lose my home. I don't want to lose my home. [...] getting out of jail to nothing is the **worse fucking feeling** a human being can have.*

*Kyle only finished half of his sandwich that day and took the rest with him.*

Kyle's stories suggest a lifetime of his freedom being threatened, and I remember thinking to myself: when was the first time he felt a threat to his freedom? and when was the first time his freedom was actually taken away in one form or another? During one of our initial conversations, Kyle associated a loss of his freedom with an impending sense of boredom that is associated with living in a correctional facility. I also wonder about other meanings the idea of freedom holds for Kyle, and how this has maybe changed, or not changed, over the years. A recurring idea throughout Kyle's stories that touched on his freedom were diverse relationships with people that were key to either maintaining/losing his freedom or having it at risk of being taken away. Two such relationships were forefronted during our time together: those with his 'Street Life' friends and probation officer.

Stories of Kyle's 'Street Life' friends visiting his home unannounced and bloodied up, law enforcement officers knocking at late hours, and uninvited text message inquiries about a place to stay were commonplace throughout his life. For Kyle, navigating these complex social situations and relationships is a regular occurrence.

*If somebody comes up to my place, no matter if you're a good friend or not, you come up alone. You never bring anybody into my home. I don't care whether I know them or not. You don't bring them into my home. That is my biggest rule. My friend, Trevor, told him*

*to go fuck himself, because he rolled up to my place at four in the morning. [...] he was in a cab and couldn't pay for it.*

Kyle also shared a story about a friend that once showed up at his home who was recently jumped by his business partner (an individual known to Kyle and similarly disliked):

*(Mid-conversation pause as he looks at his phone) Who is J? ... Wait, hold on a sec!  
(continues to look at his phone) Holy... (long pause). I am so happy! Oh my god! He got set up by his partner. They sell drugs (Kyle shows me his phone). Greedy, greedy little fag. So, I know this guy, too. He got set up, got stomped out, showed up at my place covered in blood. [...] I paid for the cab, took care of him, let him go to bed. Before he left, he was in tears [...] like, 'I got to do something, like what do I do?' I was like, 'well you can't get revenge on Ricky because he's connected.*

Kyle gave this friend a place to get cleaned up, wash off the blood, regain a bit of his pride, and heed some words of wisdom. In these moments, I can picture a faceless man in a clean washroom looking at the mirror ahead. Cupping water to their face, they watch some of the blood from their busted-up nose mix with the cold water in a pink hue as it dissipates across the white, porcelain sink. I wonder what Kyle was feeling and thinking at that moment. How would I feel if someone I knew showed up at my home like this? How would I begin thinking about and navigating my actions so that I was not pulled into this situation? What if this friend brought more than a bit of blood into my home and in turn threatened my freedom? Relationships with friends who have street identities appear to cause stress for Kyle. Other relationships with



justice-associated identities, such as probation officers, also threatens his freedom. However, for Kyle, navigating these social contexts and relationships is what he thrives at.

In my field notes I write: *As I am on my way to visit Kyle, I look down at my phone and I see a message from him. He says our meeting will have to be a bit shorter, as something else came up that he has to attend to. He also asks if we can meet up in the mall, because he has to head to the bank to get a form filled out for welfare. [...]*

*I see Kyle standing near the bank, who gives his subtle head nod (he does not wave). After talking for a bit, he proceeds to go into the bank and meet with the teller. Standing outside and waiting for him, I wonder if I should have asked to go inside with him, but I did not want to overstep my new relationship. I always enjoy the opportunity to come along with Kyle in his life outside of our Tim Horton's bench. After we sit down and chat for a bit, he tells me he has to leave so that he has enough time to get ready for his unexpected business. Kyle shares with me that he needs to get home, wash up, and make the call with his probation officer for 3:00 pm. I remember this moment. Kyle was so calm and collected about the entire situation. He had to make a video call to a person who if he does not check in with, could potentially breach him and result in an arrest. Kyle just smiled, took his iced capp in his hand, and headed off for another Tuesday afternoon.*

One particular justice-associated relationship that had a significant impact on his sense of freedom was the one Kyle had with his probation officer. I can remember the day that we talked after Kyle finished his last meeting with her in late-October. He was finally free from the restrictions of his probation, even though he has found it to be easy at times: *Probations easy.*

*Most people don't like it cause its built to fuck you over, you know? This was in part because he was paired up with an officer for the last three and a half years that he had not only respect for, but even loved her. Kyle shared that she was the type of person that he could even be friends with on the street.*

*I had respect for her and I never have respect for those kinds of people in that position, you know? In corrections of any sort, but her... I would definitely be friends with her on the street. She did try her hardest to work with me, and I appreciate that.*

The significance of this statement is not lost on me, as Kyle has a hard time respecting anyone in a traditional position of power and authority. When he spoke of her, I could sense the relationship that they had built with one another.

*In 2019, me and Mary were going to Gay Pride in Toronto, and I asked her (probation officer) if I needed permission due to curfew and stuff like that. She said, 'No, but I will put a note into the police officers that you're out of town. Not telling anyone where you're going, cause ya know, it's none of their business. Just go have fun, but don't let me see you drunk or high.'*

While Kyle has told me about some of their conversations, I wonder what this relationship looked like in person - I wondered if it had a bit of friendly banter and humor intertwined in it, along with a respect for each other's' identities and stories. Kyle spoke about how his probation officer did not abuse her position of power and approached their relationship from a place of flexibility and openness.

*The first thing she told me was that I will never, ever breach you. If you miss an appointment, just show up. You know? Come here, show up, and let me know you're alive. Phone me or whatever - just don't duck and dodge because I don't like phoning the cops and having to deal with that part.*

His probation officer acknowledged the complexity of Kyle's story and only requested that he stay connected with her. I wonder what the first moment was like when Kyle first realized that this woman was not 'out to get' him. What did it look like between both of them? What was the environment like, and how did she further reinforce that reincarcerating Kyle was not her intention? How could these aspects of her relationship with Kyle act as further stepping stones for all service providers to follow? Did she simply follow her occupation as a checklist - completing certain tasks, calling individuals, and then leaving when her time was done? How did her 'on paper occupation role' differ from the role that she took in the lives of people like Kyle? Thinking about how close Kyle was with his probation officer over three and a half years, and the fact that he could say he respected someone in a position of authority, spoke to the significance of the relationship that they created. Personally, it makes me uncomfortable to imagine having to go meet an individual on a regular schedule where they have the ability to reincarcerate me. So many questions would go through my head: what if my probation officer is having a miserable day and I am who they take it out on? what if they find some tiny detail, or some small slip-up, that they hit me with? how would I begin to feel as I see my phone ringing with my probation officer's number? I can just imagine how I would react in that scenario: the tightening of my stomach, my vision narrowing, my hands becoming shaky, and my heart starting to beat quicker and quicker in my chest. Even if I had not done anything wrong, I would

be in such a state of unease as I navigated that relationship and its encounters. As I write this, I realize that I am such a *Square*, as Kyle would say.<sup>22</sup> Yet for him, he would probably find this reaction of mine somewhat amusing and indicative of someone obviously living a square life. Kyle continues to live and tell his story of not only functioning but thriving at the intersections of these complex individual relationships with his home and freedom.

### **Thriving with HIV**

Interwoven throughout our conversations were the realities around living and thriving with HIV. It was, yet again, a hot summer day when Kyle and I first talked about his diagnosis. He said,

*I've only ever cried once about this illness, and that was when I first found out on my 18th birthday. [...] It was my 18th birthday present. [...] On the day of my birthday, Dr. YYYY called me into her office.*

I cannot imagine that kind of a gift as you turn legal age. When Kyle shared this with me, so many questions arose: what was that day like for him? Does he remember it vividly? How was he told that he was positive - did they take the time to talk to him about it, or did they just say the necessary 'words' and be on their way? Did Kyle have someone he could share his

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<sup>22</sup> The term 'square' is a term utilized within prison subcultures to refer to people who are more likely to follow society's rules. The relationship between prison subcultures and language was previously discussed in Chapter 2.

diagnosis with afterwards? As Kyle and I continued to talk about his diagnosis, my thoughts kept coming returning to an initial conversation, in my field notes I wrote:

*Sitting down with Kyle at first was stressful. My mind was full of relevant and irrelevant questions and concerns. This was in contrast to Kyle, who appeared calm while having yet another conversation, with yet another researcher. He was relaxed as he sat on the uncomfortable cafeteria bench, side bag slung over his shoulder, and sunglasses on the top of his hat. His voice was smooth and steady as we chatted during that first meeting. On the phone he previously told me that he had been in numerous research projects that revolved around living with HIV, such as HIV-related stigma or other clinical-based studies which took his viral load. He also shared with me that he was familiar with the research process and role of a participant. It did make me wonder if he had been enrolled in a study similar to mine, but this was a question I was excited to explore over the course of our time together. We had barely spoken when Kyle brought up living with HIV. I remember being a bit taken aback; I did not expect him to be so forthcoming about living with HIV. As I reflect on why I thought that, it made no sense. Living with HIV is a part of who he is - it is not who he is.*

*I've never, ever one day in my life, woken up and stressed about it, like 'oh my god I am gonna die.' What is that gonna solve? What is that gonna get me?*

In much of the literature surrounding living with HIV, HIV-related stigma is forefronted, yet here was an individual who brought up living with HIV on his own accord within the first few minutes of meeting him. He brought up that he was positive and told me about the first time that he was diagnosed. As we spoke about when Kyle was first diagnosed, he shared with me

that the climate around this illness was quite grim. Kyle thought that he, too, would pass away like many others that he knew.

*It's like everyone was dropping like flies, you know, or just overdosing and killing themselves when they found out.*

Even the treatment for this illness when Kyle was first diagnosed has stuck with him. While he has been on medication for many years now, it was not always that way.

*I've never been sick a day from it. [...] I refused to go on those cocktails. Everybody that went on cocktails back in the day I saw die.*

The thought of living through such a period of time, where a diagnosis was likely a painful death, is something that most cannot grasp - myself included. The closest way to truly understand what this would have been like is to listen to those that have a story to tell, such as Kyle; who, despite all those odds, still sits in front of me, laughing and telling stories all while eating his usual turkey bacon club sandwich (no tomato/lettuce) and sipping on his Tim Hortons iced capp.

*I'm the only one out of my group still alive when I first checked in with XXXX (ASO) that's still alive. [...] I didn't like going at first, because it was admitting. You know what I mean? It was like caving in.*

Kyle's resilience and perseverance is something that has continued to stand out in our conversations. The nonchalant and open way that Kyle tells his incredible experiences, from working as a high-class escort to being a *spiderman who crawled up from the 2nd storey to the*

*18th storey of the XXXX downtown* contribute to his sense of identity and resilience. I wonder if the resilience that is tied to his identity also stems from how he organizes and protects himself from living with this illness and its associated ideas.

*Like, to me, it was such a stigma to have it. You know what I mean? It's like, to me, no different than the word typical. So, I was like, can I hide this from people? Hence why I don't have sex with people... Simply because I don't want to get anyone sick, and I don't want to have to explain myself and my sickness to anybody, ever.*

Morgan: *Is that still current for you?*

*I've gone this long, what's the fucking point in changing it? I'm set in my ways and it's comfortable. I've never had any awkward questions from somebody.*

From our conversations and time together, I began to see Kyle as a master in navigating, reading, and leading social situations and dialogue. This skillset is arguably one of Kyle's most relied-upon tools to navigate his life and identities. I can just imagine Kyle thinking through the interaction between himself and someone whose unsolicited questions or comments are slowly making their way into a territory of Kyle's life that is not shared with anyone. I would imagine that Kyle would shut the person's advancement down with a short quip that disarms them and immediately turns the conversation on the individual. As Kyle and I continued our conversations, they also began to touch on living with this illness within and outside of a correctional setting. Within and between these places, Kyle's self-protective measures and situational awareness are often heightened:

*I don't ever tell nobody. Nobody. **Not a fucking soul**... When I am in the Remand... trying to explain my pills, because most guys are like, oh what are these? Are they sleepers? It's like, no. You know? They will try to muscle you for your non-existent sleeper.*

*Morgan: Have you had a lot of challenges or is it just more so navigating not having to share that information?*

*I see it. I've seen it done to other people. I've seen it on movies and shows, so I try to avoid it before it happens. I just won't let that situation even come near me, or my little area. It's like when I'm out and about. I'm always aware of my surroundings. You know? I've never been jacked. I've never been robbed.*

If I had to guess, it is likely second nature for Kyle to expertly navigate away from any probing questions that infringed upon his personal health. It makes me wonder: when did Kyle first see these stigmatizing attitudes and behaviors towards this illness? Have these attitudes changed over time? Has how this illness been portrayed in the media changed over time to him?

*So to be positive and in jail, it's like most guys are, you know what I mean? [...] 80% of the guys who are in the corrections right now are positive, or they contracted Hep C, or something from doing something. [...] When I go down to the Remand to go see Dr. XXXX. I would see other people would be going to see her. [...] It's like... comes in all shapes. This shit doesn't know any boundaries.*



When Kyle steers clear of scenarios that threaten him, I would bet that he does this in a way that does not draw any attention to himself nor the fact that he is avoiding a certain topic. I imagine Kyle playing cards (10s, Crib, Big 2, Omaha, 5-Stud) on a general population unit with his select group of biker friends - some canteen in the middle of the table along with coffee stained mugs/powerade bottles and pencils and paper. Here, one must *mind your P's and Q's at a poker table in jail*. A question comes up asking why Kyle went down to the health clinic the other day, causing Kyle to pause for the briefest of moments as he looks at his cards. I would guess that Kyle already has 2-3 separate responses ready in his head, and each response eliciting a question that shifts the conversation away from the boundaries he sets up. This imaginative scenario might be somewhat accurate, or it might represent my naivety to card games and social interactions that occur on any general population unit - perhaps people don't ask others while they play cards where they went the other day? Perhaps there is minimal conversation during these social events? Or is conversation just reserved to friendly banter? Regardless of the social setting, Kyle has shared that he is forever aware in all his social contexts.

Yet I wonder, when were the moments that Kyle can let his guard down regarding this illness? If these moments existed, do they still occur for him or are they only a part of his past? Living with this illness, Kyle also shared that after the first time he was told, he would never let it control his life nor allow himself to wallow in pity. Considering one of our initial conversations was about how Kyle would mock the most muscular and 'manly men' who break down and wallow in the transit van heading into a correctional facility, this makes sense to me. As we were sitting down in a deserted mall food court in the pandemic, he let me know that he

orients himself to the present; Kyle does not allow the past to drag him down nor negate his future.

*I told you, I am a mother-fucking-miracle. Cause I am not the type where I have never, once woken up and stressed about this thing.*

Kyle is someone who appears to me as constantly living for the moment - an appreciation of life that occurs for few. I have seen this appreciation in the richness of his told stories that have spanned across North America's largest cities. However, integrated throughout these stories are their ups and downs: *I have had ups and downs - a lot more ups than downs, actually*, but Kyle shared that one stressful point was when he was first diagnosed.

*I stressed over it simply because I was embarrassed. There was nothing more to that. I was just embarrassed. Like, to me, it was such a stigma to have it. You know what I mean? It's like, to me, it was no different than the word 'typical'.*

Kyle has often spoken about the word 'typical' and its relation to anything but his sense of self and life: *I've always told myself I'd never be a typical Indian or statistic*. He shared a story one time about his aunt who had a hard time deciding between going to Bingo with her last \$40 or buying food for her three kids that were at home with an empty fridge.

*I was always an outspoken kid. I could always talk, ya know? [...] It's like, it was always like, how can you even think of wasting your money or feeding your family? You're a fucking idiot. You're a typical, fucking Indian. That's what I always told myself, I will never be a typical Indian. I refuse to be. To me, that is just embarrassing.*

As he shared this story, I could hear his sense of frustration as he carefully articulated select words. Yet, it was that same conversation that we began to speak about different ceremonies that have appeared over Kyle's life, and he drew a distinction between those who are typical and not.

*Those natives, the ones in relation to ceremonies are traditional. They are educated. They are different and they have respect for all walks of life. They remember the old ways. [...] But, the ones that come from the reservation to the city, and expecting great things, but yet all they learn how to do is rob people, rob their own kind, kick someone down who is already down, I can't deal with that. I won't deal with that. You know what I mean? I would sooner just not associate myself. So when I see them, it's like 'get away from me.'*

Ideas of labeling and dominant narratives that shape our perceptions are foregrounded when reflecting on this experience. As I sat across the table from Kyle or walked with him to the bank or pharmacy, I was constantly in awe of the stories he has lived and continues to tell. Walking down the icy sidewalk with him to receive his Covid vaccination at a local pharmacy, farthest from my vocabulary to describe his ongoing story and identities is the word 'typical.' Rather, the words remarkable, superb, glamorous, unique, and exceptional come to me. The dominant narratives that shape lives in a typical way continue to bump up against those who *are educated* in Kyle's experiences. Another piece of Kyle's identity is his relationship with other people living with HIV.

Kyle disrupts certain ideas around how people living with this illness may be viewed as a singular group with a shared identity. In our conversations, he spoke often about his association with the ASO and the interactions he has had with the clientele that access its services.

*I have never, ever talked with anybody there... I try not to be a snobbish person, but I can't carry a conversation with them. And the smells... my OCD kicks in and I just can't. It comes across as ignorant, but I don't know how else to be.*

While Kyle has many kind things to say about the organization and its staff as a support for himself and others, he distances himself from the clientele that accesses the community organization's downtown location. Kyle lives with HIV, yet that is only one dimension of his life and identities. This is a shared piece with others accessing this organization, yet that shared piece of their lives - living positively - does not hold enough significance to create and maintain a further relationship with one another. We tend to group people living with this illness together within the literature and guiding policies. However, when we begin to think about this distance between Kyle and other clientele in the context of his street and square identities, it begins to make sense. He shared,

*I think it's another reason why I don't talk to people or clientele from there. If I see them in public, I don't want them saying hi to me. In public and if someone knows who they are and blah, blah, blah, you know? Oh he goes to the clinic too. It's like, no, no thank you.*

If Kyle is on Whyte selling and partaking in thrills or out and about with associates from his different identities, he wants to make sure he is distanced from other people living with this illness. This distance that Kyle puts between himself and others seems to protect his social

ranking and relationships across his multiple identities. It makes me wonder, if Kyle were to attend a group activity for those living with this illness, I wonder what that group of individuals would look and sound like? Would that group all have shared experiences of incarceration and/or sex work?

While many people living with this illness are described as vulnerable or experiencing marginalization in the literature, Kyle challenges those types of ‘typical’ stories that researchers and practitioners take up. Kyle’s story of living with this disease challenges anything to do with a ‘typical’ life and identity formulated by political, social, and familial narratives.

*Like I always said, that this disease will never kill me... I won't allow it to kill me because I won't be a statistic of it. You know, like I see so many slots where there wasn't a name, it was a fucking number, and I don't wanna be that. You know, there's memorials in San Francisco for the first 500,000 people that died of it. They are numbers... They were defaced of being human by the government. They weren't treated. They were thrown in rooms to die.*

If Kyle could go back and speak to the nameless and numbered people from the memorials in San Francisco, I wonder what he would say to them? What would they share with him? As I walked back to my vehicle and looked at the faces of adolescents and adults going in and out of a convenience store, sipping on slurpees, I could only imagine all of the faces of people - each with their unique story and identities - that Kyle had known over the years. As Kyle’s experiences of living with this illness stretch back almost 30 years, he has likely known some people who have become *statistics* of this illness. If he was to speak to them again, what

would they talk about? How can Kyle's exceptional identities and story of living with this illness serve as a way forward for others living with HIV? If Kyle was to share just a glimpse into his sense of resilience and perseverance, what would he say? I am trying to imagine a session where Kyle works with newly diagnosed individuals (of course only those that he would approve of being seen in public with) - what experiences would he share with them? What would he say about his story to show them how to keep their name and face? Throughout my conversations with Kyle, I am always reminded that throughout his life he tells himself, others, and the world that he has a name, a face, and a story that will not align with what society may expect of someone living with or without this illness; a story that is in no way 'typical.'

In my field notes I contemplate: *Listening to Kyle and my recorded conversations and sitting down to write his narrative account, I can feel myself drawn back into the experiences. As I sit down and begin to type out his phrases and words, my fingers type H-I-V. Yet, this time typing HIV feels a bit different. I say it out loud in my mind, and for some reason it is a bit more noticeable to me in the context of our conversations. As I relisten to our recordings and reflect on our conversations, suddenly the word HIV loses its outward appearance and position in our spoken words. Kyle very, very rarely - if ever - says HIV out loud, but instead utilizes phrases and words such as "this illness" or "this thing" which take the place of HIV. The discrepancy between what is written in the academic literature and what is spoken aloud is resounding. Yet, as I sit to begin composing Kyle's narrative account, I become attuned to my own sense of discomfort of utilizing HIV in his account; if he turns away from using this word, then perhaps his account should also follow. As I continue to write out Kyle's account and share it with him, my mind is also drawn to the ways that power may be distributed when writing and saying the word HIV.*

## Living with Thrills

Kyle and I sat on a mint green and brown couch in the quiet portion of a mall in Edmonton. As we enjoyed our regular Tim Horton's lupper (meal between lunch and supper), you could hear the faint echoes of distant shoppers. Between sips of his iced capp, he shared that he despises living a normal life. For Kyle, a normal or typical story was defined by social or familial expectations and lack of fun.

*Go through normalcy? Ya, I hate it. I've always hated normalcy all my life. It's boring.*

*No fun in it.*

While Kyle has described parts of a normal life as working a 9-5 job, living in a neat little house, and doing what you're told when you're told, I wonder what else he means by a normal existence. Does this extend to ideas around relationships, hobbies, or interests? Or, perhaps, some of these ideas of normal and exceptional can overlap, but it is in the pursuit of them that excitement can occur? As someone who has a square identity, it is with some of these questions that I continued our conversations.

Part of this resistance to a predefined identity and story has surfaced in our conversations in connection to the complicated relationships Kyle has had with the thrills in his life. By thrills, I mean the activities, feelings, and ideas that disrupt traditional ideas of 'normalness' or 'boringness.' While many of these thrills are traditionally associated with street identities, many do have overlap in the lives of squares. I remember when Kyle spoke of his three main thrills in life:

*Excitement is getting away with it. That's my rush, you know? My biggest addiction is gambling. That's first and foremost before the drugs, and then the drugs, and then the rush of getting away with it. You know what I mean? Knowing that there's 40 cops walking a beat right now looking for me. Not knowing it's me, but looking for me, you know? And I could walk right past them with my nose in the air and they wouldn't even recognize me. It's a rush.*

### **Gambling**

During one of our earlier conversations, Kyle shared that when he is at the casino, he treats it as a place of business. In this sense of business, he referred to the casino and the thrill of gambling as his main source of income. At one point he even paid off a year's worth of rent with a single night of winnings. Throughout my life, many people I know have enjoyed gambling in different forms, myself included. While my luck is less than poor at best, many have described the rush they receive when winning a big payout; they made the right call during poker or selected the right Fantasy Football lineup. However, for Kyle the thrill of gambling is this rush but something much more.

The casino as a place, or other places with Video Lottery Terminals are nestled within a complicated relationship that Kyle has with the thrill of gambling. Due to this, Kyle often dislikes bringing friends, family, or others to his place of professional practice:

*I don't talk to no-one when I am there. [...] leave me alone, go do your own thing, fuck off.*



This sense of solitude and thrill is even marked by a dislike of playing group activities at the casino, such as blackjack, poker, or craps.

*I don't like the tables, because I hate humans. I hate interacting, especially when you get some little punk-ass kid, who thinks he is some WPT Poker Tour Champion.*

Kyle's preferred thrills are the slot machines. From what I know about him, this is congruent within the context of his life, as his stories often emphasize a preference for solitary activities where he is the one in control and does not need to depend on the actions of others. These preferences came up again and again in the experiences he has shared about his time in correctional facilities or during childhood. I can picture Kyle as a young boy playing goldfish or some other introductory card game with other kids, yet even at that age the loudmouthed child next to him is irritating. I can also remember the many conversations we have had about the different slot machines, with a progressive slot machine called Alberta Gold being repeated. Whenever we discussed Video Lottery Terminals and gambling, Kyle shared many of the nuanced actions someone must take to remain successful, such as keeping with a machine until it pays out.

Looking back, I reflect on a field note: *Walking back to my vehicle after one of our more detailed conversations on playing the slots, my mind began to wonder what this may look like. I can just imagine him entering the casino and finding his space for the late evening and into the night. He finishes his cigarette before he goes inside, and as he walks through the doors he already begins to see a few of the staff that he is familiar with and on a first-name basis. He gives his traditional head nod and begins his initial walk through. Beginning by first grabbing a*

*pop or something to sip on, Kyle begins to walk up and down the different slot isles. He looks for his favorite machines and then begins following his gut instinct about which one he is drawn to. Designer hat and sunglasses on his head, name brand bag at his side, and thinking with the clarity resulting from a bit of a nicotine buzz, he finds a machine that he has a good feeling about. The sound of the buttons being pushed, reels spinning, and flashing lights fill the casino and space around him.*

Kyle's confidence and ability to take risks is impressive. His experiences of working the strolls as a sex worker, selling thrills, and getting into situations of excitement (that may also require the use of bear spray) showcase this across his lifespan. It makes me think, has Kyle ever found a partner in gambling that he connects with? Another 'lone-wolfish' type of person whose attributes correlate with him? What would this person look and act like? Could they come from a square identity?

Kyle continues to thrive where risk and thrills intersect with the stories that he lives and tells. While most individuals would not be comfortable in this state of potential dis/ease, it would appear that Kyle lives for it.

*I never go there and put my whole heart into it. [...] I could lose five-ten thousand dollars and walk out with a smile on my face. It's gambling. Gambling is gambling - you take a chance. Why should I get mad at an inanimate object? When it is my stupidity feeding it money.*

Kyle's self-awareness at his thrills is astounding and integrated throughout our conversations. He recognizes the relationship and potential results that may occur when he enters

a casino. This view of life and relationships to the thrills he enjoys are grounded in an ongoing ability to process life in the present. However, Kyle's relationship with gambling and the casino can become a bit complicated, resulting in an ongoing and changing relationship. While on one hand, Kyle does have a tendency to *spend it as fast as I win it*, there are times when this is challenged.

*This is the first time I have not woken up and wanted to go straight back to the casino...*

*Walking out last night too, when I walked out with all my money, I was like... this is odd?*

Morgan: *Did it feel good to walk out with that money?*

*Oh god, yea it did.*

For Kyle, gambling and visiting the casino is his primary thrill of choice. In this gathering place of diverse people and identities, Kyle thrives at the intersection of risk, reward, and cash. Pursuing these thrills and functioning at the intersection of risk might deviate from some of the square expectations of society, yet for Kyle this is just another night out. Interestingly, this pursuit of a thrill through gambling is not something that is confined to only those with a street identity but transcends these categories of street and square lives.

To me, something that both identities share between them is the idea of taking risk for a high reward. Some people's risk tolerance is higher than others, and thus their potential payout (in whatever value they are looking for) is even higher. It makes me wonder, when was the first time that Kyle felt a real 'payout' for taking a risk? When did this connection between risk and reward first begin and in what form? How do these ideas of taking risks for a higher reward

perhaps influence Kyle's perceptions of accessing, acquiring, and organizing resources, such as money, food, shelter, or items of comfort while entering correctional facilities and then upon leaving them? How can formal support services and integrated support workers learn from this relationship that Kyle and others - both with street and square identities - share with the thrills in their lives? Kyle enjoys the thrill and payouts of taking chances in life - and when lives can be cut short so quickly, why not?

### ***Pint***

Throughout our conversations, Kyle shared many experiences regarding his second most influential thrill in his life: drugs. As we sat for coffees and meals together, Kyle shared with me experiences across his lifespan of using different thrills, for different purposes, and usually for one of the most prominent reasons of all - they are the antagonist to anything boring.

Kyle's experiences of drug use have spanned many years, as he spoke to numerous styles of parties and recreational activities throughout his youth and into adulthood. It does make me wonder, when was the first time Kyle found a connection with substances in his life? When did these first become a part of his identity and the antagonist to a boring lifestyle? Was this in his youth? Were there any other individuals that were intertwined in this initial relationship? As Kyle and I continued to speak, he shared that there are numerous differences and hierarchies amongst those who access, use, and distribute thrills in the form of substances.

While there are many levels of people who distribute and purchase substances, Kyle shared that he is someone who has certain standards and rules for accessing and purchasing any sort of thrills.

*If my dealer's don't drive cars and have their own steady home, I won't buy off you. I have never bought on street levels; you know, like someone who walks Whyte Avenue.*

These insights by Kyle suggest that he creates rules that protect not only his health, freedom, and home, but also his different identities. As many of our conversations either directly or tangentially touch upon this other world - substances and informal street economies - I always find myself in cautious awe. In my field note I write:

*One summer afternoon Kyle and I stood outside our regular coffee shop. He had just lit up his cigarette and the familiar smell of the smoke mixed with the summer air wafted around us. As we were chatting, Kyle brought up an App on his phone. Greeted by the screen of Kyle's phone, he opened the app and at the same time a new world jumped out. The app creates connections between individuals where they can anonymously communicate with one another in a certain geographical radius. Suddenly, acronyms and phrases that I have never seen before appear on the screen along with different images. Words such as Superman or Windows and different M, F, and B letters in various arrangements spelling out diverse sexual preferences showed up on his screen. Looking at Kyle's phone, people appeared to use it for many of life's activities: pleasure, love, fun, and selling services. I remember being amazed - I could barely even keep up with Kyle's explanation of each word and how different letters mean different phrases. As a square individual, it was like looking into another world. I remember looking over at Kyle as he kept scrolling down, cigarette hanging in his hand holding his phone, and just wondering how he continues to navigate and orient himself in different social contexts and worlds.*

Navigating these worlds does come with danger. Kyle and I discussed the risks of substance use and how these relationships with addiction are contingent on the drug and individual. He shared that part of this precarious relationship involves understanding and reflecting upon how he creates boundaries with substances in his life and the resulting impacts on his resources.

*For me, I've woken up once with no money and no dope in the seven years that I've been doing this shit (pint), and it's the worst fucking feeling I've ever had in my life. [...] I love the drug. I love the lifestyle. But it's like, yeah, I know my boundaries and limits on it.*

Ideas around how someone creates boundaries around their substance use in life are forefronted during our talks. Identifying and reinforcing these boundaries is a significant challenge with minimal room for error on Kyle's behalf. Perhaps this continues to speak to how he strictly organizes and structures his life; there is no room for error when a significant amount of your resources (drugs, smokes, cash) as well as freedom and home are dependent upon your ability to control your thrills. As a health service provider, it does make me wonder: how can we help maintain these self-created boundaries around substance use that may not align with our own preconceived ideas around substance use, risks, or thrills? how can service providers' ideas about substances be shifted and acknowledge how individuals construct these relationships that provide stability in their lives?

As we continued to speak about Kyle's second thrill of choice, he told me that a period of uncontrolled addiction in his life was when he was using crack. He shared that he used to fix

(inject) crack at a younger age, with his last use about 7 years ago. Thinking about our conversations, I return to a field note:

*Kyle and I were sitting down at a quiet spot in the mall when I was able to travel to another world of his. This conversation was, of course, characterized by his trademark sense of humor. He explained to me the process of reconstituting crack so that he could fix it. Kyle instructed that the process begins by first cooking the baking soda out, and what is left floating in the pan/spoon is pure coke.*

*So, once it hardens again you put it on a spoon, crush it, add a little bit of vinegar, water, mix it up, and it will evaporate. You draw it up and do your thing. It's a retarded high, like super fucking strong.*

*As I relistened to our transcript, I realized just how taken in I was during Kyle's explanation. Intermittent words and phrases of 'yeah?' and 'oh, okay' are spoken by me throughout. I can remember sitting there and struggling to keep up with Kyle's discussion as I tried to envision the different steps involved in reconstituting the drug.*

Looking at my notes now made me realize how different my experiences and knowledge was from his. While Kyle did not share many detailed experiences during this time in his life, he did say that it was a darker period when the crack controlled him and threatened his life.

*Worst of all my friends; the worst one, and everyone thought for sure that I'd be the first one to die.*

As I reflect on our conversations, the experiences that Kyle shared using *Satan's drug* (i.e., crack) are now marked by a sense of growth and pride in overcoming his addiction. For a man who excels at setting boundaries, protective mechanisms, and exerting control over his story and identity, that must be a hell of a drug and relationship with a substance for him to refer to this as a darker period in his life. Kyle also shared that when he was using crack, the conversations we have had together as a researcher and participant would not have existed.

*I didn't talk. I didn't communicate. And all that was on my mind was getting more drugs, more money for drugs, and that was it. You know? ... I'd be sitting here literally looking at that mall going, 'Where's a good break in point?' You know? That's how my mind was.*

When Kyle shared this, it spoke to his multiple identities that have taken form, changed, and then waned over his life course. In that period of time, I can only imagine just how unsettling and uncomfortable it must have felt, to always have this pull at all times of the day towards a substance or the acquiring of this substance. If we would have started our relationship then, Kyle would have met up to grab whatever gift card or food I was offering, not say a word, and then be on his way.

*I would have come here with the thought of getting the card from you, getting another one from you, and leaving. That's how bad of a crackhead I was. Without caring about how you felt, and not even talking, because... I was so antisocial. I hated the world. I don't know why I hated the world. I just did. It's just part of the drug that makes you hate everybody, you know? It's like everyone was the enemy if you weren't doing drugs. If you*



*couldn't help me get high, I hated you ... maybe not hated you, but you were of no use to me, so I wouldn't even talk to you.*

Whenever Kyle and I spoke about his previous crack use, he was often reflective and introspective. In the previous quote, he takes back the word 'hate' and explains it further. It was not necessarily hateful, but it may have come across as hateful in a relationship; it was because in this world his relationship with this substance was the primary goal, and you were merely not helpful in this pursuit. While Kyle was fixing, unless someone was helping him get money or get high, they were in his way. This pursuit appeared to cause a significant amount of discomfort within his story, often taking away the ability for him to take control of his actions.

*No, like when I tried to quit before, and didn't have a backup drug for it, I craved. I had cravings left and right. I would wake up sweating, craving it, tasting it. And be like, to the point where I am getting dressed to go out to get it and then catching myself.*

However, this all changed about 7 years ago when Kyle first tried pint. This relationship with crack was interrupted by a new backup thrill that somehow and in some way changed who he was and how he interacted in his worlds. This change was profound and discussed throughout our meetings.

*Pint just totally rewired everything in my head. Totally rewired it overnight, and I didn't get it for the longest time.*

This 'rewiring' of Kyle's head was ultimately transformative for him. Suddenly, there was a sense of control in his life and no longer the ongoing drive to organize his worlds and

identity around the acquisition of crack. Here, relationships with people, an abundance of time, and new resources were coming into his life.

*It's given me back everything from when I was doing crack. I lost everything. I had nothing. You know? I was one of those 107 (avenue) people. You know, like, well to a point. [...] I was like... one-eleventh - my own little street.*

From our conversations, individuals who live their street lives on 107 Avenue or 118 Avenue are traditionally known as *gangsters* or living in abject poverty. Kyle is forever creating his own identities, as he refuses to be categorized into the ideas that others have about the people that inhabit these avenues in Edmonton. Even when using crack, he was *one-eleventh - my own little street*. When someone describes what a change in using substances may create, especially when it is from one substance that you have no control over, Kyle's story begins to show it as *from nothing to everything*. Kyle's change from using crack to pint also protected two of the things he holds close and that are inextricably linked: his home and his freedom.

*I've calmed down, like on the crime cycle. Totally is like, I'm not better or anything, but it's slowed right the fuck down. From like 100 maxed out to maybe 20 (laughter).*

Kyle has shared that since getting out of a correctional facility in April 2021, this has been the longest time since becoming reincarcerated. As each month passes and he shares this with me, I can hear the pride in his voice, often saying, *I know, right?!* Mixed in with this pride is also a bit of surprise. He partially attributes this lack of recent incarceration to his current use of pint, which he can control. If he was still using crack, he likely would have increased his current rate of crime and become reincarcerated. While Kyle primarily chooses his thrills

because they are the antagonist to anything boring, they also appear to be contingent upon other factors, such as their effects on his ability to acquire resources and preserve his home and freedom.

The previous control that crack had over Kyle's body has continued to wane, as he shared a story where he was recently helping a friend move out of his house and found some forgotten crack in a spare bedroom. For some reason, he had no urge to use it - at all. I can imagine Kyle standing in front of a small dresser, holding a sock that had a familiar weight and feel to it. As he opens it up, he is taken aback for a moment - it is a baggie of crack, yet there is no pull towards it. At that moment, there was no 'autopilot mode' engaged to use it either. To think that such a change could be brought on by switching out one substance for another. When Kyle spoke about his pint use, he states that he is able to control it now and not vice-versa like it was with crack.

*To me, this addiction to pint, I can control the pint. I'd never let it control me. Like, I have had friends who have let that drug control them. From having everything to having nothing. The day I started smoking pint was the day I quit crack.*

In the new relationship that Kyle forged with pint, he was able to push out the uncontrolled and self-harming one he held with crack. He is even able to say that he has full control over his preferred thrill, even when others are unable to. This change in his identity and life continue to be profound for Kyle:

*To me, it's like that was the biggest change in my life. You know, like it was from night to day - instantly more sociable. I had money. I had smokes. I knew how to make money - always - but not on crack at least. I wasn't giving it to my dealers constantly.*

I have reflected on this change for Kyle. I tried to imagine what that moment must have been like for him when he first used pint in his life. For Kyle, both crack and pint were and are the antagonists of boredom. However, one was the antagonist to freedom and his home while the other was the agonist to both of these fundamental pieces of his life and identity. Crack facilitated Kyle's return to incarcerated settings, while pint was the one that delayed reincarceration, arguably providing more control over how Kyle chooses to risk his freedom and home in the pursuit of thrills and resources. It makes me wonder, when Kyle was actively using crack, what would he have thought about some of my questions? As a service provider, what would this conversation around the ideas of freedom even look like? Or would this conversation have to occur in a setting, such as a treatment or correctional facility where Kyle no longer was able to pursue his focus of obtaining crack or cash? Kyle has always known how to make money, yet the end-destination of this resource was often his dealers instead of his home, pantry, self, and personal comforts. However, Kyle shared that there are dangers to using this thrill of choice: pint.

*Pint is a drug that if you have any demons up there (gestures to head), that you don't know about or you know about it, they are 100 times worse.*

These dangers were brought to light in our conversations where we also talked about how some drugs, such as crack or pint can affect and control people using them while others seem to be resistant to these effects. Interestingly, some of Kyle's friends could be in control of their lives and functioning well when using crack, yet once they switched to pint they lost all self-control to the drug. Some areas of the city remind Kyle of these complicated relationships to thrills in his life.

Kyle spoke about avoiding the downtown area now, because the people there remind him of how he was when he was fixing crack. He used the words *panhandlers*, *zombies*, or *addicts* to describe them. Throughout our conversations, he shared that these individuals are on the bottom rung of the street's social positioning ladder, and as such he will not be associated with them anymore. It makes me wonder, does he distance himself from these individuals due to the potential risk of being pulled down and restarting his relationship with crack? Or perhaps he is avoiding the potentially negative association that might occur for his street and/or square identity? Kyle even posed the question during one of our conversations - how do they let themselves get to this point?

I do wonder what Kyle meant by this. Does he question how those living with substance misuse and housing instability will not take the steps to do complete *dirt* (i.e., crime) to put a roof over their head and acquire resources? Or how can they live their lives in this way within such a visible and public space; to be seen by all and to be ignored by most? Or how they may allow the structure and boundaries in their lives to be taken away by a thrill? These complicated relationships and power balances that people have with their thrills of choice appear elusive. Even with his lifetime of experiences, Kyle has a hard time making sense of these complicated relationships and outcomes with the thrills in his and others' lives; primarily, how can some people lose themselves and their identity to one substance, yet have control or empowerment while using another? My conversations with Kyle have made me reflect on this. If Kyle struggles to understand these relationships, how can service providers and supports learn to understand them? Perhaps the question is not to understand but rather to support the person in these

relationships. Adjacent to these conversations, we often spoke about the cycles of addiction that people go through.

*Morgan: How does someone stop that cycle? Can you?*

*Of course you can. Everything, it's all... it's all mental addiction. It's not physical. You can quit pint, ya know what I mean? I guess I shouldn't say that, because I am almost out of dope. That's the reason why I didn't go to my mom's today.*

Kyle has stated that he is living a good life right now. He has a *beautiful home*, nice clothes, food, his freedom, and opportunities to seek thrills and enjoy life. In the context of his previous relationship with crack, these pieces of his life were not all there. However, using pint has changed all of that. The relationships that Kyle and others hold with thrills in their life in the form of substances are extremely complex, often casting a translucent veil over their inner workings to not only Kyle, but others. There is no straightforward answer to how support services and workers may fully understand these relationships.

### ***Getting away with it***

From our short time together in the context of Kyle's life, the thrill of a life not constrained by social norms or expectations is forefronted. Kyle's life is also organized, to a degree, around certain feelings of the 'rush' previously talked about - the rush of getting away with it. The feeling that you have as you are walking by police officers and they have no idea what you just did or who you are; the act of being looked for but not found. I have a hard time imagining this feeling. However, this thrill, like all of the thrills in Kyle's life, are constrained by

numerous rules and boundaries around what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. For Kyle, two rules for getting away with it are brought up.

*I won't hurt another human being, and everything's insured - it's just a nuisance.*

As Kyle and I spoke lightly and somewhat tangentially around the thrills of getting away with it, he would always tell me that he will not hurt a human being. The only time he may cause *discomfort* to someone is if he is in a position where he will be harmed. In other words, self-defense. For that reason, he usually carries bear spray around with him if on Whyte Avenue or downtown. Yet, it does make me wonder: when did his rule about only committing crimes of inconvenience, i.e., nuisance, first take root? Was there a time when something happened to Kyle, or someone he knows, and he realized that he will only engage in these types of activities? I acknowledge there is much of Kyle's street identity and the thrill of getting away with it that is not spoken about between us. As written about in a field note, this lack of discussion around his street activities also constitutes a boundary:

*Woven throughout our conversations is an ongoing shroud of mystery and silence regarding his street activities. Kyle has shared that he does have side hustles that involve crimes of nuisance, but we do not go into further detail beyond just superficial talk. While part of this lack of conversation are my ethical obligations as a researcher, the reality is that I have no need to know the details or further information. I am curious, as most are, but I recognize from my time working in corrections that someone does not ask questions about these topics. It is my hope that Kyle recognizes this is a sign of respect for his experiences.*

Kyle finds excitement in his life from different thrills, with each one having its unique relationship to his freedom and home. However, it makes me think - can the thrill of getting away with it be something that one can be enveloped in all the time? I wonder how Kyle takes a break or recharges from this thrill. He has mentioned that *eventually the rush comes to an end*. However, not by his own means, as these thrills expire on their own. What happens when someone no longer wishes to have this thrill, or at least the consequences or potential police visits, in their life? Can you just walk away and not look back? Or will you always need to be thinking about what may occur via formal legal effects or street effects (someone looking for you afterwards)? Perhaps these questions demonstrate my naivety about police investigations or evidence, but it does make me wonder. Do these concerns carry over for those who support and provide services to individuals with a street identity? I know I have often thought about what may have happened to Kyle when he does not respond to a text for a period of time or show up to a conversation. Each time I was worried that something could have happened to him. Maybe this concern is also a trait of my square identity.

I acknowledge that Kyle is a master of social context, perception, and situations - marked by an impressive situational awareness. While he is likely at home in this thrill, it makes me think about how out of place I would feel within the context of 'getting away with it.' While this spoke to who I am, Kyle thrives in these circumstances and can function - I imagine - almost flawlessly. He has spoken in the past about increasing or decreasing his crime cycle. Kyle keeps a pulse on the amount of thrills he is engaging in, taking the time to step back from thrills if things are getting out of his control or beginning to threaten his home or his freedom - his two



primary rules. However, I wonder how he does this and what other factors influence these decisions.

### **Sense of Self**

When thinking about Kyle and his identity - who he is, has been, and may become in the future - multiplicity is forefronted. As I sit here writing, I cannot put Kyle into preconceived categories or limited labels of one or two identities or traits. Witty, resourceful, hilarious, independent, protective, pragmatic, and resilient come to my mind. Through this account, I hope to begin showing the multiple dimensions of Kyle's sense of self that I was fortunate enough to be introduced to throughout our time together. Many of his identities have shifted over time and taken multiple forms alongside his life and relationships.

### ***3rd eye***

On a July afternoon we sat down and discussed the list of our introductory questions that were required by the Research Ethics Board. While we spoke, Kyle sipped on his Dr. Pepper, leaned back in his chair, and seemed aware of his surroundings. He sat relaxed and engaged in conversation, yet also attuned to the noises, objects, and people around us in the food court. This attentiveness was not in a paranoid sense, but from a place of comfort - of being in a state of familiarity. As we continued to speak, it became clear that Kyle has had many experiences where he is situated within complex social circumstances with multiple people and relationships. This familiarity and comfort was in contrast to myself. I was stumbling in my mind as I tried to think through all of my questions I was required to ask. The confidence in social settings that Kyle exhibits is something that I should learn from.

Walking away from that first meeting, I remember thinking back and reflecting on some of my first thoughts about who Kyle was. Over time, I continued to wonder about the different identities that he was creating and maintaining. Sitting in his chair, chatting away with me, and exuding a sense of comfort made me wonder, how does Kyle relax himself in this situation? Perhaps it was the confidence that comes from being a part of numerous research projects and finding individuals with square identities harmless, but what else might have contributed and continues to this sense of ease on Kyle's behalf? Sitting in my vehicle, I wondered if this in part comes from the 3rd eye that Kyle often spoke to me about:

*It's like I can read a person wayyy before they even come near me and I meet them. It's like, I go with my gut instinct. To me, I always believe that your gut instinct is your 3rd eye. It's like your psychic conscious telling you 'don't go... it's bad'. You know? Listen to it. Don't be that white chick in the horror movie that says, 'I just wanna see what it is' (laughter). You know? You'll be the first one to get killed.*

I wonder, what did Kyle's 3rd eye tell him about me? What was his gut instinct towards the project? It must have been positive, as he has continued to be a part of this work for a significant period of time. Kyle shared that this 3rd eye was developed by his ongoing experiences of seeking thrills and living diverse lives and identities within a variety of diverse social contexts (street life and square life).

Even when he was a child, Kyle shared that he used to have dreams that involved predicting future events; a sense of feeling or direction to prevent harm to those in his life. He shared one example of a dream where he saw his uncle pass away from hitting a tractor. He told

his aunt who then shared this with his uncle. The next day, Kyle's uncle was driving down a road and was narrowly missed by a tractor that could not see him due to a logging truck. He continued,

*I started doing drugs, they went away. Now it's just a feeling or a sense.*

We did not speak about when Kyle neglected to listen to this 3rd eye, but I wonder when he found that this piece of his sense of self was something that he could rely upon. I can imagine the realization and sense of frustration that would have occurred when Kyle ignored his 3rd eye, only to be proven wrong. In the above quote, it seems equivalent to 'trust your gut.' It makes me ask, as a service provider, how can we instill or help create a sense of ease for Kyle to 'trust his gut' when it comes to creating a relationship with us and the services we deliver? What happens to the relationship when individuals get a feeling that they cannot trust a service provider? Can this occur only through face-to-face communication and interactions, or can we lose trust or cause a disease through other forms of communication, such social media posts or signage on a building? It is with these questions that I continued my work with Kyle.

It was a cold day in October when I was able to see Kyle's 3rd eye in action. We were sitting in a busy Tim Hortons.

*As Kyle and I sat in the window booth, just off to the side of the washrooms, I noticed that he seemed 'off' and distracted in our conversation - definitely on edge. Standing beside him, waiting for her food, was a well-dressed woman that Kyle kept glancing over at. While we sat there, he told me that he did not like something about the way the woman was standing and waiting for her food. As we carried on our conversation, and with Kyle repeatedly looking over*

*at the woman, a man exited the washroom and stood beside her. He, too, was well dressed and appeared like he was just waiting for his food. Again, Kyle mentioned that something seemed 'off' about the two individuals and that he was not comfortable - they reminded him of undercover cops. As I drank my coffee and looked at the two people and how they were dressed/acting, I did not see anything that would set off an alarm bell in my head, yet Kyle was still on edge. After the two individuals waited for two minutes and then received their food, they announced to the staff behind the counter that they are with Alberta Health Services and are questioning their COVID-19 protocols. Almost immediately everyone became quiet around them, and the front staff announced they would check the two individuals' temperatures and grab the manager for them. It was almost instantaneous that Kyle looked relieved. With a self-confirming grin, Kyle said,*

*I can spot a narc a mile away - they're like cops. The way they were carrying themselves, walking back and forth. Yup, health inspectors. [...] if you're standing in line, you look like you don't wanna be here.*

*Kyle knew something was wrong with the way they were acting, stating that while everyone else was appearing like the last place they wanted to be was standing in a Tim Hortons lineup on a cold day, those two were engaged, looking around, and well dressed. (Field Note)*

Kyle has an otherworldly sense of perceiving and analyzing people who are not conducting themselves in line with social norms. I acknowledge that this skill set comes from

Kyle's rich and diverse experiences across his life but seeing his 3rd eye in practice is remarkable. It is almost a lens whereby Kyle interacts with his external conditions of living to successfully navigate diverse social and environmental conditions. Were there specific experiences that contributed to this 3rd eye? Can anyone have a 3rd eye? Are these experiences that someone else, such as a service provider or healthcare professional could experience? Can they be taught and enable a connection between those with street identities and this uncanny ability to navigate social scenarios? How does one hone their 3rd eye? Is it, in some ways, developed through the retelling of his stories and inquiring into his experiences? Thinking back to Kyle's story, I cannot help but imagine myself as *that white chick in the horror movie that says, 'I just wanna see what it is'*. I would likely have been killed off in the story a long time ago.

### ***Structure | Discipline | Protect***

Kyle's quick wits, tongue of silver, and lifetime of experiences facilitate the comfort he feels in navigating social contexts. Each time we have a conversation, he casually eats his meal and sips his iced capp as he draws on an experience from somewhere in North America that relates to our topic. I am usually in awe when I hear him speak, immediately drawn towards him as a Storyteller Supreme. From my work in corrections, I had assumptions about the participants that I might be working with. I did not expect to meet someone who had the articulation and vocabulary skills that Kyle does. Thinking back, I was very wrong in this presumption of who Kyle might be when we first talked on that phone together. Sitting here, it makes me think about other presumptions that I may hold towards those who have not yet made their way into my life.

Integrated into our conversations was a level of structure and discipline that Kyle orders his life and relationships with. Each time we spoke, I began to pay more attention to how Kyle takes control of his life and orders things around him. Sitting there across the table, I can feel myself lean into the conversation a bit more when Kyle shares another way in which he protects his home, freedom, relationships, and identities. Our conversations showcased how structured and disciplined Kyle is when he approaches and interacts with ideas, practices, people, and social contexts.

*If you give me your word that you're gonna be paying me back at a certain time, you best be paying me back at a certain time. [...] You give me your word, I hold you to it. I did a lot of Penn time and I am big on people's word.*

Although there is emphasis within penal facilities, staying true to your word is a mutually understood arrangement that transcends the walls of correctional facilities. The sentiment of keeping your word has echoed across my experiences and is shared with new healthcare trainees: if you tell someone you will do something for them, you make sure you do or at least tell them why you cannot. When thinking about how Kyle structures his life to acquire and safeguard his home and other resources, it makes me think about how a sense of integrity is emphasized and communicated. How does Kyle structure his relationships with others to be contingent upon their integrity? While having integrity is a part of peoples' lives with histories of incarceration, it also speaks to others. When service providers work alongside people during transitions around facilities, staying true to your word, being honest, and knowing what you can and cannot accomplish is of utmost importance to creating and maintaining relationships. I wonder, are there local organizations involved in transitional services that have a habit of giving their word and

then going back on it? While this applies to an individual-level, what about larger systems, such as carceral or health, that people like Kyle find themselves accessing and having to organize? Can you encourage a system to value and maintain integrity? It is with these questions that I continue to think about his experiences in the context of transitions.

Kyle regularly controls, or attempts to control, the situations where he finds himself by projecting his sense of self - Kyle - onto current and plausible future scenarios. Kyle puts himself first in many of the experiences he shares, because that is how he structures his life and protects himself. I wrote in a field note:

*The sunlight was blinding Kyle across the table from me. Without asking, I stood up to bring the blind down at the quiet Tim Hortons. We had to do this almost regularly when we sat here around 3pm. With a bit of laughter, he says 'thanks' as the shadow of the shades comes down across his face. The more we talked at that Tim Horton's shuffleboard table with its red chairs, the more familiar we were, altering the environment to suit our needs. As I went back to my stool, I asked a question about the types of supports that are helpful for Kyle when he transitions into or out of correctional facilities. The first words were*

*Me, myself, and I. [...] Plain and simple. I've never relied on others. Even when I get out, I don't rely on these people. If there is something that Cindy can do for me, I will try, a million times, to do it - fall down and pick myself up and try again.*

Kyle's story reiterates the importance of starting with himself and his continued resilience. He shared that the only person he could consistently rely upon was himself. Other

individuals and supporters drift in and out of his experiences, their contributions and deductions shifting, but Kyle was always there. He did speak to supportive relationships that border on friendships. He can turn to these for assistance, such as those at the local AIDS service organization, his parole officer, or other support services. Yet, because Kyle can always rely upon himself, he must take measures to protect his primary support. As we continued to speak about transitions when leaving facilities, he drew numerous circles around himself in the center of these webs.

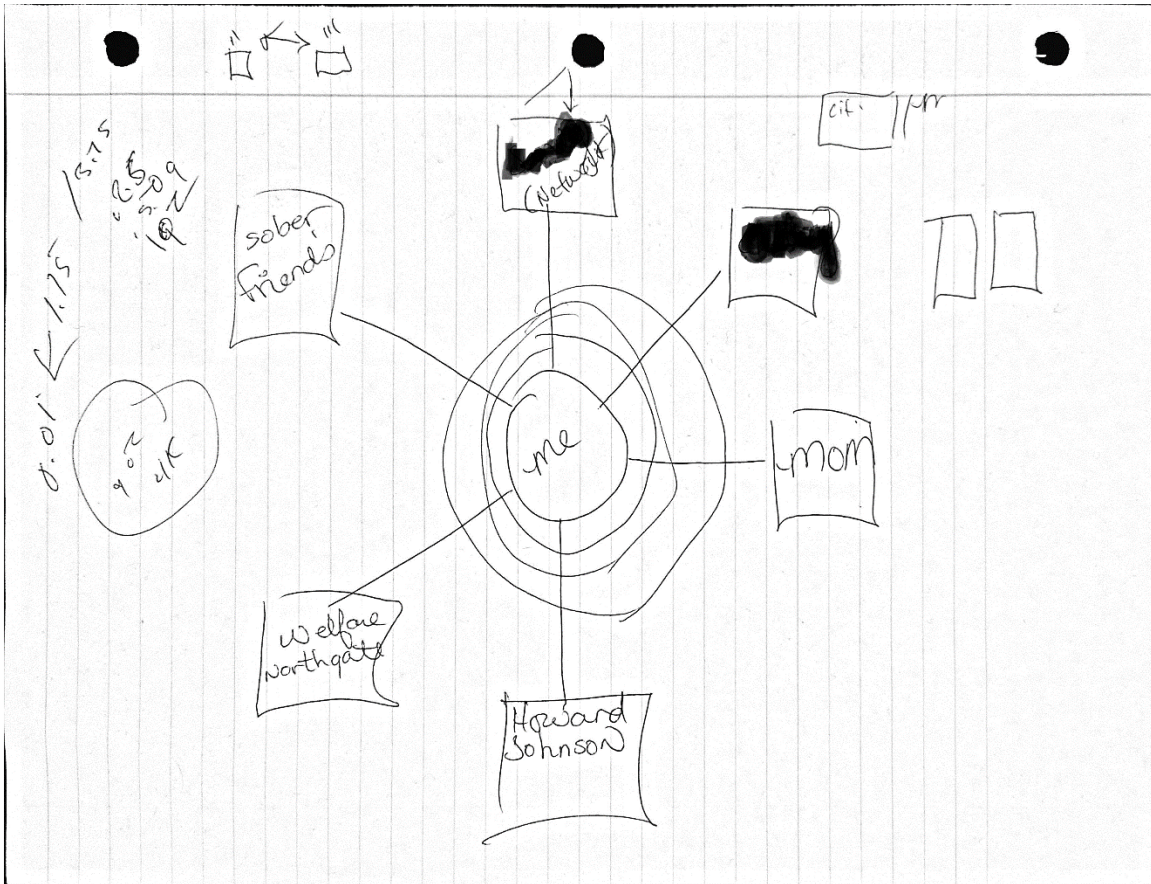
*Oh I got like a fortress... like fucking 20-feet thick you know? Yeah, I don't let nobody in.*

*That's why, it's like that's why I'm a bitch, I'm a cunt - whatever you want to call it.*



**Figure 1**

*Kyle's Support Web.*



There are different names and organizations that come up in this image, yet I am left imagining the fortress that Kyle has built around him. A lifetime endeavor. Inside its walls, it is well decorated and similar to his home; a pleasant scent wafts through its halls. There are surveillance cameras scattered throughout. Within this fortress Kyle is safe. The outside walls bear the marks of unintended consequences and scars from those who have tried to enter and harm Kyle. This fortress is forever growing - its walls constantly being repaired and reinforced based upon the experiences of Kyle and his social network.

*I think it's been going on my whole life. I see things happen to other people and decide, well, I don't want that happening to me, so I will put a brick up. Like, piece by piece.*

Sometimes I imagine myself slowly walking up to this fortress, its Louis Vuitton flag fluttering in the wind above the tallest peak. As I take a step towards its giant iron-wrought door, I can feel a little camera move in my peripheral vision as it focuses on me. I knock on the door with a light fist, and a little peering slot opens up that Kyle looks out from. He gives me a quick glance - looking at me and how I may threaten or harm him. It is a moment before he makes his decision, and I am unsure if anyone makes it past this point. It makes me question, how can service providers or agencies be invited into Kyle's fortress? What type of a relationship would they have to form with him, and what may this look like? How do you form a trusting relationship when you operate within a system, i.e., health or justice, that people actively protect themselves from? Looking inward at my own fortress, or lack thereof, I cannot help but see a difference between our experiences of others. These questions have continued to guide how I think about Kyle's relationships with others and myself. Part of Kyle's relationships with others are his ongoing protective practices that occur across his lifespan.

*I'm very aware of my surroundings and anybody in my home. I know what you're doing, what is going on, and that way I don't get ripped off.*

One of the most often prominent rules that maintained the fortress walls around Kyle was his 3-strike rule. If you mess up three times, you are out of his home. This applies to anyone living with Kyle or visiting his home. If someone is living with or renting from him, you clean up your dishes, you keep your room clean enough so Kyle cannot smell it, you do not invite

unknown visitors over, and you do not go into Kyle's room. To me, these rules seem simple to adhere to, yet the people that Kyle often interacts with have such trouble respecting these boundaries.

As we speak about these experiences, I can sense his frustration towards having to place another brick, building up his fortress wall, after another endeavor into finding a roommate. This idea of a 3-strike rule is intriguing. When working with people who have recently been incarcerated or released, what types of rules do they create with service providers? When have I crossed this 3-strike (or even single-strike) rule when working with people living with HIV (or others)? I remember when Kyle first shared his 3-strike rule. I thought it was a bit harsh, garnering a small eyebrow raise, but as he shared the experiences where he was either taken advantage of or his home and freedom threatened, it resonated with me. There is no room for error in the experiences he shared. Contextualized-kindness and offering repeated chances for someone does not necessarily work when your freedom, home, and life are at risk. This is not mean nor rude; this is survival. While Kyle calls this approach to protecting his life honesty, many struggle to understand this.

*He just starts laughing and goes, fuck - you're rude. I was like, no, it's not rude, it's called honesty. When people who don't like hearing honesty, they call it rude.*

Reflecting on my experiences with correctional officers, nurses, and other service providers within and outside of correctional facilities, I am doubtful that many recognize the actions of others as potentially coming from a place of survival. Kyle needs to take strong action towards protecting his home and freedom along with trying to access resources that can help him

keep his home. It makes me wonder, how may the responses of the above service providers working with incarcerated/recently incarcerated people change if they switched their perspective from one of potential ‘rudeness’ towards survival or desperation? How would their relationships be changed, and what would these new relationships look like?

Kyle’s protective practices come from his diverse experiences with people and ideas within and outside of correctional walls. These protective practices are interpreted and carried out within his street and square lives. How Kyle structures his relationships appears to be contingent upon these protective practices.

*I don’t allow my friends to ever become friends in my home. Why? Cuz when they cause drama between each other, all the shit comes back to me.*

When we speak together these instances of Kyle engaging in actions to protect himself seem so evident, such as the 3-strike rule or not acting as the link between two people with street lives, but other times his actions are subtle and require significant reflection. I return to a field note that spoke about Kyle’s aversion to drawing attention to himself in public:

*It was a cool day in October when Kyle and I decided to meet at the mall. This was during the 3rd wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the rules for public gatherings and engagement were changing daily. We sat down on some benches in a quiet part of the mall and began to have a bite to eat. A security officer came up to us and told us we were not allowed to have our masks off on the property. At this moment, I was unsure of how Kyle would react, but he nodded his head along and agreed. After the security guard left, Kyle and I picked up our conversation where it left off.*

Thinking back to this experience, Kyle protects himself and structures his life by not drawing unwanted attention to himself in public gathering places. This has also been repeated during our conversations at Tim Hortons, when we sometimes move away from more crowded areas. At first this was surprising, as I see Kyle as having star like qualities. He has a striking appearance, designer clothes, and a presence that does draw attention. Every time I see Kyle approaching, I am always taking note of him, often with an accompanying smile. However, I have learned that this idea of being seen comes from a wanted sense of respect or admiration rather than suspicion; looks of ‘that is a nice Louis Vuitton scarf’ from strangers rather than ‘what is he doing?’ are preferred. As we continued our conversations, Kyle shared that some of his protective and structured approach to organizing relationships with others comes from his penn (i.e., federal institute) time and experiences of working the strolls (i.e., sex work). This has facilitated his ability to read people and interpret their plausible actions.

*If you put your word behind something and you say, ‘Oh my word, I promise you. I promise you.’ I mean, look me dead in the eyes. Try to convince me that. I can see your little demons inside - behind you - already working to make you not come. I will hold you to that. [...] You told me you're going to do this, then you best be fucking showing up.*

I can begin to understand why Kyle experiences frustration and requires those high walls around him. Thinking with the above statement, I am imagining the sense of apathy and distrust that Kyle often feels when navigating these relationships and conversations. To have someone you know promising that they will pay you back the owed rent or cab fare, only for you to see past those words to the *little demons* working their gears and resulting impulses. In a similar line of thought, I am drawn to think about how these little demons might be a part of my own and

others' professional and personal practices within the health and justice systems. What little demons do we have working to make us not keep our word or let down those we provide services to? What do these little demons look like, and how do they operate? While some demons might be attributed to addictions in the context of Kyle's relationships, people operating within health and justice systems likely have demons with racist and colonial dispositions. Yet these are subtle, preferring to mask themselves behind bureaucratic procedures or policies that exclude and marginalize certain communities. Kyle's experiences of structuring his life and protecting himself continue to guide my thoughts.

### ***Two Identities - Street and Square***

An important part of Kyle's sense of self are two overlapping identities and pieces to his life: his street self and his square self. Throughout our conversations, Kyle has described these two identities as dichotomous to one another but linked through his experiences and how he makes sense of his life. These two pieces of Kyle's life are fundamentally a part of who he is, and he can move between the two depending upon the social context and his needs. While we spoke, Kyle would share certain activities associated with his street life, but then switch to activities and interpretations of experiences from his square self. Speaking with Kyle, he is always pulling from one identity or the other to help navigate his current experience. Although I had assumptions when we first met, I remember my urge to understand what it means to be a square or to have a street life. I knew I was a square, but I wanted to know more about what that meant for others.

Morgan: *And what makes someone a square?*

*Doesn't do drugs. She's married, got two kids, has a house, they own a house... normal, ya know?*

This was in reference to his friend, Samantha, when we were speaking about their relationship. Kyle told me that his square activities often entail sending his mother and family money when they need it, visiting his mom if she is sick, or spending time with his friend, Samantha, at her place of work. Living a square life is one that I identify with; I am a square, and I am quite comfortable with this. Many institutions and opportunities in life are structured around sharing with or being a part of this square world. Yet it makes me question, because I am at home in this square world, what does that make me uncomfortable with? As Kyle and I continued to talk, my general anxieties appeared to fade away. No longer would I find myself struggling to organize my thoughts before we met nor mid-conversation. Kyle does put people at ease when conversing with him.

Kyle's square identity encompasses more than the activities he engages in with others, it is also an ability that enables him to blend in with diverse social groups and places. As previously discussed in this account, Kyle does not wish to bring unwanted attention to himself in some social situations, so being able to go into 'Square Mode' is helpful, even protecting him. I remember one time Kyle shared he was riding an electric scooter in the city and was hit by a vehicle. That vehicle then sped away. A concerned passerby immediately jumped to Kyle's aid:

*She said, 'I've already called the cops as soon as he got away. I called 911.' I was like, 'Oh my god, why would you do that?'*

Unbeknown to the concerned passerby, Kyle was out selling thrills that evening and the last thing he wanted was to have a conversation with a police officer. Kyle promptly left but told her that if the police really needed him, he would be at a Tim Hortons not far away. When Kyle shared this with me, I can imagine myself watching it unfold. Kyle always has a sharp wit in our conversations, and without a doubt, he would have navigated that conversation to both reassure the women he was OK, but to also validate her concerns. This ability to be a part of the square world is often spoken about by Kyle.

*I'm part square, because I can act sober and nobody knows. I can go into a commercial area and nobody knows that I do drugs or sell drugs or anything like that. They have no freaking clue.*

Kyle has spoken before about being a *chameleon* who can blend in with any surrounding: correctional facilities, bars, restaurants, downtown, etc. Arguably, this is an ability of Kyle's that is not found uniformly across many with experiences of incarceration and transitions. Kyle does not bear facial tattoos nor bring unwanted attention to having a sense of self that involves the street.

*Most of the people who buy dope just stare at me like, 'You sell dope? You don't look like you sell dope.' Like, what am I supposed to look like? [...] When I got money and can go buy clothes. I got water at home and I can wash up. Why should I have to look like a street thug?*

Sitting across from Kyle, I always take notice that he is well dressed, clean shaven, and fashionable. Puma is a summertime favorite of his, and to be frank, he makes me look like a



scrub. It makes me think about how visual appearances are important for navigating the square world and what types of access and opportunities may then be opened up. Even though many support services and individuals involved with transitions work alongside people who have street identities, I wonder how those who have a different appearance from Kyle or myself are treated or allowed access to services. Questions are raised around personal hygiene, skin pigmentation, clothing, and tattoos. How does accessing services or resources become easier, or harder, when one must communicate and interact with those that may not spend time with people who have street experiences? My mind goes through the processes of owning a home or obtaining insurance - bank employees or insurance agents. As I think with Kyle's experiences and our conversations, he acknowledges and overcomes this challenge. Kyle also understands how to organize and access services to meet his needs. He does not wait to have his priorities taken care of by others; he accomplishes this himself. His ability to navigate and obtain resources from both square and street worlds is nothing short of impressive.

Kyle's street identity is tied to the story that he tells of working and living a life involving the streets: selling thrills, riding scooters, and getting caught up in a bit of mischief and resulting excitement. Writing this narrative account, I find myself thinking of how this life is best represented at times, and how it is a different world. I wrote in a field note:

*We were sitting at our usual Tim Hortons spot together when Kyle began to explain the details and embodied knowledge behind selling thrills, specifically drug-related measurements.*

*We call it a nine-pack, which is nine ounces, you know what I mean? It's the biggest deal you can get. You can get it for \$1500 bucks, when it usually would go for about \$4000 individually.*

*Listening to Kyle, I sat there with my peppermint tea beside me, my pen making notes on the paper as I tried to keep up with his explanation.*

*Before you get the small amounts, an eight-ball is the first bigger amount. It goes half a game, which a game is a full eight-ball. Then it goes eight-ball, then a quarter, then a half ounce... 28 grams to an ounce... when you get into these smaller numbers, I'd rather spend my money on candy.*

*While I was listening, Kyle was also writing some of the measurement sizes on a piece of paper he had, doing quick math that showed how many units of a smaller amount constituted the larger ones. It was around 3pm now and Kyle and I continued to talk and sip on our beverages. School children started to stream into the Tim Hortons.*

Kyle shared experiences with me that gave me a glimpse into another world: his street life. One particular example stood out to me as he was discussing this world.

*These little popcorn dealers are stepping on the dope again.*

Morgan: *Wait, what is a popcorn dealer?*

*I call them popcorn dealers. They're nothing. [...] They're very small, minute, little.*

*They're there one day and they're gone the next.*

My mind immediately went to some of the individuals I have taken notice of in downtown Edmonton or Whyte Avenue. A vision of a young man with a flat-brimmed hat on backwards, backpack, and white Oakley sunglasses as he rode a BMX bike appeared. I wondered, I had a sense of what a *popcorn dealer* might look like in my mind, but it was nothing in comparison to the lived experiences of Kyle. He has not only seen these individuals but had conversations with them across many years. I can picture Kyle spending time on Whyte Avenue. He walks by someone who he sees as this type of a street professional. With a small 'sigh', Kyle keeps on walking by, slightly annoyed at what they bring to this profession and how things have changed over time.

*That's just how back then it was. There was respect. There was people. There were a lot of respect for people and your space, your attitudes, and everything... but not anymore.*

Speaking to Kyle about his street life, he respects and values someone who conducts themselves in a professional manner within their street life and occupation. While this extends to those that sell thrills, I believe it also applies to service providers. It makes me wonder, while Kyle has stated that he cannot respect someone in a position of traditional authority, like a parole, police, or correctional officer, can he respect how this person conducts themselves and carries out their role? Perhaps it is in this interaction - associated with a formal authority - and the actions that person does whereby a relationship with someone who has a street identity can begin to be negotiated? If so, how can those with a traditional position of authority that are involved with transitions learn how to act in a respectful and professional manner that is congruent with the expectations of someone who comes from a street life?

Another part of Kyle's street identity is his preference to spend time with certain groups of people with street lives over others.

*I dislike most natives that are very Indian. [...] I call it rezzed out when they are very... not civilized. It's a very savage attitude, you know what I mean? So, it's very ignorant. [...] They're very ignorant towards everybody else but their own kind, and I don't like people like that. [...] My brother is one and I don't even talk to my brother. [...] That tells you how far my belief in that goes. I won't talk to my brother until he quits (Redd Alert).*

This statement is significant. Kyle separates himself from his brother because of how his brother carries himself and who his brother associates with in his street life. While we did not speak often of Kyle's brother, I wonder if his brother also has a square identity? Creating boundaries with those who also have street lives is a necessity to not only protect Kyle's home and freedom, but also maintain meaningful relationships.

*Addicts, you can't trust them. Me, that is why I make enough money, everyday, that I don't HAVE to rip off friends and family when I used to when I was a crackhead.*

Throughout our conversations about his street life, Kyle would often mention the complex relationships and boundaries that are created by him with various people and diverse practices. He describes people with severe substance misuse as *addicts* who cannot be trusted. This is grounded in his experiences of having his trust broken by those living with serious substance misuse. Furthermore, Kyle has shared that there are those who, by their actions and appearances, he does not associate with. These are often panhandlers, people living without homes, or those picking up cigarette butts on the sidewalk.

*You just see them day in day-out out scrubbed out. I call it scrubbed out when you're picking butts, you know? Your hands are dirtier than the sidewalk.*

Some of Kyle's rules may appear to be hard, but they are created and maintained out of necessity and his ongoing experiences of survival. If someone is fixing and heavily involved in drug use, Kyle does not trust them, because in his experiences they will make promises they do not uphold and potentially take your possessions. I remember when a friend borrowed money from Kyle and then ghosted (cut all contact) him.

*It's like, 'Don't call me bro cause I'm not your bro, cause then you wouldn't have done what you did to me.' Then he tried to play it off that he forgot and it was the drugs. I'm like, 'Bull-fucking-shit. You've been ducking and dodging me for 3-months now.'*

Kyle assesses whether a person with a street life is trustworthy by using his 3rd eye and experiences from his street and square identities. However, some individuals with street lives do gain his trust. We were talking about Kyle's friend that he knew would not steal anything if left alone in his home.

*They don't have it in them. I can see. You can see their soul in them. [...] Like, I see that Alex P. Keaton, from Family Ties. [...] They don't have it in them to do that to people.*

When Kyle has a relationship with a person from his street life, he also bases his trust upon what he sees within the individual's soul. While I immediately had to look up who Alex P. Keaton was, I arrived at someone who is and had the quintessential square life. Alex P. Keaton is someone who does not take advantage of others nor steal nor rob them - they do not follow the

rules or practices of the uncivilized individuals Kyle has spoken about. Questions arise for these Alex P. Keaton individuals who do have a street life: how may their experiences of transitions around correctional facilities be different from those who have their actions run entirely by the little demons that Kyle spoke of? Because their square identity might be more forefronted, are their experiences different from those Kyle labels as *not civilized*? Furthermore, if Alex P. Keaton had to access support services around transitions, how would he go about doing this, and what would happen to his life and trust in the system if he fell through the cracks?

Kyle often spoke about navigating and trying to keep his street identity and activities separate from his square identity. One of these challenges was navigating the different social relationships that are a part of his story.

*I have two lives. [...] I have my friends on this side of the fence and I have my friends on that side of the fence. I try to make sure they're separate. [...] I make damn sure I don't blend the two.*

Although I had my assumptions, I was curious why Kyle keeps these identities and relationships separate from one another. He shared that it was a combination of creating less work in his life (i.e., less *drama*) and wanting to protect selective relationships from the effects of his street identity and activities.

*Even now, it's like I still have two different lives. I have my square friends and I have my street friends, and I keep them separate. Like Samantha, she's always like, 'why don't you invite me up?' And it's just like... because if there's something that I forgot to put away, I*

*don't want to make you see it. You know what I mean? Like, I don't want that brought into your life. You don't need that.*

Kyle tries to not only separate certain relationships from his street life, but also protect them from the potential effects of it. He does not want to place them in an uncomfortable position where they see dope or other street-associated items in his home. While he spoke of his friend, this also extends to his mother.

*I turn to a field note: It was early in our relationship when we first tangentially spoke about his mother. The sounds of the pop radio station playing overhead was interrupted by the ding and ringing of deep fryer machines as we sat down together at Tim Hortons. I was just getting to know Kyle, so each time I would ask him what he would like: a large iced capp and a turkey bacon club with no tomato or lettuce. Kyle shared that his mother lives a distance away from Edmonton, in a small town marked by a well-known truck stop. He found it challenging when she would come down to visit and ask to stay with him for longer than a few days. It was stressful navigating his relationship with her while trying to hide or minimize some of his street activities and use of thrills. His mother did not approve of these activities and would bring this up each time she saw something that related to his street life.*

I had a conversation with Kyle about how he has told his mom that it is hard if she visits him in Edmonton for periods of time, as he will not change for her. He finds it stressful looking after her when she is here, so he prefers shorter periods of time to visit.

Kyle accomplishes this separation between select square relationships and his street identity through enacting boundaries with relationships connected to his street identity. When Kyle is out with Samantha or his mother, he would despise it if an individual brought up a dimension of his street life in front of them. Even when we sit together, I can only imagine how upset Kyle would be if I accidentally treaded upon this unforgivable ground. Kyle is the only individual who can interpret and justify when these two worlds - and identities - may overlap with one another.

*I know a lot of people, but whether I choose to acknowledge your existence is huge. I'll see somebody. I'll just keep walking.*

Kyle's experiences make me reflect upon this ongoing performance that must occur to maintain and protect his street and square identities. What would occur if someone involved with transitions created a link between these two lives on behalf of Kyle? How would Kyle react if I reached out to Kyle's mother to connect with him? When thinking about how to organize and facilitate access to services for transitions around correctional facilities, how do the boundaries that people create between their street identities and their square identities function, and how can we support or hinder these? Thinking with Kyle's experiences is a starting point to begin understanding some of these questions critical to the experiences of transitions.

### ***Here and Now***

One dimension of Kyle's sense of self that is continuing to evolve is a focus on the here and now. Throughout our conversations, Kyle's tendency to live and think within the moment has often been spoken about and viewed as a strength; this is a resilience mechanism. Kyle views



*the past as the past* and there is no way to change it. In his spectacular Mariah Carey fashion, he blends humor into his performance as the Storyteller Supreme:

Morgan: *Are you still good sitting here?*

*Oh yea, I don't care. Elma, turn up your hearing aide. I really don't care if people hear my conversation, it will usually clear a room. You know, my story is my story. It doesn't bug me to talk about it. I don't reminisce or get sad overthinking something. I can't cry over spilt milk. That's what my aunt always taught me. Que Sera Sera. Done.*

We were sitting in the brightly lit Tim Hortons when Kyle shared this with me. There was an abundance of customers compared to usual, so there was limited space available for us to have a conversation. Sitting close by was a group of senior women sharing a coffee together - once or twice they looked our way as we were conversing. Each time Kyle would just chuckle and continue with his story. Thinking back with this quote, Kyle's aunt and uncle were Italian, so the phrase *Que Sera Sera*, which translates to "Whatever will be, will be" has likely been a part of his experiences from a young age. I am curious as to what other phrases he was accustomed to hearing and then living. As Kyle and I continued our relationship, it became clear that he believes there is no need to mope or moan about the past or how his current predicament could be better, but instead focus on the present with the future in your peripherals. Kyle continued these ideas in another conversation:

*I don't cry over loneliness or sit in my apartment going 'boohooohoo, poor me this, poor me that.' When I look around, I'm going, 'I got four walls around me. I got a beautiful fucking home. I have nothing to cry about. I did this all on my own.'*

Appreciating his current position in life, specifically with an emphasis on his home and freedom, grounds Kyle in what holds meaning for him. If he has four walls around him and a home, he has *nothing to cry about*. This sense of being focused on the here and now is also reinforced by Kyle's self-accomplishment of reaching this point of comfort. Thinking with these ideas, I wonder how and in what ways Kyle would accept support in maintaining his home or other pieces of his life? Could this support come from a service agency that he has to physically attend, or would he prefer something that is anonymous or virtual? While this depends on what the service entails, such as HIV support or welfare, I wonder how he would prefer to have these structured.

I wonder if being centered and focused on the present facilitates Kyle's awareness of his immediate social and physical surroundings - perhaps this is one of the ways in which he has survived and thrived so far in life. His previous experiences are significant for shaping his life and identities: he has a street life and a square life. The genesis of both lives has stretched back to his childhood. As Kyle shared, many of these experiences have been traumatic. From navigating his ex-step-father's attempts at harming his family to working the strolls, Kyle has faced trauma and experiences that many would likely struggle to cope with. Not dwelling on the past, but instead focusing on the present moment is a way to navigate and cope - one must not *cry over spilt milk*.

As we sat down on those uncomfortable cafeteria chairs the first time we met, I was drawn to Kyle's response to one of my ethics-required questions: was there someone Kyle trusts, and if I could connect with them if we have a particularly challenging conversation? Kyle let out a small laugh and told me that there is nothing he would share with me that has not already dealt

with and does not mind the world knowing. Kyle would shed no tears or be in any kind of pain when talking to me. As a researcher, I felt a bit confused. My mind raced for a moment when he first told me, so I cracked a small joke and said that maybe I would just reach out to Cindy if I felt something was off. Looking back and writing this account, it was I who needed an answer or a support, but Kyle did not.

I return to a field note: *It was the summer and Kyle had shared with me his plans to receive botox for the first time in a few months. In the midst of a conversation around personal care, he told me:*

*I just went and bought Retin-A filler.*

*Morgan: What is Retin-A filler?*

*It's this stuff that Hollywood stars use to keep their face looking fresh... but it only works for so long.*

*Our conversation about personal care practices continued, and I could tell from Kyle's voice that he was excited to go back to receive botox. He was hoping to turn it into a monthly event to help reduce wrinkles. Kyle explained his process for choosing the correct clinician to assist with this, mostly what is their bedside manner and what does their portfolio of before and after photos look like? As we spoke, it was clear that Kyle was excited about this. When he becomes more excited about a topic, the more animated he becomes in his conversation, often incorporating humorous and well articulated voices and characters as he tells a story. As I sat across the table from him, I leaned in to pay closer attention.*

The idea of living for the here and now also incorporates Kyle's self-care and physical maintenance routine. While we often spoke of his plans to receive plastic surgery (e.g., a slight face-lift) or botox injections, Kyle also made mention that he has prioritized looking after his body since a young age. It makes me think, while Kyle orientates himself to the here and now by keeping his physical appearance in the present, self-care and botox is also a part of that peripheral vision towards the future.

Our conversations relating to the here and now component of Kyle's sense of self also extended to his experiences within and across correctional facilities. Kyle shared that when going into penal facilities, being focused on the present is how he begins to orient his mindset and stay calm. I can just picture the transport van on its way to the remand centre: cramped, bumpy, a poor odor, and cold. Kyle then begins to practice a disciplined technique to change his view to focus only on the present moment. The individuals around Kyle are moving towards despair at what is to come and how they cannot enjoy their thrills anymore.

*Boohoo me, poor me this, poor me that. I coulda, shoulda, woulda I call them.*

Morgan: *Coulda, shoulda, woulda?*

*Yeah, I coulda did this, I shoulda did this, I woulda done that. You know? But you don't, that's the addict in you.*

During these moments, it appears that Kyle does not really think about the past or the future - just the here and now. Kyle spoke of not dwelling upon the past in this quote, as well as understanding that he cannot go back in time and change his actions or the series of events that

led to this moment. Instead, he is sitting here and thinking - this again? Better start getting comfortable. I wonder if this present-focused attention enables Kyle to move through scenarios that would normally be impassable for others. Reflecting on my story, I would struggle to orient my thoughts and actions to the present if I was in a transport van heading to a correctional facility. Yet, for Kyle and others, this can be a regular occurrence that repeats across their lifespan. These experiences are often contextualized by the significant and traumatic events that Kyle and others have likely faced in their story.

As previously discussed, Kyle's relationship with crack was a darker period in his life and one marked by a sense of losing control. Highlighted across this period of Kyle's life was also a presence of death that one takes notice of when listening to his story. I am drawn to a field note:

*Fall was beginning to leave and winter was settling in when Kyle and I sat down at Tim Hortons for our weekly conversation. The black tabletop and red chairs stood out against the gold and red leaves of the trees outside. We were talking about Kyle's previous experiences living in Vancouver as a young adult. Kyle told me that he loved this period in his life, but tries to forget it, because it was also marked by a very challenging period where he lost some friends:*

*I lost two really good friends to down. I pretty much... they didn't overdose in my face, but overdosed to my face. I was in the bedroom, they were in the living room. They both overdosed. One died, the other one lived and she got brain damage. [...] it was this thing called China White.*

*When I got home that day, I looked up China White. It was the name given to a type of heroin that was extremely potent during the late 1980s to early 90s, causing unexpected deaths and massive rates of overdoses to occur globally. I cannot imagine losing two friends in this way.*

A dimension of Kyle's sense of self acknowledges that waking up tomorrow may not always occur. This understanding is based upon his previous experiences related to loss. Likely, there are others in Kyle's life that also share this sense of living and situating their life within the present: the here and now. Whether this piece of their identity is informed by the rising rates of drug overdoses or other forms of trauma and loss, it should be acknowledged by service providers during transitions. I hear Kyle tell the story of living for the present, but I also hope to understand how this may translate into a supportive relationship with service providers during transitions. How do service providers reconcile our oftentimes 'square world' view towards the future - almost a blindness to the beauty of everyday - and connect with those who may live for the moment, like Kyle? Should this occur, and if so, how many organizations think with these ideas when it comes to organizing their services?

Kyle and the present moment he finds himself within are one dimension of his ongoing identities. Throughout his story, and the multiplicity of his identities, I have gotten to know pieces of his sense of self as I write this account; yet those fortress walls remain high.

### **Phases of life Involving Correctional Facilities**

Kyle and I spoke often about how and why people go into and out of correctional facilities. Pieces of these conversations were his own stories of transitioning around correctional facilities and living within them. He shared with me that he has spent almost 18-years within

facilities across his lifespan, with his recent release in April 2021. He now is on the longest stretch of time without revisiting a facility.

When discussing what transitions mean to Kyle, he pointed out that these movements into and out of facilities are more so phases in the context of his life, rather than a transition. When asked what transitions mean to Kyle, he responded,

*Like a move... something within yourself. Yeah, your attitude or... your outlook on life. [...] Inside your soul. Your being, who you are, that's transitioning to something new.*

In this sense, transitions are something that happen internally - a moment of enlightenment and change. As we spoke further, I asked:

Morgan: *When have you had a transition in your life?*

*The day I started smoking pint.*

A significant transition in his life was when he started using pint instead of crack. During this transitional period, he felt something *switch* in his head. It was a moment in his life where he felt he regained control of his story and identities. This understanding of a transition was fundamentally different from those we use to describe going into and out of correctional facilities.

Kyle continued to speak about going into and out of correctional facilities and what they mean to him. I asked him if transitions around correctional facilities were similar to his ideas of going through the previously discussed transitional periods in his life when he responded,

*No, that is not a transition, that is something that you get used to. It's like a bump in the road.*

Morgan: *It's like a bump in the road?*

*Yeah, it's like, it is what it is. For some people it's life changing, but for someone who has used it as a revolving door for so many years, it's like: 'this again? Oh for fuck's sake.' You know what I mean?*

I always enjoy the humor and narration that Kyle weaves into his stories, but I was a bit taken aback when he shared this with me. A focus within the literature and by health and other service providers is often the significance of going into and out of correctional facilities for people, because it is during these movements that they are often linked to care, relationships, and resources. While this is not to say that Kyle's explanation does not mean transitions are insignificant or have meaningful effects for him, but he describes them as a *bump in the road*.

Kyle's experiences pose questions when I begin thinking with these ideas: what does it mean to become *used to* transitions around facilities for someone living with HIV? Is this a numbing sense, where you no longer become emotional in these circumstances? Is it in a sense where these movements into and out of facilities become a practiced or routine state, where you can predict what should or should not happen in this situation? For Kyle, I believe it is a mixture of these questions that are ultimately informed by his experiences.

The walls of correctional facilities have been *a revolving door for so many years*. Kyle challenges the idea that to go inside or out is a remarkable or even memorable event for



someone. The relationship he has to these facilities, and the street and square worlds within and outside, are a part of his ongoing story. Who Kyle has been, is, and is becoming cannot be separated from these experiences of going in and out of facilities.

### ***Going Inside***

When does one begin the process of going inside, or transitioning into, a correctional facility? Is it when the transport van drives through the gate of the ERC? What about when someone realizes they are being remanded when in the police holding cells (i.e., pink cells) in downtown Edmonton? How about when someone is first arrested and moved into the police vehicle? Or what about when someone starts taking increased risks in their street life? Arguably, one cannot separate these pieces or experiences of going inside a facility from another, because Kyle and how he makes sense of these experiences is the central piece that holds them together. A focus of this work is to understand how Kyle makes sense of his experiences going into and out of correctional facilities. When we spoke together, he shared with me that there are times when his crime rate starts to increase, which then leads to more risky behaviors.

Part of Kyle's experiences are his street life, where there appears to be the understanding that the rate of crime he commits will have its highs and its lows: sometimes chasing thrills occurs more often than others. Sitting across the table from me, Kyle shared there are many pieces that contribute to this experience. People might be at a loss of money, their home might be threatened, their relationships with other people might pull them into unwanted circumstances, or they are living with an addiction that controls them. Each time Kyle spoke about one of these instances, you could begin to see him reflecting on an experience he had personally or with a

friend: he would look out the window, take a drink of his beverage, and think for a moment. He spoke to me about the importance of keeping a pulse on how active or risky you are becoming. While there are many pieces that come together to influence the rate in which you chase thrills, when this occurs your risk of becoming reincarcerated begins to rise. Kyle shared:

*If I do get picked up, it's gonna be something stupid, you know what I mean?*

To *get picked up* - I understand this as being arrested and taken to police holding cells. However, Kyle's statement makes me wonder: what does it mean to do *something stupid*? From our conversations and my own experiences, to do something stupid can involve diverse people, circumstances, and responses. There are many actions in life that can lead one to doing *something stupid*, such as living with a substance misuse disorder that controls you and leads you to take more risks in order to continue using. Something stupid may also be an event imposed upon you, such as someone calling the police to your home because they heard the door in the hallway smacking open and close. Other things that may be imposed upon you include a concerned passerby calling 911 when you were hit by a vehicle that then drove away. To me, many things can cause *something stupid* to lead you to being picked up. As we continued our conversations, I believe that *something stupid* also applies to the people and systems that are involved within carceral processes.

The justice system involves police, probation, and parole officers among others. *Something stupid* might be the result of their actions or by your own hand within their professional realm. While Kyle and I spoke above about his relationship with his probation

officer, it seems that a piece of something stupid that might cause him to get picked up could be probation orders.

*Probations easy. Most people don't like it cause its built to fuck you over, you know?*

If something is *built to fuck you over*, it is likely that it can also be the cause of something stupid that leads you to being picked up. Another dimension of the experience going inside facilities is when Kyle is engaging and communicating with police officers or traditional authority figures, which can expedite or inhibit *something stupid*. The relationships that Kyle creates with police officers can be marked by 'challenging' traits, signaling a difficult time trying to communicate with them. Kyle has often called them *an asshole*.

Morgan: *What makes a cop an asshole?*

*They're belligerent towards me, you know? It's like, they have an answer for everything I'm gonna say. They ask a question and they answer it for you.*

As we continued to converse at Tim Hortons, Kyle explained that when negotiating a relationship with a police officer he regularly interacts with, it is often challenging for both of them in different ways. Both Kyle and the officer have diverse boundaries and roles when it comes to engaging with and understanding how people live within their street life. Kyle acknowledges this position of difference between him and police officers. However, what often helps to bring their relationship closer and improve communication is a respect for mutual civility. When we were speaking, I had asked Kyle what were the traits that made a police officer easier to interact with. He responded,

*There was no overbearing attitude. 'I am better than you' attitude - nothing. I have met a couple other cops like that.*

I often imagine my day-to-day interactions with others, and rarely do I have to deal with an *'I am better than you' attitude.* I can begin to understand the frustration of attempting to communicate with someone in a position of authority who does not wish to speak to you or has already arrived at the end-goal of your conversation. Thinking back to my practice, it does make me reflect on if I have done this to those who are incarcerated and receiving care. When have I had an answer for everything they are going to say? While sharing an experience of working the strolls, Kyle reflected in our conversation:

*That was when cops were decent. [...] Instead of throwing you in jail, she would try to help you before throwing you in jail - give you opportunities.*

Speaking with Kyle, he has shared that there are ongoing and dynamic relationships and interactions between his street life and the justice system - including people who have professional roles operating within this system. Sometimes unexpected relationships occur, and you can have a 'good' interaction with a police or probation officer which leads to further opportunities to develop your relationship with them. Other times you have a poor one that can lead to *something stupid* happening. Yet, once Kyle is picked up and has begun the process of going into a correctional facility, other mechanisms and ways of making sense of this experience begin to occur.

We had just had an unusually warm January month in Alberta, and much of the snow had melted. The pavement on the roads began to peek through the layers of dirty ice as I drove over

to see Kyle at Tim Hortons. During our conversation, I remember the look of surprise that crept across my face when Kyle shared an insight about living with uncontrolled substance use and going into a facility.

*We call it, not getting arrested, but getting saved. That is what we call it in jail. It's like, when you're at your lowest point in addiction, like when I was on crack. Every day is your lowest point. I had no gumption to do crime. You know, I was done. [...] I just didn't care. [...] I didn't give two fucks.*

Thinking with this experience where *every day is your lowest point*, I cannot imagine just how tiring this must feel. I have felt exhaustion in my life - mentally, emotionally, physically - but I have not felt like that in my life, let alone each day that follows the next. I wonder, does this feeling of just not giving *two fucks* come before, after, or simultaneously with Kyle's previous experience of waking up with *no money and no dope*? Sitting across the table as we caught up with each other, I remember how surprised I was when Kyle said this to me. My eyebrows raised and my pen stopped. A piece of transitioning into correctional facilities that is challenged by Kyle's experiences is that we often view becoming arrested as something that is often negative - which it is in many ways - but Kyle begins to open this up in a different way to think about, i.e., the idea of *getting saved*.

Kyle ties this idea of *getting saved* directly with the *lowest point in addiction*. It makes me wonder, what does the idea of *getting saved* mean for how we think about transitions around correctional facilities for people living with this illness? This was the first time I have heard of someone with a history of incarceration being arrested in a positive tone. It also makes me

wonder if this event should be viewed positively, or perhaps my own presumptions of the work I do within facilities is being forefronted here. I have had my wonders when working alongside people with uncontrolled substance use when they are actively withdrawing in facilities.

Returning to a field note, I reflect on this:

*Walking back to my vehicle after talking with Kyle, I can imagine when I am working in the Remand's Admissions and Discharges section. The speckled white, black, and gray textured floor of the medical rooms stand out against the gray and beige flooring of the rest of the building. Someone has just entered the facility and is going through the intake steps: identification, verification, pictures, showers, searched, talking to placement, being body-scanned, and now chatting with me. Sitting on the medical bench across the room, the person sitting in front of me does not have a face, but their heart rate is elevated, blood pressure decreased, and showing signs of dehydration. They just vomited in a garbage can, and I am walking towards them and giving them an injection of Gravol. Looking disheveled and in an obvious state of discomfort, I am quite confident that this individual does not want to be here at this moment. Far from my choice of words is that I am saving this person.*

When Kyle spoke about becoming incarcerated as helping someone during their lowest point, I believe it is important that we do not define what someone's lowest point is, but instead they dictate what that position is for them in the context of their lives and identities. It makes me concerned about the self-righteousness and perceived moral superiority of those who work within corrections and how the idea of *saving* someone may then become reified and made into what their expectations are. However, I also acknowledge that some professionals would

understand and appreciate this nuanced viewpoint that recognizes the time and care put into assisting someone through their withdrawal. When thinking about what this idea of being saved may mean in the context of going into and out of facilities, I am drawn towards the available opportunity and importance of creating and negotiating relationships with those coming into facilities with uncontrolled substance use.

Another dimension of going into facilities that Kyle shared with me was when he first gets picked up by the police and is on his way over to their holding cells downtown. Kyle referred to this area as the *pink cells* during our conversations. It was in the early fall when he shared that when you are sitting in the back of the cop car, driving downtown, you begin to have a gut feeling. This gut feeling signals to you three paths coming your way: a) potential bail at the holding cells, b) release from the holding cells, or c) you are going to the remand centre. I wonder, what experiences inform this feeling that Kyle describes? Is it a 3rd eye that Kyle has spoken about? Is it based upon your previous interaction with a police officer and the resulting method of communication? Or is it contingent on the feeling of hitting a daily low, where you just do not *give two fucks* anymore?

Kyle shared that once you leave the pink cells, you then make your way to the remand centre. Thinking back to when I first asked Kyle about what it is like to go into the centre, I was curious about what he would say. I paused mid-conversation, feeling the small break in the air as I readied my pen and my mind to listen to what Kyle had to say.

Morgan: *The first thing you think about when you go into the remand centre?*

*Depression.*

Morgan: *Depression?*

*You feel, It is so solitary. You feel alone. [...] It's such a weighted depression on you. Like you feel like it's the end of the world, because you're coming off the dope. That's all it is. It's the dope fucking with you. You're missing the dope already before you're missing anybody else. You're gonna miss the fun, you know? To go do whatever you want, even though you know down that everything you did was stupid.*

Kyle began to speak about some of the feelings and emotions that go on for him when he first goes inside correctional facilities. My mind goes back towards the diverse people that come into the Remand. Many of the initial processes are individual endeavors where you talk to administrative, placement, and healthcare staff until they arrive on their living unit. While I know he only spoke to his own experiences, I can just imagine the repeated conversations that may have occurred between Kyle and others as new waves of recently-incarcerated individuals come onto his general population unit after being in almost isolation for a few days.

Coinciding with Kyle's described emotions of loneliness and a sense of regret is the feeling of *'this again? Oh for fuck's sake.'* It seems that this idea of a revolving door is also accompanied by feelings of depression and loneliness from a loss of your freedom and fun. Kyle begins to feel this as soon as he starts to go inside. While this sense of depression and loneliness is relative to the sum of someone's experiences within correctional facilities, sometimes these movements into facilities take a larger toll on Kyle than expected. Thinking with the sense of loneliness and depression that Kyle spoke about, I reflect on the current effects of the COVID-19 pandemic within facilities. Individuals had to undergo between 11-14 days of quarantine before



heading to a general population unit. In these quarantine units, they are often housed alone and out for only one hour a day. I struggle to imagine the isolation that must be felt by someone, especially when they are actively withdrawing and cut off from supportive relationships. How do service providers begin to understand and connect to these emotions and experiences? Or rather, how do these service providers potentially disconnect themselves from these experiences of depression, loneliness, and regret felt by those recently incarcerated?

When going into a facility and being charged, Kyle shared that there is a legal aid component to this experience. Our conversations on this topic were brief, but if you are unable to afford a private lawyer, you would be assigned one via legal aid. However, if you had any cash on you when you were first arrested and it was held in your property, this cash would be put towards those legal fees - regardless of what you say or do. It makes me imagine Kyle heading inside again, there is the general feeling of annoyance and feeling down while remaining present. When Kyle is first conversing about his legal representation, he knows what to expect if he says he does not have a private lawyer. Others are not aware of the outcomes yet when they say they will rely upon the provided legal counsel.

Once Kyle has navigated the initial move into the remand, he then begins his life within a facility on a general population unit. I can just imagine Kyle making his way onto the unit. He walks down the long, concrete hallway with its white walls and gray/beige flooring. Wearing an orange jumpsuit, he walks by other individuals heading the opposite direction towards the health clinic or video courts. Carrying his see-through fabric/mesh bag over his shoulder, he walks through the two large green doors on his respective pod. Walking through the last door, the officer's desk is to his side as he walks onto the unit. The mint green seats that surround the off-

white circular tables and black legs of the seating area stand out against the white walls. Kyle just lets out a sigh; the show begins, and he breaks out in *chameleon* mode.

Kyle shared with me that he can change his colors and appearance to fit into almost any kind of social group, calling himself a *chameleon* in one of our conversations. It makes me wonder if Kyle's overlapping square and street identities assist him in accomplishing this performance. He truly is the Storyteller Supreme. My mind also goes towards how Kyle performs when we spend time together and converse. Picturing Kyle as he eats his sandwich in front of me, I acknowledge that this is one part of him, and likely different in many ways from when he is living within and across facilities. I also acknowledge that a large portion of his actions come from a place of survival, especially when forging a life within facilities. A part of this is creating relationships with diverse social groups, but there are boundaries towards what groups of people Kyle will create relationships with.

*All my friends are white. Okay, I have no native friends, no black friends. It's not the racism part, I am more comfortable and know how to talk with white people more than anyone else. I get the lingo and the slangs, but with the aboriginals, I just hate the... looking at them and going, 'that is so typical'. [...] I find it embarrassing and disgusting. You know, it's my own people, but yeah, no thanks.*

Kyle has shared multiple times that he feels comfortable creating relationships with people who are *white*. His practices towards who he will associate with and not associate with are influenced by his experiences and dominant social narratives that Kyle lives within. These

relationships also act as one of the first supports, or distractions, that Kyle looks for when entering a facility.

*I really try to get into a group that plays cards, ya know what I mean? Like, find the middle-aged guys that will play cards and play poker.*

As spoken about previously in this account, Kyle prefers to spend time and play cards with these *educated* individuals, because with them, one must *mind your P's and Q's at a poker table in jail*. I wonder if joining a group that plays cards when he first gets in is to begin counteracting the sense of loneliness that he feels. My mind goes towards how someone would begin to create relationships within facilities when you first go inside: how do you find a group of people, or even another person, that you can connect with?

Kyle also spoke about the idea of *morphing* during our conversations. In the context of what transitions mean to Kyle, he spoke of morphing as changing your outward physical appearance:

*Your outside doesn't transition, you morph... like, people change, you know what I mean? (discusses taking HGH) I can feel it working. I have lost weight... It's like to me, that's just morphing.*

This idea makes me wonder: how can Kyle change his behavior to match the actions of those within his immediate social setting? And how are these context-specific behaviors contingent upon his multiple identities and living with this illness? Perhaps this idea of morphing

- physically changing his outside appearance - that Kyle spoke about also relates to becoming a chameleon within a social setting.

*Like, I can fit into any group, you know what I mean? I get along with everybody, especially in there you have to (pause) adapt. So the chameleon in me comes out, and it is like 'OK.'*

However, one reason that chameleons change their outward appearance is to blend in with their surroundings. It makes me think about the previous experiences Kyle and I have shared when he does not draw unwanted attention to himself in social settings. Is this aversion to unwanted attention influenced, in some way, by living positively and the resulting effects that may occur to Kyle if people find out about his illness? How long can Kyle be a chameleon for, and how does he take breaks? Perhaps there is a period of time when he first begins by blending fully into a new social setting, but over time he can rein this performance back a bit, taking breaks here and there. He spoke to me about his love of beading inside facilities, and it makes me wonder about the congruence of this activity with the masculine social groups that he spends time with. I can just imagine someone questioning Kyle about his love for beading, only to be put in their place by an unexpected quip that is sharp, shifts away the attention, and adds humor to the conversation. As we spoke together, Kyle continuously relies upon himself when going into facilities and navigating social settings. However, he has mentioned other supports that are helpful when going inside.

One of the key facilitators that supports Kyle when he goes into facilities is meeting with health professionals who can arrange services and medications, specifically those who can make him comfortable:

Morgan: *What were the things that made it easier to get what you needed when you went into a correctional facility?*

*Being nice to that one... Thomas, he is my go to. As soon as I get in, I make sure I put a request in to see him. And he makes me get my meds faster. And once I have those, I can be more comfortable. My lotions, you know what I mean? That is what makes it a little bit more comfortable.*

Interestingly, it would appear that Kyle does not need assistance navigating the move into correctional facilities in the sense of what to do, who to speak to, or what he can accomplish. Kyle has done this multiple times before - *it's like a bump in the road* - and he knows what to do and expect. Part of this familiarity is engaging in a civil and polite relationship with Thomas, a health service provider, who Kyle is nice to. When I think of what supports and resources may be necessary to assist Kyle when going into facilities, my mind goes to somewhat 'larger' needs, like accessing a social worker or create relationships. However, what Kyle highlights when accessing supports that are beyond himself are those that can make him *more comfortable* and make his life easier. From this place of comfort, Kyle can navigate living within a facility on his own. He spoke further about comforts in our conversation.

*Yeah, especially because I get rosacea around my nose, and when I'm stressed it acts up worse, so having that cream saves me from having a bad breakout. You know? And then*

*he makes sure that I'm going to see Dr. XXXX right away ... it just makes things comfortable. And knowing that 'okay, that's out of the way,' I don't have to worry about that.*

Some comforts that he discusses are access to medications, specifically creams for his Rosacea. Every time we have met, Kyle has had flawless skin; there is not a single blemish in sight. It would make sense that this sense of self and pride in his physical appearance extends into facilities. Kyle acknowledges that he needs to see Dr. XXXX if he is incarcerated. Having his HIV care trajectory set up by a health professional as soon as he comes in makes it easier and one less thing he needs to do. However, the act of accessing HIV services within facilities may be something that if Kyle does not have to do personally, such as submit a request to do so - which has a high likelihood of being made public in the process - it is indeed something that he does not *have to worry about*. These ideas around how facilitators into facilities act to make Kyle more comfortable makes me reflect on my practice and others: what do I do to make people comfortable when they go into facilities and live within them? What activities do I do or processes I am complicit in that make people uncomfortable? In the context of transitions into facilities, how do I begin to align their care trajectories? Ideas of proper pain management, appropriate diets, and opioid agonist therapies come to mind, not necessarily as ideas of comfort, but instead as objectives of healthcare. Like Kyle shared, Rosacea is a health concern. It is our role to make sure his healthcare needs are met, which involves arranging care, like Thomas does. While some may view this as an item of comfort, and thus at risk to be taken away, I wonder what the effects would be if staff framed these small, yet significant, medications or 'comforts' as providing appropriate healthcare? Ultimately, Kyle has acknowledged that a role that service

providers can play when going into facilities is to increase the comfort of people living with this illness. I wonder, are there other ways to be comfortable within a facility, and what are these? How do we best go about doing this within the confines of a facility that is meant to punish rather than rehabilitate? In this line of thought, I asked another question regarding the supports that officers provide:

Morgan: *Is there anything that officers do?*

*No.*

While this was quite a short response, it also represents Kyle's stance towards officers' role in creating a space within facilities that is comfortable. While officers have the ability to make Kyle's time-served uncomfortable, he has no recommendations on how they have increased his comfort when going into facilities. This remark makes me wonder about the experiences Kyle has had with officers. What experience does Kyle reflect on when he responds with a quick, *No* in the context of this discussion? Sitting with Kyle, he began discussing his preferred institutional programming when first going into facilities.

*I really don't utilize most of the... anything that is offered. Even the programs, because I have taken them all in the Penn. You know? So, come remand, I will listen to a really good life course or self-study.*

For Kyle, because corrections have been a *revolving door* for him over his lifespan, it seems that first transitioning into the remand centre does not offer anything new for

programming, because he has *taken them all in the Penn.* However, he does prefer self-study programs.

*There was one program that the addictions counselor gave to me, and it was called Stop the Chaos... that was a good program. It was 19 chapters, and I did it in my cell, and it was just me. No one influencing my thoughts. I just wrote the truth down and it went by fast.*

Kyle has continued to share that his primary support is himself when going into facilities. In this same sense of self, and because Kyle will never let himself down, it seems that the programming that he prefers is also solitary. In this activity, behind his fortress walls, no one is influencing his thoughts. He can write his truths. Thinking about Kyle sitting on his bottom bunk - obviously, because that is the more coveted and respected bunk - I can only imagine what was written across the pages in those 19 chapters.

### ***Going Outside***

Leaving correctional facilities and returning to his life in communities is challenging to Kyle. This trajectory out of a correctional facility can be understood in multiple ways. Similar to understanding the experiences of going inside correctional facilities, the same questions may be posed to when the experiences of going outside of facilities begins to take shape for Kyle. I wonder, does this process occur once he is within a week of his release date? Does it start the day of his release or notice he will get bail upon the end of a trial? Does it begin in the transport van that takes Kyle to downtown Edmonton and drops him off? Or does this experience become reified for Kyle when he walks down the street and takes the first puff of a cigarette after getting



out? While I acknowledge that each of these moments in time constitute the total experience of leaving a correctional facility, it is with these questions that Kyle's experiences help me think about transitions.

One dimension to understanding the experience of transitions out of correctional facilities is how Kyle's sense of self and future intentions are situated and linked with one another. A piece of this idea that we spoke about when preparing to leave a facility is being honest with oneself and committing your actions to doing good.

*I just ... I tell myself, I'm going to do good when I get out. You know what I mean? I don't put 100% into it, but I try. You know what I mean? I am just honest with myself.*

Kyle tells himself that he will try to *do good* when he gets out. Sitting with him, I wondered what exactly he meant by *do good*. Ideas of connecting with friends and family and staying away from destructive relationships and substances that control oneself come to my mind. I also wonder if this ties into finding and keeping a home and your freedom. From part of our conversations, it seems part of doing good is to also keep out of a facility. What makes me wonder is when Kyle shares that he does not *put 100% into* this, and then states that he is just being *honest*. Listening to Kyle, I acknowledge that this sense of transparency likely recognizes his previous street and square experiences and how they interact with one another. I wonder, given the barriers to re-entering your life outside of a facility, is it possible for anyone to put 100% into doing good when they get out? What takes away from an attempt that someone gives their 100%? Do those *little demons* that we have spoken about contribute to this? Kyle continued

to speak about these ideas and reflect on the *something stupid* that may occur to bring him back to a facility.

*When I get out, I'm usually sober and have full intentions of trying to stay sober. You know what I mean? Most guys don't get out. Some guys do, but not all. Get out with great intentions. We all have this plan, and most of the time it doesn't go that way. Why? Because of choice; we self-sabotage.*

Kyle draws upon the repeated patterns of experiences that he has witnessed across his lifespan. In line with his intention of *doing good* when he gets out is sobriety, and inseparable in this plan is the notion of choice. It appears that Kyle believes the individual is the one who makes their original plan, and then the choice to not stay sober. To what degree can sticking to this self-made plan be facilitated or hindered by service providers and organizations involved with transitions? What is required, in Kyle's experiences, to stay sober? And how does this differ from the priorities or services offered by providers and organizations? While I acknowledge that there is not a 'general plan' that everyone who leaves a facility follows, the ideas that Kyle shared of trying to do good and stay sober seem to resonate in my own experiences. People share with me that they will no longer spend time with certain friends or avoid specific locations in the city. It makes me wonder: what does '*to do good*' mean to each person?

Returning to a field note, I wrote: *As soon as I get to my vehicle, I roll down the windows to let out the hot air on the scorching summer day. Kyle and I had just met at the Tim Hortons to have a conversation, and it was the first time we began to talk a bit more about transitions into and out of facilities. Kyle drew a support network for when he leaves the facility. When I asked*

*him what his supports were, the first words out of his mouth were, "Me, myself, and I." Leaning my head against the headrest, I reflected on our conversation. How many times has Kyle had to rely on himself to accomplish what is needed? How does he define what his needs and his wants are, and how does this compare to how systems may define them? Thinking about the supports in my life, I was brought back to reality when the pain on the back of my head reminded me where I was.*

I wonder, how do you stick to your plan, remain sober, and do good when *getting out of jail to nothing is the worse fucking feeling a human being can have*. I acknowledge that I know very, very little when it comes to experiencing a release to the community. I cannot imagine what living through a release like this would feel like: is there anger, motivation, remorse, or happiness? How does this feeling and experience change as you find yourself further away from a correctional facility and closer to your home (or absence of a place to stay)? What would you do to alleviate the worst feeling someone can have? And how do you make sense of these actions? Kyle spoke about how he makes sense of finding a place to stay during our conversations.

*Go sleep under a tree? (referencing panhandling/being without a home) **I re-fucking-fuse.** I would never be caught dead sleeping outside when I can go do something and have a hotel room in an hour. Right? I don't get it.*

Speaking with Kyle, he shared that he does know what he can do to begin looking after himself and find a place to stay. When he shared this with me, my mind went to the many different activities or routes that can entail to *go do something*. I wondered if Kyle could turn to

close relationships or support networks for a home when going outside, but this is often not the case.

*Knowing you have family but they won't even come see you. They don't call you, nothing.*

*Try to get a hold of you to help you out - not a fucking thing.*

What is there left for Kyle to do? I think about what I would do if my options were to sleep outside, go to a shelter, or take an opportunity from my street life so I could afford to have a room for the night. How would pieces of my identity influence the actions I choose to make? How would I, or others, make sense of this? It is also bold of me to assume that people with primarily square identities and lives could even have the skillset to *go do something* for an hour - successfully and not get arrested or harmed - and have a room to sleep in. Kyle's life is different from mine, yet there are many pieces of how he navigates barriers and accesses housing that make sense to me.

Kyle values his home and freedom, and it makes me reflect on how he feels when he leaves a facility. While he now has his freedom, he is missing the other half of what really matters to him. He acknowledges that if he wants to quickly obtain a home, he might have to risk the other piece. Throughout our conversations, it appeared that support systems involved with phases around facilities can be too slow or inadequate to meet Kyle's needs, so he looks elsewhere to make sure his shelter, finances, food, and tastes are met. This looking elsewhere can involve taking opportunities in his street life to ensure his needs and wants are filled. When thinking with the idea of time, I can just imagine the sense of urgency that would accompany coming out of a facility and being dropped off downtown Edmonton. It is the early afternoon,

and you know darkness will be here within a few hours along with the accompanying cold. A few hours is not nearly enough time to find yourself a place to call home, rather short-term fixes with higher risk activities are likely required within this time-frame. This situation seems as if you are racing against time and support services cannot keep up, especially if you would never be caught dead within a shelter. Kyle continued this line of thought in another conversation about accessing housing support services.

*I was never homeless. I just knew how to work it.*

Kyle told me this in the context of working with organizational housing supports to access a home. Kyle acknowledges the risk and has the skill set to put a roof over his head in the short-term, but he has also utilized support services (e.g., housing placement) in the past. Reflecting on our many moments together, I can envision the charm he must carry with him as he negotiates his relationship with his housing worker. He can bridge the gap between someone with a street life and those with a primarily square identity. Arguably, if you were respectful and professional, Kyle would be someone who a support worker would very likely enjoy spending time with. He is humorous and lively, telling incredible stories as he uses his hands to make somewhat dramatic gestures and bringing in different voices and narration styles. Kyle knows *how to work it* with his support services. Thinking about our relationship, he has certainly worked it with me. Another one of these relationships relevant to leaving facilities that Kyle creates and maintains is with whatever community supervision officer he is paired with.

Kyle spoke fondly of his probation officer, who he just recently ended his relationship with because their time was up. This connection and obligation was marked by a sense of *respect*

and transparency, as well as a mutual sense of friendship where his officer did not abuse her position of power. This narrative account has highlighted the relationship that they were able to create within the context of probation (i.e., *most people don't like it cause its built to fuck you over, you know?*). Kyle acknowledges that understanding how to protect his freedom while adhering to the obligations placed upon him during his probation is an important element of going outside of facilities. He appears to navigate this by creating a relationship with his officer that provides him with opportunities to not be breached, but instead communicate with her. I wonder how others living with this illness have managed to create relationships with community supervision officers, and what have these looked like? These relationships are an essential obligation to those that leave facilities, and as such they must learn to navigate them. It makes me wonder in which ways these relationships may operate as a barrier or facilitator to doing good when one leaves a facility.

Turning towards a field text in August 2021, Kyle drew a support network around himself for when he leaves facilities (see Figure 1). Kyle's sense of self and his self-reliance upon his own actions is, and continues to be, his primary support throughout his experiences. When it comes to his supporters, Kyle is his starting point and his repeated end point. Sitting across the table from him or walking alongside him, I continue to think about his experiences that forefront how he can always count on himself. However, from this place of comfort Kyle does venture out of his fortress to garner support from others in diverse ways and across diverse places.

Morgan: *Once you were released out to the community, who would be those people who support you there?*

In response to this question and our ongoing discussion, Kyle drew Figure 1. On the top left corner, you can see the marks of our future conversation that explored a piece of his street life where he described different measurements to sell thrills. Kyle's diverse identities come out into each one of our conversations. One moment we are talking about the programs offered by the Edmonton John Howard Society, the next we are speaking about the different hierarchies between people who use pint vs. crack. Reflecting back on the page, Kyle first began to speak about Cindy at the Network (top-middle of web).

*She has been a counselor at the network for over 20 years... Like, Cindy is my family.*

The network is an ASO, a local non-profit that provides support and services to people living with, or affected by, HIV. Cindy is someone who has known Kyle for over two decades. She is not just a counselor, but his *family*. I can only begin to imagine the history that they have shared together. I can begin to see the significance of their relationship appear on Kyle's face and body whenever he spoke about her; he usually pauses in mid-conversation and makes a remark about his love for her or that he should really call her. The relationship that Kyle has with her, along with the resources that the network provides, is something that keeps him coming back to the organization even though he prefers to not associate with its clientele.

*I think it's another reason why I don't talk to people or clientele from there. If I see them in public, I don't want them saying hi to me. In public and if someone knows who they are and blah, blah, blah, you know? Oh he goes to the clinic too. It's like, no, no thank you.*

If Cindy were to leave the network, it makes me wonder about what may happen to Kyle's relationship with this organization. He actively avoids clientele that access the downtown

location, because of their social positioning and the stigma associated with their illness. Kyle will not be seen with them nor wants to spend time together. Reflecting on all the moments that Kyle spoke about Cindy, I wonder how they first created a relationship together almost 20-years ago. What did the Network building look like? How did they act with one another? Who told the first joke and incorporated humor? I also wonder how this relationship has changed - or not changed - over the years. Moving around the support drawing, another support was Kyle's close friend, Samantha (top-right of web).

*Samantha, my best friend.*

During this specific conversation, Kyle did not talk at length about how his best friend supported him when he left facilities. However, Kyle had previously shared that when he was last released, Samantha was the one who drove down to Calgary to pick him up and take him back to Edmonton. In December 2021, she was also the one to drive him to the small town his mother lives at when she became unexpectedly hospitalized. It has appeared that to the extent in which Kyle may call upon someone to help him, Samantha has been there more often than others in his life. Sitting with Kyle, I have wondered what this woman looks like; for some reason, I picture a lively individual with blonde hair and sharp wit that matches Kyle's. Part of Samantha's identity is that she comes from a square life.

*She's like my only square friend. Well not my only one, but my closest one.*

Throughout their relationship with one another, Kyle and Samantha seem to have been in consistently close contact. He would often visit her at her place of work and they would text



daily about their lives or what activities they are up to. When we were first discussing what it means to be a square, it was in relation to Samantha.

*Doesn't do drugs. She's married, got two kids, has a house, they own a house... normal, ya know?*

Kyle has a close bond with Samantha that has spanned many years, yet their relationship is also marked by cyclical patterns: they come together and drift apart at times. As of writing this account, they are a bit more distanced in their relationship. Yet, that may change. Whenever Kyle spoke of her, I could hear the love that he holds for her in the way his voice pauses and becomes reflective. They have spent many years together across diverse places inside and outside of Edmonton. Even though they are more distant in their relationship right now, Samantha is one of the individuals in Kyle's life who he can trust.

*I don't hide anything from Samantha. You know, like, if I am in trouble, I let her know. It's like, she has my back.*

At this moment in time, Kyle may not reach out to her on a regular basis, but during our conversations he has acknowledged that this metaphorical door stays open, at least for now. The importance of establishing a trusting relationship across Kyle's experiences has continued to stand out for how he makes sense of accessing people and organizations that may support him as he lives in transition. Another support marked by a somewhat cyclical relationship is Kyle's close family.

*My mom... used to be my sister but now we are not talking. I probably still could, but I am being too stubborn.*

Across our conversations and embedded within the experiences and stories that Kyle has shared, there is a complicated relationship between him and his mother and sister. There has often been a sense of frustration around his relationship with them when in facilities.

*My sister didn't send me fucking shit the whole time I was in jail. But yet, they seem to think in their minds that they did something: 'what you answered phone calls from me? Okay - thank you.'*

From our conversations, the pauses and 'sighs' that Kyle introduces when talking about his family and their relationship with him within facilities seem to show a sense of frustration and complexity. He has appreciated their relationship with him when he is in facilities, but there is a sense of wanting more. This sense of wanting more has also extended to when he leaves facilities. While we did not speak often of their support and relationships in the context of leaving facilities, Kyle shared:

*Getting out of jail to nothing is the worse fucking feeling a human being can have.*

*Knowing you have family but they won't even come see you. They don't call you, nothing.*

*Try to get a hold of you to help you out - not a fucking thing.*

This experience stands out for Kyle when we were discussing leaving facilities. While we spoke often about his family and in different contexts, these relationships were often marked by periods of closeness and then distance between them. Thinking with Kyle's experiences, I have a

hard time imagining myself leaving a facility and half-expecting my family to be supportive in some way, but then nothing - no phone call or attempt to connect - *not a fucking thing*. While I am unsure if this has occurred each time Kyle has left a facility, it was a memorable experience that he shared with me.

The relationships that Kyle holds with his family is something that he values and loves, yet they appear to not always be there for support when he needs them. When he spoke about them, you can begin to see and hear the complexity in his voice, his current story trailing off as he looks out the window mid-conversation. Kyle loves his mother and sister. However, navigating his relationship with them can be challenging at times. These are relationships that he trusts - and continues to trust - but are acted upon only during certain periods of time when they are not in conflict. As of writing this account, Kyle had shared that he is currently in a period of closeness with his sister and mother, spending meaningful time with both of them during the 2021 Christmas holidays. I acknowledge I am an outsider to his relationships with them, but this brought a smile to my face when he shared this. We have spoken about how Kyle loves the Christmas season, decorating his home for it, so knowing that he spent it with family holds meaning to me. Kyle's sober friends are another support he relies upon when leaving facilities. I remember asking him

Morgan: *So, your sober friends. Why do you reach out to them?*

*Cause when I get out, I'm usually sober and have full intentions of trying to stay sober.*

Kyle reaches out to his sober friends when he leaves facilities, because he is sober with the intent to stay sober and *to do good*. This is in line with his previous ideas in his account,

specifically around self-sabotage. Questions continue to be raised around how does someone self-sabotage when they get out, and how may service providers and organizations support people to not engage in self-sabotage behavior? Being a part of and relying upon a network of peers that is currently not using substances - certainly those you cannot control - appears to help facilitate the attempt to do good when Kyle gets out of a facility. I think back to when Kyle shared,

*Addicts, you can't trust them. Me, that is why I make enough money, everyday, that I don't HAVE to rip off friends and family when I used to when I was a crackhead.*

It appears that Kyle begins to protect himself from those who do not have control over the substances in their lives by surrounding himself with *sober friends* when leaving facilities. Kyle can trust these individuals because their substances do not control them. This has been a recurrent experience for him as he shared his stories with me.

*Now, I don't even trust any of my supposed friends because of the addiction. Well, Mary, my best friend for 25 years, she stole from me. So, I just have no trust in anybody. You know what I mean? I have a camera installed in my living room.*

Kyle previously spoke to *little demons* that are working behind the scenes, guiding individuals' actions so they do not keep their word or potentially threaten Kyle's home and freedom. I continue to wonder how these little demons are created and then sustained - what types of emotions and experiences do they originate and grow from? Another piece is *self-sabotage*. In the context of his experiences, Kyle also engages in this self-sabotage, because he

has, before, gone back to using substances that controlled him. The Edmonton John Howard Society is another support that Kyle spoke briefly about.

*Howard Johnson is exactly what we are talking about. For people who get out of jail, they help you with everything: housing, clothing, welfare, everything you need. They will help you.*

Sitting with Kyle when he shared this with me, I leaned in a bit closer and took note. I was aware of this organization and what they are able to do for people with the experience of incarceration. Yet for some reason, I felt a bit surprised when Kyle shared this with me. It always makes me glad, or in a sense relieved, when I hear about organizations that have a positive reputation amongst community members and clients. Kyle continued:

*I have only been there once, but I know they would help with like... I always get a little card.*

I wonder why Kyle listed the Edmonton John Howard Society as a support for when he leaves facilities, when he has only been there once? Kyle has high fortress walls around him and dual street and square identities. So, what is the society doing - or not doing - that informs Kyle's understanding that he can always go back and access them if needed? Was it through the words and actions of community members that Kyle knows he can access support through this organization? How did this organization create this relationship with Kyle and create a sense of 'goodbye for now, but come back whenever you need us'? To me, this is powerful. Thinking with that *little card* that Kyle *always* receives, how does this literal door remain open as a

support? The last support Kyle spoke about his relationship with the Northgate Alberta Works office and its manager.

*Northgate is the best one... There is a lady at the Northgate Office. She is the manager there. She's like a mom... She is a Muslim lady who's got a great sense of humor, and if she really likes you, she will help you like she helped me.*

Interestingly, Kyle's relationship with the manager is forefronted as a support. Unlike the Edmonton John Howard Society, the first thing Kyle mentioned about this organization was the location's manager who was *like a mom*. What stood out for Kyle, and something that he was able to connect with, was this lady's *great sense of humor*. Integral to negotiating and sustaining a relationship with Kyle is engaging in humor and dialogue. It would appear that this lady begins to humanize the support service, creating an opportunity to create a relationship with Kyle. She is also someone who Kyle trusts to assist him with key services that help him acquire and protect his home (e.g., welfare) and freedom (e.g., reduced risk-taking behaviors).

Each support and relationship that Kyle described was marked by a sense of trust in a person or organization. The trust that Kyle had towards each support differed between the individual or organization in some way or another. In addition, Kyle needs to ensure he has appropriate and stable housing while minimizing the risk to his freedom. These two pieces of Kyle's life are fundamental to him, so when Kyle reaches out for support, he trusts - in some way - that that person or organization will assist him with obtaining or retaining his home and preserving his personal freedom. If Kyle puts his trust in a service organization to arrange housing for him, he expects that to occur.

Trust, or a sense of ‘closeness,’ that characterizes the relationships that Kyle has with supports may also be cyclical over time, as seen with Kyle’s relationship to family, friends, and organizations. Yet this underlying sense of trust and reliance continues to remain as long as someone stays sober and is not driven by the *little demons* that accompany uncontrolled substance use. This idea of a cyclical relationship, where periods of distance and closeness interact with one another, may also be thought about in relation to Kyle’s relationship and engagement with Cindy at the ASO or the Edmonton John Howard Society. Kyle is not continuously in contact with these supports or accessing their services, but he knows, and trusts, that he can go back and continue that relationship in a meaningful and helpful way. I think about the idea of saying ‘goodbye’ to someone, but not forever, only until you meet them again. These organizations and individuals keep their physical doors and relationships open to Kyle to return to, and that is a support that he knows he can rely upon. These supports might not be something that he regularly accesses, but he trusts that they will be there if he needs them. I wonder, what would be required for Kyle to trust another person or organization? What would this relationship look like? Would it have to be someone who has similar experiences? Can this relationship begin with someone in a position of authority or must it come from elsewhere? Does Kyle trust me in our relationship? Or while it is maybe not a question of trust at this moment, but more so a reason to not distrust me so far? Reflecting on our conversations together, one dimension of a trusting relationship is the understanding that one can step away for a period of time and come back again.

## Relationships

During our conversations, we spoke about the many diverse relationships that Kyle has had and continues to maintain with others. These relationships have predominantly revolved around his close family members, friends, people with street lives, and romantic partners. When thinking about relationships, one conversation stood out to me:

*Yeah, I look at where people are getting value in my life, and if I don't see you having any future value, then you got to go right then and there. I just don't waste no time.*

When Kyle first shared this, it suggested a black and white approach to structuring and valuing relationships in his life. I remember raising my eyebrow a small amount, taking a sip of my tea, and thinking about what may have happened for Kyle to create and keep this rule governing his relationships. When has Kyle wasted his time on a relationship in the past and how did this endeavor turn out? What does *future value* mean to Kyle in the context of a relationship? Is it someone who does not threaten his home or freedom, but instead contributes towards his life in positive ways? As Kyle continued sharing his stories, this self-protective stance became a bit clearer:

*I don't like getting hurt. If I'm gonna hurt, it's gonna be me who hurts myself - nobody else. I won't allow anyone to get that close to me. I've had these little close ups, like with Jonathan. I let him in too quick, you know what I mean? Sigh... Like, thank god I'm really quick at really seeing people who are users, you know what I mean? I can catch on real quick where their game is going. It's like, no... urch... pump your brakes, buddy, you gotta go.*



Kyle spoke earlier of the fortress that he creates - a self-protective mechanism in his life that has repeatedly been beneficial to him. One dimension of this self-protective mechanism is visualizing the plausible future actions of those *people who are users* and protecting himself from them. Many of the relationships and connections that Kyle has spoken about are constrained, and certainly affected by, a lack of resources, respect, and boundaries. Sitting across from Kyle, he has shared stories of people who have stolen from him or used him for his access to thrills. Thinking back to Kyle's diverse self-protection practices, he is hyper-selective of what individuals and kinds of relationships he exerts his energy into, because his home, freedom, and resources are often at risk.

### ***Family***

Woven throughout our conversations was Kyle's relationships with his close family members. Kyle has an older sister and brother, a biological mother, and an aunt and uncle. We talked at length about them - some more than others - and the experiences they have shared together. Many of these relationships were marked by a sense of complexity that occurs over a lifetime, as well as a cyclical pattern of coming close with one another and then separating for a period of time. Given that Kyle is selective of the relationships that he maintains, his shared stories highlight the complexity and extent of experiences with each of these individuals.

We talked the least about Kyle's limited relationship with his older brother and sister. Kyle shared with me that because he was raised by his aunt and uncle for the majority of his childhood, the three of them have lived somewhat separate lives from one another. This specifically applies to his older brother.

*There's no love lost between us. You know what I mean? We didn't grow up together.  
There's no bond, you know?*

It would also appear that this lack of an initial bond and relationship has been further affected by his brother's involvement in Indigenous gangs and social practices that Kyle has repeatedly shown to distance himself from. We did not speak often of Kyle's relationship with his brother beyond that this relationship appears to be complicated and marked by a current sense of distance between them. I also do not know where or how Kyle's relationship with his brother will move towards in the future.

Kyle appears to be much closer to his older sister. When we were discussing the supports that Kyle may rely upon when going into and out of facilities, he shared with me:

*Used to be my sister. Now we're not talking. Yeah... I probably still could, but I am probably just being stubborn.*

Kyle's relationship with his sister seems to be marked by the ongoing balancing of his different perspectives towards his relationship with her. He loves her, but it is complicated and negotiating his relationship with her can be frustrating at times. Months after these initial conversations about his sister, Kyle shared with me that he was able to spend time, unexpectedly, with her over the Christmas holidays. He stated that *we had a good time*; I remember smiling when I heard this. Across the stories he has shared, their relationship with one another continues to come close and then drift apart. Intertwined with Kyle's relationship and stories about his brother and sister are his early childhood experiences and his relationship with his biological mother.

Kyle has had a colorful and complicated relationship with his biological mother. Kyle was born to her, but from the age of an infant he was raised by others. Kyle shared:

*My mom dropped me on my Aunt and Uncle's doorstep when I was 1-month old.*

Kyle's biological mother gave him to his biological father's sister and her husband when he was an infant. Kyle did not share with me why his biological mother did this, nor what led to this happening, but for the next 8-12 years, Kyle's childhood revolved predominantly around his life with his aunt and uncle and their side of the family. This was a good time in his life, and Kyle had much love for them.

*My aunt and uncle were awesome people.*

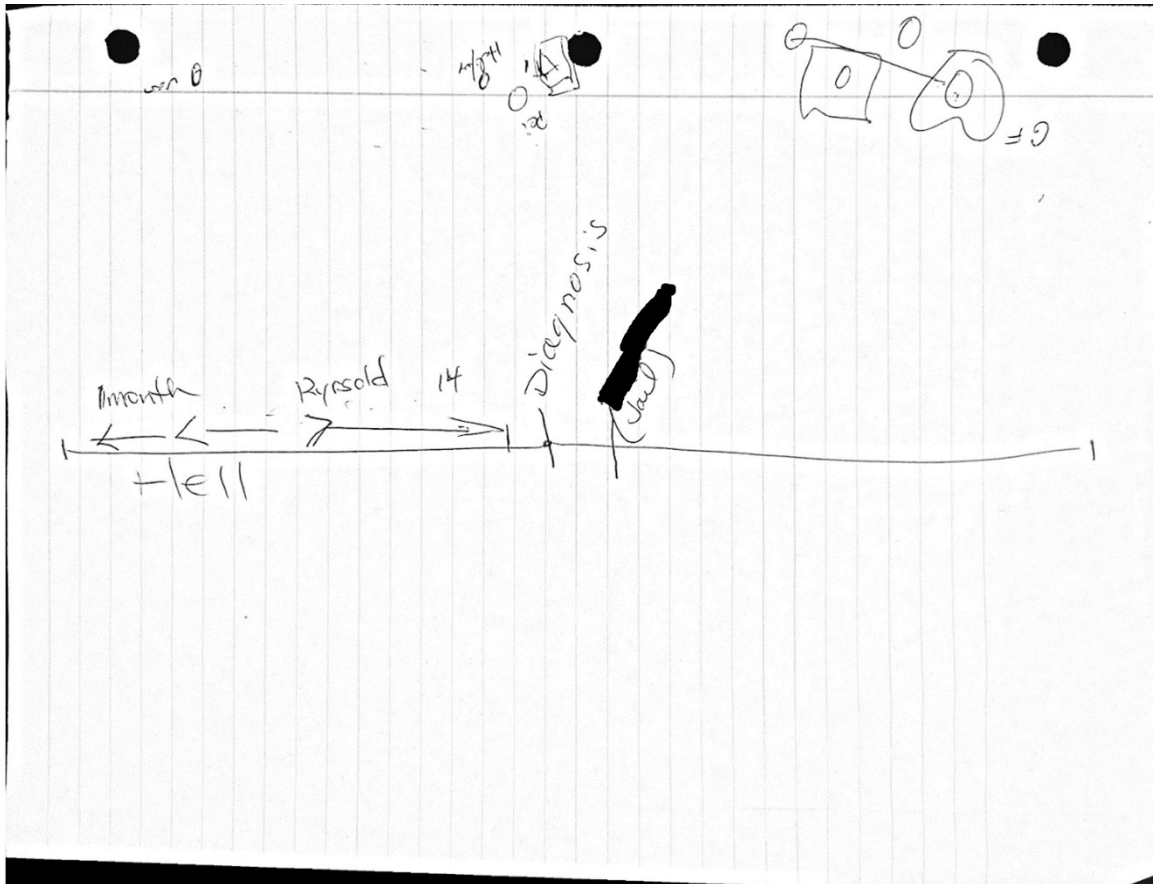
Every time we spoke about these two individuals, Kyle's tone of voice and the pace of his speech would change, appearing to glow a bit as he slowed down and warmly referring to his aunt and uncle as his mom and dad.

*I called her mom (aunt). My uncle was my dad.*

The lives of Kyle's aunt and uncle reflected primarily square identities and lives. They fit, largely, within dominant institutional and social narratives while deviating from others. His aunt and uncle took him in and cared for Kyle during his childhood. It was in early October that this began to stand out during his lifeline activity.

**Figure 2**

*Kyle's Lifeline.*



*Note.* Kyle's lifeline represents key moments in his life up until the present moment. He chose his initial HIV diagnosis as the starting point for further discussion.

*All of this is hell (refers to the period of time before the current moment). [...] my whole childhood.*

Morgan: *Whole childhood?*

*Well, there were a few good years, when I was at my Aunt and Uncle's place, those were a few good years.*

It made me wonder: what made these *a few good years*? Kyle's aunt and uncle were of Italian heritage. From our talks, it was clear that these two people shaped his life in a positive and rewarding way. He grew from these experiences. Kyle shared that when he was with them, his life was structured and he had responsibilities:

*I was in bed at 10 o'clock, awake at 6am to catch the bus, do my chores before I went to school. You know? It was routine.*

Morgan: *Did you like the routine?*

*Yea, it was normal.*

Chores took up a significant period of his time and this was rewarding. The time with his aunt and uncle took him far away from the lives and experiences of his biological mother and brother and sister. It was not often during our conversations that he would return to these experiences.

I turn towards a field note written in the fall of 2021: *Kyle and I had just met at a local coffee shop nestled in a busy outlet mall. The cold breeze of winter was starting outside, and he had just returned from a shopping trip where he purchased bright white sneakers. As his bags sat beside him, I listened as he shared stories of his aunt, uncle, and their side of the family from his childhood. He reflected and shared,*

*I miss that family though... they were good people. They treated me good.*

Morgan: *Would you ever reach out to them again?*

*I am so embarrassed at having not called for years. That is why I don't call... I guess my Uncle has Alzheimers now... (silence) and I don't wanna talk about it.*

Morgan: *That sounds like you come from pretty good people.*

*Kyle looked down at his iced capp for a few moments as his eyes began to well-up. He let out a sigh and looked out the window as we both took a moment from the conversation.*

Kyle loved and still loves his mom (aunt) and dad (uncle) from his childhood. Kyle would not slowdown in conversation or allow his mind to drift towards warm and comforting experiences often, but every time we spoke of his aunt and uncle a piece of his identity connected to his childhood appeared in his stories. This part of his life was *a few good years*, and he stayed with these two individuals constantly until he was 8 years old. Kyle still cares deeply about them, and yet, the stories he tells are not often shared with others. His life became more complicated and this good time changed when Kyle's biological mother came back into a primary caregiver role when he was around 12 years old.

*When I was 12 my mom decided that she wanted me back because that was a paycheck that wasn't in her pocket... So... she phoned my aunt and asked my aunt to bring me to the city. I remember, like, gripping that steering wheel, because when they got in the truck, like I kept running, they were trying to close the door and I was like... I remember running and putting my head and whole body inside the door and clamoring over my*

*aunt and holding onto the steering wheel while my mom and stepfather were pulling my legs.*

Kyle's experience of going from his aunt and uncle's home to his biological mother's at the age of 12 is something that I struggle to comprehend. He continued to discuss this change in his life.

*So, my mom and them where here (gestures to one point on a map), and this is literally an hour and a half drive (gestures to another point on the map where his aunt and uncle lived) to them. That is how far apart we were for all those years, and she wouldn't even come see me as a kid. Resentment? Ehhh a little bit (laughter).*

These experiences shaped Kyle's life and represented a metaphorical end to those *few good years* in his childhood, marking the shift towards the *this is hell* period in his lifeline. After Kyle moved from his aunt and uncle's home, he tried to call them from his biological mother's for the first time.

*I was like, can I talk to mom? (in reference to his aunt). And then my mom comes flying around the corner going 'that's not your mother! I am your mother!' I was like, 'no you are not.' Here is a 12-year-old explaining to this drunk that you may have given birth to me, but you ain't my mother... I didn't ask for that. Deal with it.*

Kyle shared only short pieces of his experience of leaving his aunt and uncle's home and going to his biological mothers. Yet in only a few words, it has stuck with me. Walking back to

my vehicle after Kyle and I spoke that day, I gripped the steering wheel and pulled it a bit; it felt different in my hands.

These experiences begin to show how dynamic Kyle's relationship with his biological mother is. The complexity of this relationship would continue to be opened up in our conversations. Specifically, their relationship has also been marked by periods of closeness and distance, both physically and emotionally. When Kyle left for Vancouver during his teenage years, he shared an experience where his biological mother reported Kyle as missing to the Vancouver City Police.

*She (Kyle's biological mother) made a big scene and reported me missing. [...] I was like, that goofy fucking bitch. [...] So they took me to Granville Youth Station. Thank god there was this other girl there, cause she knew how to escape and we escaped.*

A piece of Kyle's incredible life are the experiences he has shared with others from his time in Vancouver. These were both the best and the worst times in his life, and as we were speaking about this experience, Kyle shared what he thought was the rationale behind her actions when she called the police:

*Maybe someone mentioned, like 'Aren't you worried about him or something?' And so she had to pretend to be the worried mom.*

I do not know if Kyle's biological mother was worried or not at that moment, but Kyle doubts her genuine intentions to locate him. Their relationship, and the experiences that it has been built upon, have been and continue to be complicated. These experiences and Kyle's stories are filled with dynamic emotions, words, and actions. Yet Kyle and his biological mother



continue to spend time with one another, both inside and outside of Edmonton. The complication in their lives also extends to Kyle's street and square identities and practices and how these interact with his biological mother's identities. She often leaves her home in a small town in Alberta to come visit and stay with him in Edmonton, yet it can cause conflict and unrest at times for both of them.

*I always tell her, I won't change my colors for you. I won't change the way I live for you. If you don't like it, I can get you a hotel.*

I have a hard time imagining Kyle changing his colors for anyone, but when it comes to his biological mother, he will make sure that she is looked after. This may involve getting her a hotel or an alternative place to stay, but he puts in the effort to continue their relationship. It was in the summer months when we spoke about how his street life and activities can cause disturbances or increased friction in his relationships with his immediate family. I asked:

Morgan: *That sounds like that could be tiring to work with, too?*

*No, not really... with them, it is different. When it comes to like, my immediate family, my mom, brother and sister to me, it's just annoying. You know, it's like, I hope, I think that they should know different, because they've seen my lifestyle. You know, since I was 13 years old. I haven't changed. You know? It's like, 'Sure, yeah - the addictions have changed.'*

These relationships are complicated for Kyle, and the complexity of them also extends to how Kyle has seen his biological mother treated by her side of the family.

*Her whole family, they've used and abused my mom and just toss her aside once they get what they want out of my mom.*

I wonder if a piece of Kyle's relationship with his biological mother is built around trying to protect her from others that would try to take advantage of her. Kyle has repeatedly expressed his dislike of those who are *users* and his ability to identify them in his life.

*Thank god I'm really quick at really seeing people who are users, you know what I mean? I can catch on real quick where their game is going. It's like, no... urch... pump your brakes, buddy, you gotta go.*

This insight into seeing the how and why of the relationship building intentions of others extends to the complexity inherent in his immediate family and his relationships with them. Arguably, Kyle wants to protect his biological mother in multiple ways, because he has seen the way she is treated by her family over the years and has been taken advantage of. Kyle's relationship with his biological mother is complex and difficult at times, yet there is a significant piece of love that underpins this relationship.

It was the winter when we ended our conversation and I walked away from the Tim Hortons. Up until this point in time Kyle's relationship with his mother had been strained. There were certain experiences, such as visiting her when she was hospitalized, that caused challenges for their relationship and further annoyances. However, Kyle's relationship with her had recently been marked by a coming together and closeness again. It was New Year's Eve when he received an unexpected phone call.

*She's just like, 'get dressed, put on something nice and meet me at the River Cree.' I was like, 'You're in the city?' She is like, 'Yup!' So I went there. We had a really good time. I actually had fun there.*

Kyle *actually had fun there*. And when I imagine his biological mother telling Kyle to *put on something nice*, I cannot help but chuckle: Kyle is always wearing something nice. He is fabulous, and the ways he tells his stories of his relationship with his immediate family members - his biological mother, sister, brother, and aunt and uncle - have kept me wondering about their complexity. How does Kyle make sense of them all and stay connected over all these years? These relationships, marked by periods of distance and then closeness, seem to have some similarities to those that keep him connected with Cindy or some of the other supports he listed when leaving facilities.

### ***We Belong Together***

It was July 2021 when I first met Kyle in a mall food court. At the outset of our conversation, he shared with me that he was experiencing some current 'issues' with a romantic interest. Being naive to Kyle's life, I asked, jokingly, if he was thinking about putting a label on this relationship to make it official. As I sat across from Kyle, he took a short moment to respond. I thought I had said something offensive based upon this short pause, but he said, *oh god no!* He then shared that he has not been in a serious relationship since he was with his last long-term partner about 16 years ago. With a quick sigh of relief, our conversation then shifted towards another topic. I return to a field note:

*There was not a cloud in the sky as I made my way across the hot asphalt of the parking lot. I often find after meeting with people that I like to think to myself as I walk back to my vehicle. There is something about moving slowly and with purpose that brings previous conversations into my mind. I had felt as if my first talk with Kyle went well, but there were many pressing questions. My mind immediately went to how Kyle shared that he has not been in a serious relationship for almost 16 years. 16 years - that is a significant period of time for someone to be without a romantic partner, especially because Kyle appears to be so social. What happened for Kyle to remain without a partner for this period of time?*

I tried to peer a bit into Kyle's high walls during that first conversation, but I could not see anything, and I certainly was not invited in. Yet as Kyle and I continued our conversations, I slowly had more questions about this man that he met during his Penn time and was with from approximately 1999 to 2008: Who was he? What did he look like? How did he act? Kyle shared that his relationship with this man has now been set as a benchmark comparison for all future relationships.

*I kind of put everyone against him, and he's like way up here (raises hand up high) and they're like here (lowers hand).*

Kyle added a small wiggle of his hand for dramatic effect when he gestured towards the lower point - *they're like here*. I acknowledge that Kyle has expectations of what a romantic relationship should look and feel like. His partner was someone who Kyle trusted with a piece of his identity that is shared with *not a fucking soul*.

*I had, you know, Nick, like right away. It was like, 'OK I need to tell you something?' And he's like, 'What is up?' He knew a lot about it, because he was like, 'Well, what are your viral load at?' 'Undetectable' He's like, 'Good for me!' I was like, 'okay,' and that made me more comfortable and relaxed talking about it. But once that relationship ended, I haven't had a relationship since.*

The significance of Kyle sharing his positive status with a romantic partner, within the context of a federal correctional facility, is not lost on me. Although I have never experienced this I acknowledge the vulnerability in what Kyle did, as well the resulting relaxation and comfort in their relationship afterwards. What made this even more significant is that this man was, and is, part of the biker group that Kyle prefers to spend time with.

*Even though most of the boys would know me, it would still be... there's still gonna be those ones who don't. Who would make an issue of it... You know what I mean? So, it's like instead of dealing with the issues, I just avoid it all completely, you know? It's just like, nope.*

Kyle understands what it is like to live within these diverse social contexts, specifically alongside the *boys* inside and outside of facility walls. Kyle is respected and proud of his reputation, yet *there's still gonna be those ones who don't* know him. It is my understanding that Kyle broke it off with this individual for multiple reasons, but one was mentioned.

*He is part of the biker group, and I don't wanna be that dirty little secret, either. That's another reason why I left him. It's like, how do you explain me?*

Kyle is not someone who will be kept as a *dirty little secret*. As Kyle and I neared the end of our research conversations, my questions about his relationship with the man that stood above the rest were never fully answered. I still do not know what happened during this relationship. The man that stood above the rest - and the details of this relationship - are kept away in the halls of Kyle's fortress, because Kyle is reserved and protective of his close relationships in life. Yet this relationship, like his other intimate relationships, is marked by a sense of closeness and then distance over time. Kyle was reflecting on where he needs to go next in this life when he shared,

*I gotta figure out something. I don't know what I want to do, where I want to go, but it's like... I need to do something. I just don't know what it is. I keep thinking of my ex, and I know that he will eventually be part of my life again. I just... cause I want it so bad. I haven't seen him since 2007.*

Morgan: *That is a number of years, eh?*

*He got married. He named his son after me. That says a lot.*

There is a connection between Kyle and this man that has spanned the last 16 years since they have been apart from one another. Kyle continues to question what this relationship may look like in the context of his future self and life. He has also kept up to date - somewhat - on where this man is and what he is doing, stating

*I know what he does. I know where he's been for the past years. You know what I mean? I've had opportunities to get a hold of him. He's asked people about me. I know that because I've been told, you know? Like, 'Nick has been asking about where you're at,'*

*you know? And it's like I don't know what to tell him, like, 'well nothing...' you know?  
When you got nothing you don't wanna see your ex who has everything.*

What Kyle has shared with me over the time about this man is limited, yet Kyle has a deep sense of love that is palpable in our conversations when he speaks about him. This love has stayed with him. One of Kyle's favorite artists is Mariah Carey, aptly naming his hairdressing mannequin Mariah when he was in school. I wonder if the song "[\*We Belong Together\*](#)" by her may begin to highlight just a piece of the complexity that is a part of Kyle's relationship with this man.

### **The Only Chapter**

Kyle shared many pieces of who he is up until this point in his life. Yet there was one chapter that stood out the most: his lifetime career of working the strolls.

*To me, it doesn't bug me but it's part of my life. You know what I mean? It is the biggest page in my history book. It's the longest chapter. The only chapter that I would probably ever write about, because the rest is just... fluff. You know what I mean? Like, I loved what I did. I made such good money, it wasn't funny.*

We spoke about his experiences of working the strolls throughout our conversations together, but some days he chose to share more stories about this chapter in his life. I could see the excitement and pride that Kyle had when he told me about these experiences: the people he slept with, excitement he created, money he made, and the women and men he created a sense of community with. When Kyle spoke about working the strolls, his face would pick up and his

voice and rate of speech would increase. He would incorporate hand movements and gestures into the stories that he shares - adding dramatic effect. There is pride in the work that he has done, as well as a significant amount of fun and excitement. I am reminded often that Kyle lives for the excitement in life, and he has continued to do this. His experiences of working the strolls across North America is nothing short of remarkable.

*I've worked the strolls from the east coast to the west coast. Every major city. I did a tour. There was four of us. We did a tour, we went to every major city and worked their strolls, just to say that we did it.*

It was in the fall when Kyle shared more about the sheer amount of cities that he and his friends worked within and across North America: Kamloops, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Montreal, Quebec City, Ottawa, Toronto, Guelph, and Los Angeles. Among these people and many others, Kyle worked the strolls across diverse places and alongside people with different identities and lives. He would tell me these stories, always incorporating humor:

*I thought Montreal was weird, because you go to Montreal, and like, I thought I was hot - you know what I mean? I go to Montreal and there are these fucking models standing there with no shirt. Like fucking, are you kidding me?! You look like a Calvin Klein model. I wanna go home (laughter). But I'm getting picked up before them, because I'm fresh meat they're old ones.*

It is with humor that Kyle shares his stories and embodied knowledge with me. I can imagine these men standing on the street in clothes that reveal their physical assets: six-packs,



great hair, and toned muscular definition. Kyle knows he is *hot*, yet he sees them, lights a cigarette, and rolls his eyes, thinking *are you kidding me?* I wonder, what other knowledge has Kyle brought with him from working the strolls across these diverse places of his life? How has this influenced his experiences of going into and out of facilities and how he creates relationships with others? If I had to guess, I would think that it contributes to his sense of comfort and familiarity across diverse contexts and alongside diverse lives. His chapter of working the strolls has extended over a significant period of his life.

Kyle's career working the strolls spanned over 32 years and allowed him to afford the lifestyle and luxurious items that look best with his associated personality. He has always loved the money to be made.

*I started prostituting when I was like, my first trick was when I was 12. You know? And I liked it, because it was the money - I loved the money aspect of it.*

When Kyle shares these stories, a consistent piece he speaks about is the sheer amount of money that he made. I turn towards a field note:

*It is mid-December, and the weather outside has turned quite frightful. Snow, ice, and minus 20 degrees Celsius has blanketed the greater Edmonton area. Kyle and I met up at a coffee shop adjacent to a nearby mall where he was meeting up with a friend. Sitting at that little table off to the side, I see Kyle walk into the building. His glasses begin to fog up, so he takes a piece of his Louis Vuitton scarf to wipe the fog off. Wearing a Canada Goose jacket, he gives me a small wave with his leather gloves and walks over. He sweeps his leather bag off his shoulder and sets it down on the floor.*

When Kyle shared that he turned his first trick at the age of 12, but officially started at 14 years old, I wondered about how it all started for him. We never spoke about how or why these experiences first opened up for him, but from what he has shared with me in his stories, turning towards working the strolls was his own personal choice and not forced upon him by others. Yet I have wondered what experiences led him to his path of working in intimate and non-intimate ways with others. This chapter of his life was something that he enjoyed and it provided excitement and notoriety for him from a young age. Over time Kyle gained embodied knowledge and lived through diverse experiences related to working the strolls. He shared this knowledge with me.

*That was high track. That's where the high-end girls, like 2-300 dollars starting, minimum, ya know?*

Morgan: *So what makes you a high class?*

*You have a pimp, you dress good, you look good. You weren't a drug addict. You know, you actually spent the money for either school, home, your kids, or something.*

Morgan: *Okay.*

*Medium track was the girls who had addictions, you know, they were still OK and made good money... but their addictions took foremost than anything else: fuck the kids, fuck the husband, I'm gonna go get high.*

Morgan: *Ahh.*

*Low track were the girls who would suck you off for a pack of smokes.*

Morgan: *Ohh?*

*Yeah, those are the down and out fucking junkies who just didn't care. There's no more self-respect. Some even started on high track and then ended up on low track because of the traumas in their life, you know? They let themselves go that far, because they don't wanna, they can't deal with pain and stuff like that.*

We never spoke about what track Kyle worked but based upon how he structures his life and diverse identities, I have a hard time imagining anything less than high-track. He has lived with and through uncontrolled substance use, yet he has continued to reinforce strong self-protective mechanisms and boundaries towards what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in his life. Another page in Kyle's longest chapter was when he was working the strolls as a teenager in Vancouver.

*I had so much fun. It was the highlight of my life, because of the people I slept with. The names that I slept with. Like the people I've met... (proceeds to name celebrities).*

I traveled alongside Kyle as he told this story with me. Movie stars that I recognized from my youth took shape in my mind. I was in a bit of disbelief: I grew up watching that individual's films and now I am sitting across from someone who had a physical connection to that actor. I could not help but shake my head as I listened to Kyle share this story, my eyes growing wide. He shared that this period was both the *highlight* of his life, but also marked by when he *lost two really good friends*. There was a stark contrast between Kyle's expression now versus when he

spoke about losing his two friends. The sadness was gone in his face, and he almost began to glow with dramatic facial expressions when he started listing names of the individuals he had slept with. Sitting with Kyle, his stories about the only chapter he would write about took me to diverse parts of Canada and Edmonton. Many of his stories were also marked by a sense of wanting to build a community and look out for others.

There was an infamous drug den in Edmonton named ‘The Fortress.’ This place *was impenetrable from the ground with concrete, rebar walls*. The Fortress was also a place where Kyle would spend time in his teenage years. As he told me a story about this place and his role there.

*It was bikers. They kept everyone clean. You know what I mean? They were like, can you stay? Cause there are some girls who need your help. You know what I mean? We will pay you. I was like, sure! I was fourteen years old and knew how to doctor - it was the easiest thing, and those girls are the hardest to hit (laughter).*

Threaded throughout Kyle’s stories was the recurring pull to look after people who work the strolls and build a community among them. His role in the Fortress was even featured in the Edmonton Journal by an undercover reporter. Contextualized within the notorious drug den, Kyle was labeled a ‘baby face’ by the reporter. He even shared that he knew the reporter was a square, because she was only drinking alcohol rather than using other drugs. We continued to speak about his commitment and experiences helping those with similar stories. Kyle shared that this commitment extended to an advocacy and community engagement role as he traveled to Toronto and Winnipeg to speak to gay youth about his experiences.

*I used to always do speaking engagements about working the streets and stuff as a male prostitute. I love the shock. The look on people's faces, especially kids in schools.*

Kyle is a storyteller, and I can imagine that he had the youths' attention in his hands. It makes me wonder if he misses speaking to youth in this way. Does he miss the thrill of the crowd, of telling a story that leaves some mouths agape from disbelief? It was from his experiences of working the strolls that he also began to pay attention to how larger political and social narratives shift and affect those involved in sex work. One day Kyle reflected upon the Catholic Social Services Housing support he relied upon for a number of years in his youth.

*They lose funding so quick (referring to Catholic Social Services Housing for Sex Workers). Like, the left wing wants to help the hookers. The right wing wants to kill the hookers. You know, it's just like, and there's just no money in it. It's like, it's so hard.*

Kyle's stories highlight the realities of living as a sex worker: there are groups of people who acknowledge your inherent value and the sanctity of life and others who marginalize you and see you as less than. It was once or twice in our dialogues that Kyle shared if he was to somehow gain a large sum of money, he would love to help and provide supports to those in the sex industry. Kyle has experienced so much, both good and traumatic, during this chapter of his life that many would gain to learn a lot from. He shared a story that took place by/on Edmonton's High Level Bridge with me that, in my opinion, is traumatic; yet as Kyle told his story, he did so in his same lively manner.

*I've had two bad dates in my life; like, where they tried - didn't get to finish (chuckles).*

*You know, but first one was some black cab driver. I stabbed him in the leg with a fucking*

*ice pick - he was trying to rape me. [...] They (the security guards he ran towards) explained to me what self-defense was, and it has kinda stuck with me for the rest of my life. [...] I was, like fifteen years old. [...] I don't know what happened to him, because the cops took over and I refused to come to court to testify, because you just didn't do that working the streets.*

I cannot imagine what this must have been like to live through, but Kyle shared his resilience with me. He gained the embodied knowledge of how to survive working the streets. For Kyle, it was this experience that he learned what self-defense was, and that has stayed with him across his future experiences. I wonder what other knowledge Kyle has learned from working the streets that he has shared with me, but my lack of similar experiences has hindered my ability to take note of? The life that Kyle has lived and continues to live has been marked by experiences that have shaped who he is and is becoming. This relationship with him has also shaped who I am and am becoming. Turning back to a field note, I wrote:

*The High Level Bridge is lit up daily with different colored lights, such as red for World AIDS Day or red and green for Christmas. Late one night during the winter, I was driving south on the bridge. The sun had gone down and there were only the multicolored lights illuminating the road and metal structures ahead of me. As you drive along the narrow road, you can see the aged iron of the old railroad structure flashing by your mirrors. This rusted iron begins to mix with the rows of multicolored lights to create an illusion. Accompanied this illusion is the rhythmic sound of the vehicle's wheels going over the equally spaced concrete slabs. My mind went back to Kyle's story and the thought of seeing a young man running across the pedestrian*

*path towards the north side of the bridge. This bridge remains, yet the lives lived within and across this place continue to come and go, changing themselves and those they share a relationship with.*

Kyle's experience of being attacked by the cab driver was early in his career working the streets. It was with this experience that his other experiences of sex work would follow. I wonder in what other ways he grew - or did not grow - from this experience? How did it affect his relationships with his friends or other sex workers? Did this experience lay the foundation for Kyle's want to help others working the strolls? When Kyle first shared he worked the strolls, I was curious if he was still active in his profession. Yet based upon the past tense of his language, it seems he is done with this chapter in his life.

*I told myself, I would do it till the day that I just didn't feel it anymore. And when I was only just robbing the tricks at the end, I knew it was happening. Not robbing them per se, but just getting the money off them and walking away. Like, 'You're married, what are you gonna do?' Even when I was younger, if it was some disgusting old guy and he wanted too much for so little, I'd get the money and run - 'hey, you just got fucked' and run away.*

Kyle found himself in repeated situations where he would just walk away with the money from some old gross man who wanted too much for too little. After all, what is that person going to do? Call the cops? Kyle's lifetime of working the streets opened up before me through his stories. When he shared that he *just didn't feel it anymore*, I wondered: when did he first start noticing this feeling? How many years into this chapter of his life? What was the experience that

marked the first time he just *knew it was happening*? After you do not feel it anymore, can you come back to that lifestyle again? With these questions I wonder about how Kyle's experiences of working the strolls grew from his previous moments. Another dimension of understanding the longest chapter in his life is how Kyle makes sense of *human touch*.

*There's nothing I love anymore. I've lost that. That switch is like burnt out. [...] I've conditioned myself to just not let it affect me anymore. Even when I was a prostitute. [...] You get cold really quick towards that kind of human touch.*

Sitting with Kyle, I did not know how to respond to this in a way that felt meaningful to me. I had no significant response beyond a "hmm." I was preoccupied by the feeling in my hands - the weight and texture of the pen. My mind went to what it would feel like to lose that sensation when I hold my wife's hand, that loving embrace. *That switch is like burnt out*. I cannot imagine what this would feel like, let alone a lack of love in one's life.

## **Que Sera Sera**

*Que Sera Sera* - "Whatever will be, will be." Kyle and I talked briefly and intermittently about what the future may hold for him. Whatever Kyle would like to do, or whatever will be, has changed and shifted across our conversations since the summer of 2021. At first Kyle reflected on his previous years when he was pursuing an undergraduate degree.

*It was a four year course, bachelor of arts, and someday I want to eventually finish it, when I sober up. I just don't know when that is... I am not ready to grow up yet.*



As a teenager Kyle attended the University of Alberta to pursue a bachelor of arts for about two years. It was during this period of time that he first started using cocaine and seeking out more thrills in his life. I have walked across the University of Alberta campus many times within my life, so I can imagine Kyle being present in this place. If Kyle was to go back and finish his degree, I wonder what he would do afterwards: would he turn towards working in some role with others who have worked/are working the streets? It was later on in our conversations when Kyle brought up a sense of what he might like to move towards in the future, although this change was connected to sobriety.

*For most people, at least on welfare, it's like, the last few days I keep thinking. I'll go for a morning walk or something, and I'll see people go into work and like, I'm really missing that again. You know what I mean? It's like, 'Okay, I have to get a job.' I got to do something.*

Morgan: *Yeah?*

*So I think we're about to go to detox here for a bit.*

For Kyle, going back to school to finish his degree or getting a job seems tied to his sobriety. It was shortly after this conversation in August when Kyle and I met again. He let me know that he was starting to detox by himself. At the time of our meeting, he had not touched pint in a number of days and was feeling good, yet the pull back to it was there. This was the last time that we talked about detox together, but we continued to discuss the different ideas of what his future may hold.

Kyle shared that he acknowledges the effects that there are forces outside of our control that affect our lives. These forces include the ideas of reincarnation and that our lives are preordained along a set path. It was with his usual sense of humor and storytelling gestures that Kyle shared:

*Oh, I am writing my own path. I mean, like, I believe that everything we live is preordained. Our future is written for us... Yeah, I would like to find out who wrote mine and give them a swift kick in the ass - you know? A fuck you. [...] I believe in reincarnation a lot. So, I believe that like... before we come here we choose this life. We choose who our parents are going to be. We choose the trials and tribulations that we're going to go through. Not specific, but to a degree of what they are going to be. You know, it's like... (long pause). I must have been drunk the night I chose this shit (laughter).*

I wonder what Kyle would say to his previous self that chose the life that he has lived. Beyond a simple *fuck you*, I wonder what emotions would be conveyed and what questions Kyle would ask his previous self. I can imagine he would have a general sense of admiration and curiosity for his previous self, but then the questions would follow: why am I discontent with a square life? Why do I hate normal? Why did you choose a life for me that made things so hard at times, but also so fun and exciting? Why do I continue to self-sabotage myself? I also wonder what would then occur if Kyle could collaborate with his past self to pick his future life - the one that comes next. Kyle spoke a bit about how he would pick this future life.

Morgan: *If you could choose your next future life, what would it be?*

*Not on this planet...*

Morgan: *Any planet...*

*Something similar to this, because I couldn't do normal. I hate normal. You know, it's so boring. It's like that Groundhog Day at its worst, you know? It's just like... being an ant, you know? Being a little peon: back and forth, do as you're told, buckle up and go to work, come home... you know? It's like, no. No, no, no, no.*

Kyle would give his previous self a *swift kick in the ass* for choosing his current life, but he is also happy with how this life has turned out, so much so that he would choose *something similar to this* on the basis that he *couldn't do normal*. Kyle hates normal, and even though his life has been nothing but easy so far, he would gladly navigate another lifetime that contained the same amount of excitement. To me, this speaks to the inherent sense of complexity and meaning in his experiences and how he continues to live. As our conversation carried on that day, Kyle continued:

*It's like, I'm done. It's like, I almost feel like my movies over, you know what I mean?*

*Like, it's just... it's boring. It's so repetitive lately. It's like... I feel like Groundhog Day.*

Morgan: *The same thing over and over?*

*You know, I go out there and try to stir things up. Make some excitement.*

For Kyle that sense of excitement is key to his current life and story. Excitement - in its many different forms - is what breaks up the monotony of life and deviates one from the dominant narratives of how to live one's life. As we continued to talk about what the future may involve for Kyle, he shared that if he could go back and choose his life again, that it would be

something similar to what has occurred so far, but on another planet, far away. He could never have a normal life; Kyle's sense of self is the antagonist to boredom or repetition. If the rest of the world works the 9AM-5PM, Kyle takes the 6PM-8AM shift. When Kyle shared his vision of the future, it made me reflect on the idea that someone's story can be so unique and fulfilling that not only their life, but this planet does not offer them something new again. Kyle would instead like to leave our solar system to find new and exciting experiences. This sense of completion continued in our conversation.

*I feel so disjointed from humanity. It's just like, I just don't care. [...] I just really don't care what happens to anyone else. [...] If I died today, I'd be happy... I'd be alright with that. You know, my soul would be just fine. There's really not much I haven't done.*

Morgan: *Yeah, like content wise?*

*Yeah, I've done a lot in my life - lots lots (laughter). Everything that I could afford, or someone else could afford for me, I got.*

Neither Kyle nor I know what the future may hold for him in this life or the next, yet whatever will be, will be. And during our conversations, what will be has shifted over time and space. A key piece of what has made Kyle's life so enjoyable is all of the excitement and experiences he has lived across his lifespan: the food, people, relationships, scandals, and excitement are what has fueled his drive for life. Reflecting on these conversations, it makes me imagine Kyle's future.

I can just picture Kyle and his past-selves - countless previous Kyles that have lived their lives - in some primordial space, glowing stars and cosmic dust drifting around them. All the Kyles are scrolling through lists of planets on a giant screen. Kyle's current self is excitedly sharing everything that he has learned from his most recent life to a boisterous crowd of previous Kyles. The level of sassiness in the atmosphere is palpable. Some of Kyle's stories and their insights are new to his previous lives, but others are familiar plotlines. On the giant screen above the crowd of Kyles, each new planet is listed along with its unique environments, climate, clothing, social contexts, human-like organisms, and thrills. Finally, Kyle lands on one that suits his particular and elevated taste for excitement and thrills. Since he is the latest Kyle in a long line of his reincarnated selves, he gets the final say on where their next life takes them. Some of his past-selves have yelled out, "Don't pick that one!" With a look at his past lives behind him, Kyle says, *Que Sera Sera* and enters his selection. A loud 'boom' occurs, and it all begins, again.

## Chapter 5: Bruce's Narrative Account

### Introduction

I first met Bruce in August 2021, and it was during the worst drought Canada had seen in over 20 years.<sup>23</sup> The summer months were hot and persistent. Bruce was referred to me by a mutual friend who was an outreach worker at a local ASO, along with the words *you're going to like him!* Before our first face to face meeting, I had called and left a message for him to connect with me. I remember that first call when he did not pick up. As it went to the dial tone, it took me a moment to think about how I would leave a message that did not give away who I was, the purpose of the call, but also instill a want to give me a call back. I ended up saying my name is Morgan and our mutual friend said I could get a hold of him at this number. Little did I know, but there was no need to be nervous or worried if he would or would not call me back. I saw his number pop up on my phone screen almost immediately, but it was accompanied by a sense of anxiety - I could feel my pulse quicken as I became more aware of my breaths. This was short lived, as Bruce's excited voice expressed his interest and enthusiasm to be a part of the study. He let me know he would be coming into the city in a few days, and we could meet then. I wrote in a field note when we first met:

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<sup>23</sup> Bruce and I first met August 30, 2021, and would continue to regularly spend time together until we finished his narrative account in August of 2022. Over this period, we met 11 times.

*As I walked near the local ASO, I was looking for someone who I knew I would recognize when I saw them. It was early in the morning, and the heat of the day hadn't warmed up the asphalt yet as I walked around the building looking for Bruce. Unbeknown to myself, he was also looking for me but on the opposite side of the building; we were chasing each other without realizing it.*

*When I first saw Bruce so much stood out to me. He had short and slightly curled hair that was silvered with age and a contrast to his tanned complexion. He was well dressed and clean shaven, looking prepared to head into the city. His clothes were clean and without wrinkles, and the laugh lines on his face were indicative of a chronic smile. On his back and slung over his shoulder was a big black backpack and duffle bag. The duffle bag was full of fresh garden vegetables - potatoes, carrots, beets - to be used at the community organization's kitchen.*

We spent most of the morning and afternoon together. After we met at the community organization, Bruce quickly invited me into his life as we went to a local mall for him to run errands and grab a bite to eat. I kept smiling as we walked and talked together, showcasing my excitement. During our meal, we chatted over the informed consent and initial interview question guide. He was so open and engaged in our conversations from the very beginning, requesting that I use his name within the work instead of a pseudonym. He was aware that people would be able to potentially identify him, but that he has nothing to hide or worry about. These are his stories, and he does not mind sharing them with the world, stating that he would be happy for those that read the outputs of this project to know his name and experiences. This open and

sharing disposition towards the stories that he has lived and shared traveled throughout our relationship. While we spoke, I knew that Bruce's experiences were going to change how we think about experiences around transitions. We said goodbye to each other outside of his friend's home on the North end of the city that day. Driving away, I could not help but smile and think about how our first conversation went.

Something seemed familiar about Bruce that I had a hard time naming. Thinking back on that first day, I was brought back to experiences in my childhood and growing up. Bruce was like the people that I grew up alongside in rural Alberta. They were individuals who were familiar with farming and working in the oil and gas industry. He shares with them a body marked by hard work and a presence that emanates calmness - all mixed in with a bit of a roughness that is balanced by the kindness in his eyes and generosity for others. Bruce loves to be connected to the simple yet complex things in life - he loves a good conversation, gardening, being on the land, and the stillness of a quiet space. Part of these traits stemmed from his many years working as a welder throughout Alberta, but they were also highlighted by the time spent at his friend's farm Northwest of Edmonton. That first day, he shared that the time spent at his friend's farm was meaningful, but it also created challenges.

I return to a field note: *Bruce hitchhiked 75 km into Edmonton, and now he needed to figure out a way to get back to the small hamlet close to his friend's farm. During our first day together, I told Bruce that I would check to see if I would be able to drive him back home. To me, the act of driving someone home seemed like a very straightforward request; however, I was wrong. Due to insurance and liability concerns that were rooted in institutional restraints, I was unable to.*



*I was walking in the early morning when I called Bruce to let him know that I could not drive him back. Although he sounded excited on the phone when I first talked to him, the excitement in his voice dropped when he realized I could not drive him home. His tone changed and his voice slowed down - he told me that he understands but was really hoping I could help him with this. As Bruce told me he needed to go and board a bus, I knew he was disappointed and I was frustrated at not being able to help him.*

Bruce is a storyteller and storymaker. He has a stillness and wisdom that emanates from him as we speak. He has seen, and been, a part of many experiences across his lifetime. It is my hope that this account begins to highlight, at least, a small fragment of these stories. As we sat down together over the past year, his stories are accompanied by reflections informed by the passage of time; a sense of time that accompanies one as the years begin to go by as fast as some months. Alongside these stories was humor. Bruce would laugh throughout our conversations as he shared experiences with me that involved jokes, quips, and insights. One of my favorites is what he shared at our second meeting in the summer:

*You buy a couch and you change, everything changes. You are no longer a free man (laughter). You are committed to that couch. It is a stupid thing, but it makes sense ya know?*

Bruce and I talked about anything and everything together, couches included. When I think about what has changed me in life, I am brought back to the experiences I have shared with others and the relationships I have forged. Bruce jokes about a couch changing everything, is an analogy for life that I connect with. His insights about living with a couch in storage were

integrated with a significant piece of our time together: his ongoing search to settle down and find a place that can be his home. Entwined in this search for a home were reflections on what it means to be connected to a place that is contextualized by our relationships with others. Alongside this search for a home were Bruce's experiences of transitions around Alberta correctional facilities. These experiences of transitions were not always the focus, but deeply tied to his ongoing story and identity. A piece of Bruce's identity was the sense of an immovable object - he is someone who has seen much in his life and really cannot be bothered with the daily inconveniences of a life unfolding. Rather, Bruce would take a step back, crack a joke about his current predicament, let out a big sigh to relieve some tension, make a plan, and just continue his journey.

### **'B' Grade Pressure Welder**

Bruce's stories originate from the years and experiences that have spanned his lifetime. He is a storyteller and storymaker; one story turns into another as each is linked by an event, person, object, or feeling. Listening and standing alongside him, Bruce brings me into these experiences, connecting each story with the next. Sitting across from him and sharing a meal, I can visualize Bruce reflecting on his past and re-entering these streams of experience. Over our relationship, he has begun to show and tell me about the multiple identities that have been a part of his life. One significant identity is that of a 'B' Grade pressure welder.

Bruce followed in the steps of his uncle towards becoming a welder. His uncle was someone who demonstrated to Bruce what being a 'man' entailed: resilient, hardworking, and guided by ideas of doing good. Bruce respected him, and he began to embody this respect as he,

too, lived a life of a welder by trade. I remember the first time Bruce shared with me that he was a welder by trade. There was pride and a sharp sense of confidence in his voice. My mind immediately went back to my father, who was also a welder for many years. A connection was immediately made between us. I return to a field note:

*I visited Bruce out at Todd's farm for the first time today. The fall colors of the changing leaves shared the drive with me. After giving Bruce a call at the beginning of the long dirt and gravel path winding into the farm, he let me know that they were in the shop and I could come in. Standing with my Tim Horton coffees and donuts, I looked upon the wooden shop with its sporadic spots of peeling paint. I took a step over the wooden door frame and my foot felt the familiar feel of a shop floor built with earth. The floor no longer even looked like earth, but rather a thin dusting atop of concrete floor. The smell of dust and motor oil filled my nose. Looking around, the shop's MDF particle board walls were decorated with hand-made metal hooks that supported their different tools and spare parts. The ground was given shape and definition by equipment and the accompanying piles of spare materials, scrap metal, and oil stains. Bruce and Todd were working on a quad on the other side of the shop. I smiled and made my way over to both of them, navigating the paths of supplies and equipment. Childhood experiences came back to me as it felt like I was visiting one of my father's friends at their farm in rural Alberta.*

When I first met Bruce, I felt a sense of familiarity and comfort with him. Both of our lives have been impacted by the professional vocation of welding, albeit in different ways. I was affected by this trade from the experiences of my father, while Bruce lived and worked as a

welder for over 30 years. He first set out on this vocational path in his youth, with it originating from a 'spur of the moment' occurrence. Right after Bruce's older sister passed away from breast cancer, he was in a short-term position and did not expect to be in the city for long. Traveling on the bus to the Manpower office on Whyte Avenue, he got off early:

*For whatever time of day I was there, the lady came out, and I was one of very few people there... they said that a welding apprentice was needed at this other place. 'Yea, I'll take that!' And off I went. And that changed my life. That moment, the fact that I got off that bus to save my dimes, and that started me on my welding career. That was 30 years.*

Bruce reminds me that the paths we take in life may be the sum of many decisions as well as taking an early bus stop to save some time and money. Bruce thought he should just go for this opportunity and pursue a welding career, but little did he know that this decision would shape the next 30 years of his life and be closely tied to his sense of identity. The paths we take in life, and in turn our resulting journeys, makes me wonder about the lives of individuals who go into and out of correctional facilities: what decisions, seemingly large or small, led to their life course and how did they make sense of these decisions? As Bruce reflected back to this moment, he shared that when he first started as an apprentice welder he was sure of his choice.

*You accept it and don't question it. Don't worry about it. It is already outlined. It is decided.*

Bruce follows this ethos in life. There is a journey ahead of him, and while he makes decisions - seemingly large and small - and has autonomy, he is along for the ride. He believes

that life will not always make sense to you in the moment, but you should continue down that path and *don't worry about it*. Fortunately for Bruce this was a professional path that he excelled at. He shared with me an experience when he was applying for an open position. He told the hirer to call their boss and let them know that they found the right guy, stating, *I don't think I'm good, I know I'm good (laughter)*. Bruce had more stories marked by invention and his professional capabilities:

*They had this real exotic manifold system, which was cast. He (the night shift superintendent) pulled this out and couldn't find them anywhere. He said, 'You think you can do this?' I said, 'It might not be pretty, but it will probably hold together' (laughter).*

He shared this with me on a cold winter day as we sat at Boston Pizza together. The geometric pattern on the cushions weaving with one another and standing out against the white snow covering the parking lot outside. As we spoke together, his experiences would also connect with one another. A story growing in people, places, and emotions. A piece that he loved about his role as a welder was the thrill and sense of community that accompanied working on large projects with diverse groups of people. He loved the adrenaline that could also accompany the work involved during these group projects.

*I volunteered for that flare stack refit, and only cause of the height. We were 680 feet up or something.*

Morgan: *Oh my god.*

*Yup (laughter and makes an upwards movement with his hand while whistling).*

The surge of adrenaline, the height of a flare stack, and the ongoing sense of a community of workers moving towards a purpose. These experiences that he shared required a community of individuals to complete. Bruce fondly recollected upon one job he was a part of - each week the project organizers would hold a paycheck raffle (i.e., money deducted from your paycheck each week if you wished to participate). One week Bruce won this raffle, leading to him treating a diversified bus full of his colleagues to a night out in the neighboring town. I can only imagine how rowdy and excited everyone must have been. Throughout the night, he fondly shared with me that he was also known as the Music Man, carrying a *duffle bag full of cassettes... I was just known for having lots of music always*. Bruce's stories of being a welder, from retrofitting a flare stack to partying it up on a diversified bus, were often marked by shared relationships and a sense of community. I wondered how long it has been since he last worked as a welder and what he missed, asking him:

Morgan: *Do you miss welding at all?*

*I do it for that kind of stuff (referring to building the previous manifold system) and the comradery we used to have on crews.*

This is a piece of working and practicing as a welder that he enjoyed and misses: ideas of comradery, creativity, and building together with others. While Bruce can work solo and be by himself, it would appear that he enjoys companionship and belonging to a community. Whenever he shared his stories of being a welder, his face would lighten up and you could hear the knowledge that he held become expressed through his words. There was passion in his stories that he shared. It made me reflect on the importance of having a working identity that you are

passionate about - that contributes to a piece of who you are. Having been and continuing to be a 'B' Grade pressure welder, these experiences have been an integral piece of his identity and life that act as a filter for his ongoing life course.

### **Thriving with HIV**

Across Bruce's shared stories, many were intertwined with ideas and emotions of living with HIV, but the idea of thriving with this illness seemed to be forefronted. Bruce is in control of this illness. Woven into his stories was the ongoing idea that living with HIV is dynamic - both challenging and relatively simple at times. One of our initial conversations together was the story of how Bruce was first diagnosed with HIV almost 18-years ago. Bruce shared with me that he left his lucrative career working in the trades to ultimately save his life and get away from the rampant drug use associated with this lifestyle. It was during this period of time that he was first diagnosed.

In 2004 he met with and was diagnosed by an infectious disease specialist in Edmonton. However, the path to this diagnosis was nothing but straightforward nor comfortable for Bruce. It was in the late summer months when he shared this story. He first went to a medical clinic because he was becoming covered in ulcerative sores. This medical clinic prescribed him antibiotics, but Bruce felt that it was something else.

*Yeah, but at the same time, I thought it's gotta be something else. So I went to the STD clinic, and they said, go right to the hospital 'right now.' And of course, I didn't (laughter). And by the time a couple of days went by, I was much worse. 'Yeah, I got to go to the hospital.'*

When Bruce arrived at the hospital, he *was much worse*. I cannot even begin to imagine what Bruce was thinking during this period of time: did he have anyone he could talk to as he went from the medical clinic and then into the hospital? Bruce continued:

*I was really sick there when I was diagnosed. It manifested itself in a really, extreme way. Besides being really sick, my fever was through the roof. I broke out in all ulcerated sores everywhere in my body. I'm talking inside of my foreskin, inside my urinary tract, my eyeballs, my mouth - into everywhere... In-out everywhere. Ulcerated bleeding sores. Yeah, that was nasty. They actually took pictures... That was a life changing moment.*

The experience of first being diagnosed was a *life changing moment* for him. It makes me wonder what his thoughts were as his body began to worsen: how did he think about his past, present, and future self? Were there thoughts of his future or was Bruce orientated to only the present moment? In addition to when he was leaving the trades, this diagnosis occurred during the same tumultuous period of time when his ex-wife, Peggy, left him and took his little daughter, Amelia, to British Columbia. Bruce shared that he was heartbroken and confused by this, as he *had lost all the chances to raise my child*. It was already a challenging period in his life that was further compounded by his new diagnosis. Living with HIV, although challenging at first and intermittently across his lifespan, eventually became something else that Bruce could overcome and take control of. I can hear the resilience in his voice speaking with him - when he shares stories of challenges in his life, they are followed up by how he eventually overcame them. Bruce has an ongoing persistence to continue going on and overcome barriers in his journey. My eyebrows raised and my pen briefly stopped when Bruce said,



*You know, HIV has never created any problems for me at all.*

Morgan: *Really?*

*I've never had any backlash, besides I've gotten resistant with a couple of drugs. But you know, for 10 years now, I've been non-detectable. CD4 is always up there. As far as the disease goes, it's never created any problems for me.*

Bruce is in control of his HIV and not vice-versa. Throughout our conversations, he has proudly shared that he is consistently undetectable in his viral loads, and his CD4 counts are high. Besides that first experience of ulcerative sores all over his body, physically this disease has not really created further challenges for him. Sitting across the rustic wood table from me, his complexion looks healthy and he has a lean, muscular build, showcasing a lifetime of working in the trades, living in diverse places, and looking after his body. We began to speak further about how Bruce maintains control and thrives with HIV.

*Full disclosure, when I've had my blood drawn and I wanted to find out what my CD4 count is or my viral load, and like I've said, I've been undetectable for so long, it's not even an issue for me.*

Morgan: *Is it almost reassuring sometimes to have those numbers?*

*Exactly, and then, anything that I might tell somebody, I make sure that I know what I am talking about and know the facts and such. You know, I try to stay current with new developments and that is always a good part of it, being able to verify what you're saying.*

A piece of how Bruce understands and maintains control of his illness is understanding and spreading the evidence and science that has been developed over the years. Bruce understands that being Undetectable = Untransmissible when thriving with HIV. It almost acts as a piece of living with this illness that enables him to protect himself from the uninformed or outdated opinions of others. It makes me wonder, in what other ways does the science behind living with HIV contribute towards Bruce's life, and how does he acknowledge this in his actions? It appears that a piece of how Bruce continues to stay in control of this illness, and thus stay current, is by continuing to look after and prioritize his health.

*I do pay attention to my health... if I do have vaccinations come up, like pneumonia or hepatitis shots or anything like that, I go ahead and take it. I keep my appointments when they're made, and I pay attention and try to ... make sure I am taking my meds. You know? Keep my numbers where they are and I am happy.*

Bruce often refers to his *numbers* when we speak together. It appears that they act as a goalpost for keeping his HIV under his control. Bruce knows and understands what he must do to keep being healthy and living with this illness. A piece of this understanding is acknowledging the ongoing, and frustratingly small, barrier to maintaining his health status and keeping his numbers low.

*You know, the biggest problem I've got really, and it sometimes it really just perplexed me. When you had to work to get your anti retros. You know, you had three or three or even two twice a day or whatever. Even a couple of pills... you'd know that you haven't taken them. But this one pill, once a day, is just hard (laughter). Did I take it today? And*

*there are times when I don't remember. I do. I do know I took it today cuz I shook the bottle, right? But there is it sometimes that you don't know. So I try to take it around the same time.*

I remember I was taken aback a bit when he shared this with me. My eyebrows raised a little bit, and I chuckled alongside Bruce. There must be more challenges related to his physical health than just remembering to take a pill when living with HIV? What about going for his routine blood work or attending appointments? How about periods of fatigue? However, these never came up in conversation when Bruce spoke about the routine maintenance and physical wellness of his body and this illness. For Bruce, the ongoing challenge he would always share is if he remembered to take his single pill for the day. Reflecting back on these conversations, I am amazed by how far antiretroviral therapy has come in two decades. Bruce also acknowledges these advancements - he has lived and embodied them. However, there were some ongoing and dynamic challenges that Bruce spoke about often. These are the social and political challenges of living with HIV: changing public opinion, living with HIV-related stigma, and creating intimate relationships.

*Morgan: People share that living with HIV is a big part of their lives, in many ways.*

*It is, in the sense that you have to be aware of it.*

*Morgan: And it sounds like you control it?*

*Yea, and over the years, it does not have that big impact statement that it used to have in the general public.*

The wounds and ulcers that Bruce experienced when he was first diagnosed have now healed, but there continues to be marks left on Bruce's stories from this illness. Bruce has lived a life composed of a significant number of years. He has seen and lived through many diverse social and political narratives. One of these has been the ongoing HIV epidemic. While public opinion has changed in many ways, and the social impact has maybe been lessened for some, it still creates challenges for Bruce when navigating intimate partner relationships.

*It doesn't affect my life... no, it did at first. Makes it that much harder... how do you disclose to a partner that you're interested sexually? K? You know, that is a pretty crummy opening pickup line! (laughter).*

Sitting down and writing his account, I can hear Bruce's laughter again as he told me this story. Bruce shares a significant challenge of living with HIV - disclosing his status to intimate partners - in a way that integrates his sense of humor and how he makes sense of this illness. He has lived a life to a point where HIV-related stigma, and the lack of knowledge attached to this illness, is an *opening pickup line* that he must now navigate. Integrating humor into his stories always strikes me as a hallmark of his resilience. We were at a restaurant together when Bruce shared:

*It is obviously awkward if you're trying to meet a new girlfriend or something (laughter). That is a hard one to share right off the hop. You gotta be pretty sure you're gonna go one way or the other with that... it's really, you can judge someone's character when you tell them that.*

Bruce was eating some ravioli across from me when he shared this. Not only is it a barrier to first initiating an intimate relationship with someone, sharing this with someone provides insight into their character: how does this person make sense of what Bruce just shared with them? Do they trust - or perhaps another feeling - him enough that they will not immediately turn away from him? I cannot imagine what it would feel like to share this with someone and then have them turn away from me. Navigating these emotions and relationships by sharing your diagnosis is truly a *big muddled ball of wax with a lot of emotions*.

Bruce shared this saying with me, and I loved this expression: the feeling of soft, yet hard wax surrounding a ball. Impossible to just pull apart and make sense of. Instead, you have to take your time, slowly and purposefully move it around in your hands, and wait for the warmth to help soften the ball so you can begin to work with it. A dimension of working through this *big muddled ball of wax with a lot of emotions* is the self-protective mechanisms associated with disclosure that Bruce enrolls to protect himself.

*You never wanna give people ammo that they can potentially use against you. So, always guarded for that. Gotta be pretty sure about the person that you're divulging that information to. That's about the only concern I probably ever have: who needs to know?*

These ideas of self-protective mechanisms and who *needs to know?* approach to disclosing his status is a piece of who Bruce is and has been for over 18-years. I wonder when Bruce first experienced an interaction when someone tried to use his status against him: how did Bruce feel afterwards? how did he make sense of this betrayal? how does he now make sense

and filter out those he can trust and those that he cannot trust with his diagnosis? I have a hard time thinking of the rationale that someone might have to justify such an action as that.

*Morgan: You still have to protect yourself, right?*

*Always, yeah. But not as much as it used to be. Doesn't have that big stigma anymore.*

*You know, they've come so far with treatments and such that if anybody needs to see my numbers I can show them to them.*

The science behind living with this illness also acts as a protective mechanism for Bruce to fall back on, if he needs to. He understands the science and can even show that he looks after his body and illness in line with the science that he can speak about from an informed position. Although, I hope that no one ever demands to see his numbers. Bruce speaks so candidly about living with this illness, and how things have changed over time for him. The dimensions of sharing with others that he has this illness, along with other actions that protect Bruce from others, were spoken about as we shared meals together.

*People close to me that need to know, I tell them. But it's never been an issue... You know, I don't share my blood with anyone obviously. My razors and or toothbrush... and if anybody is kinda not up to date on harm reduction, I would likely speak up and clue them in. Tell them why and what for.... If I see somebody putting themselves at risk, I step up and tell them. I have no reservations telling somebody I am positive or not.*

There is so much that Bruce does in his experiences and interactions with others to protect them from living with this illness and acquiring other conditions that might harm them.

Bruce advocates for those that are putting themselves at risk, such as sharing injection supplies, because he understands what he can do to help others in the community that might not be as knowledgeable as him. He continues to live a life connected to diverse communities, and he tries his best to help others. Sharing his diagnosis with others is a piece of understanding Bruce's experiences of living with this illness, specifically his relationships with others in his life and across his diverse communities.

*There are times where I can tell people a lot easier than I can tell my family... whether it is closer to home or something... you don't know if you will ever see that person again.*

I wonder if sharing his diagnosis more readily with those that have a high chance of being a very small part of a single story of his is another self-protective piece. People come into his stories and then drift out at times, but some relationships continue to remain. I was visiting Bruce out at his friend's farm in the fall when we spoke about this. We were enjoying a cup of coffee and some sandwiches when he shared that one of the hardest moments was when he shared his diagnosis with his daughter, Amelia. Because Bruce did not always have a stable telephone that he could be reached at, he listed the local ASO phone number as his primary contact. She was not aware he was living positively yet. Bruce knew she would eventually call, the community organization would answer, and then she would know his diagnosis. She eventually did call and learned that he was living with HIV. He was scared that her learning about his illness might change their relationship, but this never came to be. Bruce and his daughter currently share a relationship where he knows about her life and the happiness that encompasses it. She has remained a piece of his life and he is happy with that. Yet for Bruce, he also carries with him

stories of living with and disclosing this illness that ultimately filter how he interprets current experiences. I turn back to a field note:

*I felt a sense of relief - my stomach unclenching and letting out a sigh - when I listened to my phone ring a few times as I tried to call Bruce. His phone was still in service - yes! Bruce picked up and let me know that he was just closing his eyes for a little bit outside of a Petro Can gas station on the city's Northside. He asked to meet up at a local sports lounge to have a bit to eat and talk today. As we sat down in the lounge, we were surrounded by the lunchtime rush of other patrons. Mostly men were around us and playing pool, drinking beers, and conversing with one another. Video Lottery Terminals were ringing in the corner and emitting their bright lights and flashing screens. The fabric of the booths showed their age, worn in some places and contrasting with the fresh layer of paint on the walls. I was reminded of some of the small-town lounges I had visited when I was younger. Bruce was sharing with me stories of living with his illness and the stigma attached to it. He paused and shared:*

*15-years ago, if this group found out (looks at all the Caucasian people sitting at the bar and then makes a hand gesture pointing out of here).*

Our conversation in the lounge of that bar was building off of a previous one we had during the winter. Bruce shared a story that took place many years ago in a similar setting. A fight was occurring, and Bruce was bleeding a bit. He reached out, grabbed a bottle, broke it, and yelled out into the crowd, *I'm HIV positive and I'll make you all fucking bleed!* My eyes widened and I leaned in, wondering what happened next. When he yelled this, the result was like when you sprinkle pepper on top of a glass of water, and then add a single *drop of oil*. Everyone in the



bar immediately moved away from him and distanced themselves. This was an extreme public display of HIV-related stigma that has continued to remain for those living with this illness.

What happened to Bruce after this experience? How has the way he thought about it changed over time? How did he protect himself from others during that experience? While I do not know the answers to these questions, his experiences of living with this illness and making sense of his social relations is complex. Another dimension of his experiences are the stories of loss that resonate across the living positively community.

*Being HIV positive, you're guaranteed to lose 3-4 people you know each year... we had a shared connection.*

I have experienced the loss of my loved ones and friends, yet I cannot imagine losing people close to me at such a pace. Yet for Bruce, this has been a reality. Year after year, season after season, those that he has had relationships with - both close and distant - have left their physical form. Bruce has had a connection with these individuals, yet that has shifted in its shapes over time.

*Morgan: Is there a connection that comes with being positive?*

*Not so much anymore. There are more restrictions and cutbacks.*

When we talked further, these restrictions and cutbacks were due to the recent limitations that COVID-19 has placed on individual relationships, but also due to medical advancements. Bruce does not need to go in as often to see the clinical team to receive treatment and participate in routine therapy. Bruce shared that they are *not drawn together with desperation anymore*.

*There is no fatalism... it is not a bad thing, but it just happens.* He acknowledges that there is not the shared *fatalism* anymore between people living with this illness, yet there is still a connection with one another, albeit smaller than it was previously. I have continued to wonder how Bruce feels about this. He is happy about the advancements in treatment, but I wonder if he misses the closer connections that might have occurred previously. Bruce showcases the ideas that to live with HIV is something that he has in common with others, it is one piece of his identity. And for Bruce, this dimension of his being and becoming appears to be something that he is now in control of and content with, sharing:

*I'd rather have this than anything else. It is nothing. Just one pill a day.*

## **Relationships**

Across Bruce's life and the stories, numerous relationships and people have been forefronted. Bruce shared stories about living with and alongside family and friends throughout diverse places in Alberta. These have ranged from Todd's farm and remote project sites to urban landscapes. These stories have been marked by an ongoing sense of Bruce's self: the ethos of honesty and emanating good karma into the world.

*I'd like to consider myself a very honest person... I don't have to look over my shoulder. I don't fear walking down the street. If I have to walk with fear, I am not going to join that crowd... I will accept the consequences of it.*

Bruce shared that he *never want[s] people to think I am taking advantage of them.* Bruce is honest and does not take advantage of others in life, and in turn, he can walk through his life

without fear of others. He shared a story that exemplified these values. There was a man who he met outside of the hospital, clearly standing out of place. The individual just had a collapsed lung fixed, was with no money, and needed to get back to his home in Saskatchewan. The man had a look and presence that was familiar to Bruce: he was being honest about his situation. Instead of sending the man to the shelter to try and find transportation, Bruce bought him a bus ticket and sent him on his way. This sense of wanting to do good and be truthful in life also relates to his ethos of believing in good karma.

*I believe in good karma... you get it like 10-fold back, ya know? You treat somebody with kindness and it comes back bigger. It's always good for ya.*

These are key pieces that make up his diverse identities: a professional 'B' Grade Pressure welder, a father, or a man living with HIV among others. These are pieces to his guiding ethos when creating and maintaining relationships with others. A period of time in his life when he met his ex-wife also serves as a guiding filter in which he makes sense of his current and future experiences with others.

### ***Her First Victim***

Bruce and I had met up to grab some food together in downtown Edmonton, just east of the ASO. The winter was beginning to settle in for the season when Bruce left his friend's small farm Northwest of Edmonton and came into the city. Conversing together, he showed me a little scar on his right elbow and shared a story. Around 30 years ago, Bruce had slipped on the ice, fallen, and cut it open. Within a short period of time, it blew up with a Staph infection. He had to immediately head into the hospital to have it looked at, where they started him on intravenous

antibiotics and admitted him. Little did he know, but his life course was about to be changed. He was lying in a hospital bed and sharing a room with a few other patients when he met Peggy:

*That is when I met her mom... my daughter's mom... she was getting her appendix out and she was twirling my hair.*

In the same room, just one bed over, waiting to have her appendix taken out, was his future wife and then ex-wife, Peggy. Bruce ultimately *fell for her trap*. Just as she was twirling his hair in his hospital bed, their lives were about to become intertwined with one another and change. While laughing, Bruce shared that everything in his life changed from that moment even though he cannot see the now faded and little white scar on his elbow that started it all: *I can't even see the damn thing!* Together with Peggy, they had their daughter - Amelia. It was with a small chuckle and reflection that he shared: *what she seen with me was, 'oh - baby daddy!' (laughter).*

Unfortunately, it was not long after Peggy and Bruce had their daughter that she left unexpectedly to British Columbia, taking with her Amelia. This hit Bruce hard, and it marked the end of their relationship.

*Most of my friends, the ones who had a family life... they all had their houses and this and that... it just never happened that way for me... it was when the mother of my first daughter just bounced on me, and you know all the stuff I went through to try to heal me - anything at all, but nothing. And I think that just soiled it forever.*

Morgan: *That doesn't go away.*

*Never, no... you know, I was only a biological father and not a dad, so that is what bothers me most. It took me a while to get over that and be able to go there.*

Bruce's life changed from this experience, and it *took me a while to get over that and be able to go there*. These stories had an ingrained sense of loss and frustration, not so much towards no longer having Peggy in his life, but more so not being with his daughter. I have no children of my own, and I cannot imagine what it would feel like to go through something like this. Yet Bruce is resilient and integrates humor into his stories. He visited that small town in British Columbia years ago and met his daughter's husband at the time. The two of them were speaking together when Bruce was introduced to another person:

*He said to one person, 'this is Amelia's dad.' ... And the guy said, 'Oh, one of Peggy's victims?' Dan said, 'No, he is Peggy's FIRST victim!' (laughter).*

Bruce's laughter filled the air when he shared that story. I could hear the satisfaction in his voice when he was referred to as 'her first victim.' This period of time was both rewarding in the form of his daughter, but extremely challenging for Bruce. These experiences filter how he makes sense of his ongoing life and the relationships he creates and maintains. One relationship, and a key dimension of who he is, was marked by a deep sense of love and admiration. That was, and is, Amelia.

### ***Amelia***

Bruce and I spoke together about many different relationships and people that have been a piece of his life, but his relationship with his daughter was always different and forefronted.

Amelia is about 30-years old now and has a little daughter of her own. She works as a nurse in a small town in British Columbia. Across our conversations, her name would often come up, and Bruce's face would light up - his small wrinkle-lines moving closer together as he spoke about her and their relationship. You could hear the happiness and excitement in his voice, sharing that he feels he can be honest and truthful with her in a way that he has not been with others.

*I know she is my daughter. I didn't get to raise her. Nothing I could have done to change that. It tore my heart out at the time, but we reconnected. To be able to talk to her about anything, no hesitations... just honesty.*

Bruce loves his daughter. He was unable to be there for her as she grew up, but that was out of his control. The divorce proceedings with his ex-wife were doomed from the start: they were in a different province and in obscure and often unreachable places by him.

*Yeah, I had lost all the chances to raise my child. I went through the courts... doing the best... and just got screwed. You know, the conditions they impose were so extremely favorable on their side, that they were just going to make my life hell.*

Bruce tried to be there to raise his daughter, but there were forces that were outside of his control that he was going up against. I could see the frustration on his sun-tanned face when he shared with me how he lost custody of Amelia, and that has always stayed with him. His eyes began to glisten as he spoke, letting out a sigh. While they have contacted with each other in the last year, he has been worried about her in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. He wants her to be safe and happy. Their relationship with one another continues, regardless of time or

distance. This is a relationship that sustains Bruce and continues to create meaning for him. I reflect in a field note:

*I was invited into Todd's trailer that Bruce was also living in. Todd had headed out to a local town for some appointments with his mother, leaving Bruce and I alone to talk. Bruce opened up a relationship with me, and also the doors of his home. I was greeted by multiple sources of warmth and comfort as I sat down at the kitchen table with Bruce: the cats were at my feet, the pot-bellied stove was roaring in the entrance, and the coffee was still hot. Bruce and I talked and talked - emotions, ideas, and people drifting into and out of the conversations. Relationships with those still in our lives - the ones we love - were spoken about, juxtaposed by the memories of the ones he had also lost. Wilson, Archie, and Suki (the three cats) moved in and around my feet and took their rightful places on the couch and chairs. I left the farm that day feeling energized.*

Bruce opens himself and creates relationships with others, sustaining and putting energy into those that he finds meaningful. I remember the warmth I felt that day, both physically and emotionally, after spending time with Bruce in his home. To me, it appears that this same sense of warmth extends to the stories that Bruce shares about his daughter. I can hear the warmth, love, and happiness that accompany their relationship. These stories are based upon the experiences he has recently had with her, but also the ones when he was involved in her life before they were separated.

*She was fine by herself. Everything was organized. You know, the doll cups all had two raisins in her cups. She never needed anything... there was family night, popcorn, movie,*

*with the fire going behind us. And then, you'd look for her (looks around), and she went to bed on her own.*

Bruce is ultimately happy with how things have turned out with their relationship and reflects on these memories. He is in contact with her and stays in touch. This relationship with Amelia is one that continues to stay close to his heart, and he knows he can reach out to her to speak. She is a part of his life and that is what matters to him. Bruce is proud of what she has become and her future:

*My daughter, she might have a couple drinks every now and then... she doesn't drink.*

*She doesn't do drugs. She smokes cigarettes... but for being street in there, she is that!*

*She doesn't have no addiction issues at all and she is happy to be a mom.*

Bruce loves his daughter. She is a piece of who he is, and he continues to speak of her with love and admiration. Another relationship that he would only speak about with the utmost love was with his older sister, Jennifer.

### ***Jennifer***

Bruce shared with me stories about his immediate family, specifically his three brothers, older sister, mother, and father. These relationships were marked by significant experiences that disrupted their closeness with one another, but some of these people and relationships were spoken about with love and admiration. While Bruce spoke fondly of his mother who left their family - to save her life and flee from his abusive father - at a young age, his eyes would light up when sharing stories about his older sister, Jennifer.



*This smart sister, who happened to be our mother...*

Morgan: *Did she look after you guys?*

*Absolutely. She was the glue that held the family together.*

Whenever we spoke about Bruce's immediate family, his older sister's name would usually come up in some form or another. She had a motherly role, and Bruce looked up to her as she took care of their family.

*I walked towards the older dining table - small pieces of its laminate cover peeling off - and pulled back a dark wooden chair to have a seat in Todd's trailer. Diverse ashtrays from different decades decorated the table that was adorned by a few beer cans. I cleared a small space to make room for my notebook and coffee.*

*How was the drive out?*

Morgan: *Oh it was gorgeous outside here.*

*Yeah, I'd wish you'd see more of the lake when you come up here.*

*Sitting down across from Bruce, the faint smell of cigarettes filled the air and I felt comforted; reminded of visiting my father's shop when I was younger. (Field Note)*

Familial relationships and experiences were a piece of our time together. Both of us reflect on these pieces of who we are and are becoming. Jennifer was a key support in his family. She was instrumental in Bruce's life and a loving support system as he grew up, acting as the

mother that he had in his life. We were speaking together in the fall when he shared that Jennifer *died from breast cancer* many years ago. I remember taking a slow exhale and offering a half smile. Losing a sister and a motherly figure would have been hard for him. However, Bruce reflects on the meaningful experiences they shared together, especially towards the end of her life.

*So, so, just giving. She never had any concern about herself. She was worried about us, even as she was dying. She told me, she looked at me that one day, and said, 'you don't have to come here each day... you're welding, get that done.'*

Bruce was enrolled in welding school when his sister passed away. He would finish his classes and then come visit her and spend some time together. This period of time in his life was meaningful to Bruce - his eyes would begin to redden a bit and shine when he reflected on these experiences alongside his sister.

*I know I was hurt. Cause I had spent every night with her, no matter how I felt. No matter what I had the next day. I would always read to her.*

Bruce shared his experiences of reading to Jennifer. The act of spending time together and being with her near the end was important to him. She was his sister and a woman who helped raise him. This experience shaped Bruce and is a piece of who he has been and is becoming. Inherent is a sense of deep loss that remains with him as he continues living and telling his stories.

*You always keep a smile on your face, but you are sad in here (points to his heart).*

Bruce often had a smile on his face whenever we spent time together, but this smile and his laugh lines would always get a bit brighter and fuller whenever he spoke about his daughter, Amelia, or his older sister, Jennifer. These two are now in different places, but they remain in Bruce's heart; their experiences with Bruce joining them together. These are the relationships that held significant meaning for Bruce across his stories, acting as a filter for which he makes sense and meaning of his current and future experiences.

### **Phases of life Involving Correctional Facilities**

Bruce told stories of going into and out of correctional facilities in Alberta that have spanned the last 40 years of his life. While these transitions around facilities and phases of his life were not the center of his stories or his identity, they contributed significantly to who Bruce is and is becoming.

*I've been in three times in my life. That's over 40 years apart.*

The first time Bruce went into a facility was when he was about 17-years old, where he spent 18-months inside a youth facility. It was not until he was in his 40s that he revisited a correctional facility, being sentenced for around 19-months for a small trafficking charge. He was last incarcerated about 4 years ago for 6-months at the Fort Saskatchewan provincial facility. Bruce's experiences of going inside and outside of facilities are complex, drawing upon diverse emotions, people, places, and social and economic conditions to contextualize and make sense and meaning.

## *Going Inside*

Bruce told stories of going into correctional facilities. These stories were marked by diverse people, relationships, and places. Specifically for Bruce, we spoke about the conditions leading up to his arrest, as well as the legal, social, and medical dimensions of going into facilities and how he makes sense of these experiences. His experiences of going into facilities also raised questions. For Bruce, when does the experience of going into a facility begin? Does it occur when he is about to walk into a building? Or does it begin when he first creates relationships with people who then open up opportunities for him to take risks and thus become arrested? In our conversations, Bruce highlighted the circumstances, relationships, and events that lead to him being charged, arrested, and incarcerated as a dimension of going into facilities.

During his last incarceration, Bruce was using crack on the outside. He thought that he had created friendships with his dealers, and they knew that. His ‘friends’ then asked if he would do something for them - just a small favor. Bruce trusted them and figured he could help, so he did what he was asked to: he called the bank, opened a line of credit with the information he was given, and he thought that was the end of it. This experience was what led to his last incarceration. Integral to first going into a facility for Bruce were the feelings of frustration, anger, and distrust that originated from being taken advantage of by others. Thinking about my experiences of admitting people into the ERC, I wondered about who had crossed my path that was taken advantage of by others. Who thought they could trust someone and were then betrayed? How would this affect their abilities or willingness to create trusting relationships with others in the future? There were many questions raised about creating relationships with others and how this can contribute towards becoming incarcerated. Bruce shared that the financial and

legal processes and effects of becoming incarcerated are another piece of understanding and making sense of his experiences going into facilities.

Bruce expressed frustration regarding the financial and legal barriers that he continuously faced while entering facilities and awaiting his sentencing. He reflected on a companion he knew when he was in his 40s and incarcerated at a provincial facility.

*He got caught in Lloydminster with 3 and ¾ ounces, all individually-wrapped, packed, marked, and quoted as to who it belongs to. How about that? You know how much he got?*

Morgan: *6-months?*

*A year... yea, he did 8-months.*

Morgan: *What was the difference between you two?*

*How much fuckin' money was thrown at the judge... into the legal system. Lots and lots and lots. That's what made the difference. You know, honestly, that's what made the difference. The penal system... they don't take you out to the back and hit you with a stick a couple times. They hit you in your wallet. They hit your pocket, and they take your money. That is how you people are punished in the penal system. It's money... That's all it is. And that's... tell me that sounds good?*

Bruce expressed frustration that emanated from the financial toll of going into facilities. Navigating and paying your way through the legal system creates significant inequities in

sentencing outcomes. Unfortunately for many, they do not have the money to hire a private lawyer and instead must use legal aid. My mind goes towards conversations I have had with officers in the remand centre. They would sometimes point out individuals who are in the facility because they are unable to pay their \$250 bail. Our eyes usually roll in unison with one another during these conversations. Bruce and I were sitting outside an Italian cafe and having a bite to eat when I asked:

*Morgan: So, if you don't have cash, and you're going into the penal system?*

*Oh boy you're fucked (laughter). Pretty much covers it.*

Bruce integrates short quips and humor into our conversations together, often catching me off guard and causing me to take a moment to collect myself. For Bruce, a piece of going into facilities is understanding and making sense of financial supports as a mechanism that significantly affects your incarcerated trajectory and sentencing. If you have money, you will serve less time (likely) vs. not having money and serving more time (likely). When I reflect on his shared experiences, I am brought to the financial disparities in opportunities and privileges provided to some and not others in communities outside of correctional facilities. These opportunities may be related to race, ethnicity, families, social support, geography, and vocational training amongst many others. Yet these disparities often snowball and become far reaching, limiting an individual's freedom and choices when going into facilities: what is the role or capabilities of service providers and organizations that support transitions in addressing these disparities? Tied to this dimension of the financial implications of going into facilities is actually arranging your finances and personal affairs before entering a facility.

Bruce spoke about the importance of arranging your finances and other personal directives before going into a facility for sentencing. This, of course, is not always an option for individuals who are arrested unexpectedly, but if you are aware you are going to be sentenced, it is helpful to arrange this ahead of time.

*I had arranged everything ahead of time as well... I went right to my bank and told them I was going to jail (laughter).*

Morgan: *Oh really?*

*I did, yeah. Cause I knew I was going to jail, but not for how long... she came up with a solution that we froze all my online stuff... and anytime I needed money transfer, she has my COMAS number, she had my signature copy, so I just wrote her a letter... I wrote a letter from inside and she would put whatever I requested into my canteen for me... there was no worry about fraud or theft.*

Bruce is forward thinking. When he knew he was going to be sentenced, he arranged his affairs and facilitated a smoother entrance into correctional facilities. He did not have to *worry about fraud or theft*. There are significant barriers and challenges for those who were arrested unexpectedly and unable to arrange their financial affairs ahead of time:

*The worst would be if you were arrested and you didn't have any outside time... you'd never manage it (referring to setting up your finances) from inside there.*

Once you go into a facility's walls, you are arguably cut off from the outside world. If you do not have phone numbers memorized or friends and family that can arrange services for

you outside, it would be extremely challenging to look after your personal affairs. Reflecting on my own experiences and reliance on the 'contacts' section of my phone, I only remember a few phone numbers. The separation from your outside supports and services is also contextualized within the operational and time restraints placed upon your telephone time. I can envision individuals in their orange jumpsuits or blue sweats on their living units in the remand centre, calling out to the officers that they are on a call with their lawyer and need only "please, five more minutes!" Understanding these limitations associated with living in facilities is knowledge that Bruce has gained over his many years of living. How he makes sense of going into facilities is also based upon the longevity of time he has been living and telling his stories as he has formed a life.

Bruce is thoughtful in our conversations. He often reflects upon his stream of experiences that span twice the number of years I have been alive for. We spoke about how he makes sense of going into facilities as someone who is 65-years old vs. watching those who are 18 or 19-years old enter facilities. There were some key differences that Bruce highlighted:

*So they think that they have the ability to man up and change the fucking system. They're going to get top and everything else. They're going to get their asses kicked - handed to them, fucking punished, and walked away. Absolutely stripped their humanity off them if they continue to think that. The older, more experienced people accepted it. Accept the fact that you are not who you think you were, and you have no chance of being who you think you were at this point in time. Because, you're... anything that you are is in their hands. They have the ability to change you, lock you up. Anything they wanna do, they can do... You don't have a choice. You have to accept that.*



Bruce forefronts the ideas that when you go into facilities, your identities are now shifted: *you are not who you think you were, and you have no chance of being who you think you were at this point in time... anything that you are is in their hands.* Who we have been, are, and will be in the future is forever shifting and tied to diverse places yet going into facilities creates a catalyst for change in this process. Your identities are forcibly changed, and you must accept these changes. While these changes to your identities are multiple and diverse, when I reflect on my experiences of working in facilities I come back to ways people are identified or ‘named.’ Identification numbers, such as ORCAs, COMAS, or PINS are always associated with who you are and what you are about. How do the ways in which we shift peoples’ identities when they go into facilities change who they are? How am I complicit in these actions within my role as a healthcare provider? These ideas are significant and provide an opening to think about who people are and how they change when they go into facilities. Bruce also lives in what is called the old man’s unit. This unit is for those who are older than 40 years, differing from general population units:

*You know, you get to be a certain age were you're not just banging heads, and all the bullshit that goes with being young and stupid... you know all the fighting and gang things.*

Morgan: *Do you just grow out of it almost?*

*Yeah. It's not beneficial to you. You know, you'd get your unit shut down or whatever. Get everybody pissed at you or check off or go into PC. It's not that much fun.*

Most of the individuals who are in the *old man unit* are just trying to complete their time as smoothly as possible with minimal interactions with those looking to be *young and stupid*. While this way of life also encompasses many others who are in the younger general population units, it is more so on the units that Bruce lives on.

*Get it out of the way. Try to plan on something normal, a normal type of life... It gets old getting in and out of jail.*

The activities, relationships, and time spent is part of his experiences of going into and living within facilities. Most of these individuals, including Bruce, *try to plan on something normal, a normal type of life*. This is often tied to how Bruce orientates himself within facilities and interacts with others. A piece of a normal type of life involves creating relationships with others on the unit and navigating social contexts, such as a shared spaces or living with a roommate. Bruce is often aware of how he is acting in relation to others and creating relationships.

*I have a skillset in cards or whatever. I try to be OK company. I try not to be totally bipolar opposites on different days or whatever (laughter). I try to maintain an even keel, or calm seas, I guess... And, it's much easier passage of time.*

Bruce tries to maintain an even keel, or calm seas when living within a facility. If you become agitated, then you are going to agitate other people, and that is going to create more problems for you. I can just picture him making his way around a living unit, calmly but with purpose and being respectful of others. His blue sweats or orange jumpsuit fitting loosely on him. Some days he spends his time lying on his bunk and reading, other days he watches a

hockey game on the community television and plays some cards. In other words, a sense of normalcy and calm seas. Staying calm and levelheaded is a piece of going into facilities and living within them. During one of our first conversations together, I asked Bruce about what goes through his mind when going into a facility.

*You learn to turn your mind off.*

Morgan: *Yeah?*

*You totally accept where you are. You don't want anything. You try not to want out for anything. You try not to think about anybody outside what they're doing. You totally shut it down. That saves so much stress on you. Don't have you know, you can't dwell on it because you can't change anything. You can't. You can't think about when you're going to get out. Because that day will come when it comes (laughter). You absolutely just turn your mind off. And that's a coping mechanism.*

Bruce enrolls multiple coping mechanisms when going into facilities, but key to this is attempting to *turn your mind off*. This aligns with his previous ideas presented regarding the loss of your identities, lack of control regarding your finances, and frustrations when navigating the legal system and living through its financial disparities. After you are sentenced, Bruce shared that this idea of turning your mind off persists, but it begins to focus on relationships:

*Let's say when you're sentenced and you're going to Fort Saskatchewan. I mean, that's when it's, you know, the finality of it, the shock has worn off and here you are. You are in cuffs everytime you move. And you just, it's a coping mechanism that you have to, you*

*know, totally distance yourself and think you are not in anybody's life right now. At any... at all. Maybe in their thoughts, but that's it. You have to shut it down. It makes it a lot easier.*

Morgan: *Do you see a lot of guys going in there doing that?*

*The people that have done it before, because they know what to do.*

There is another world behind the walls of correctional facilities. Once you have entered it and lived within it, you begin to *know what to do*. It is by experiencing going into a facility and living within it that you learn how to adapt, survive, and for some, try to become comfortable. Yet for Bruce, this involves turning your mind off and disconnecting from your outside relationships. I cannot imagine what this would feel like - to no longer be able to call my friends or family when I wish or see them in person. I believe these important pieces of being a human begin to be pushed into the periphery when people are being processed by systems of incarceration. Reflecting on my own practices, when have I contributed towards the process *you are not in anybody's life right now*? How have I disconnected - or contributed towards distancing - individuals from their relationships? This conversation with Bruce posed further questions about the other coping mechanisms he enrolls when going into facilities and how these may be influenced by living with or without this illness.

During our conversation about going into and living within facilities in the fall, I was curious about if living with HIV created a difference in how Bruce orientates his sense of self:

Morgan: *Do you think that is the same for someone living with HIV?*

*HIV has never created any problems for me at all.*

I remember making a slightly confused face when Bruce shared this with me. Within the literature, living with HIV is often associated with significant differences and challenges when entering and existing within correctional facilities, but Bruce challenges these perceptions. My mind wondered: what contributes towards living with HIV a non-concern for Bruce? when did this first occur? how does this illness not have an effect on Bruce when going into facilities? what about his relationships with others in facilities? Bruce told me stories about going into and living within facilities, and it was in the early fall when we began to talk about accessing services, specifically HIV supports.

*As far as the disease goes, it's never created any problems for me.*

Morgan: *Even when you go into the building?*

*Nope, nothing.*

Morgan: *Nothing like that?*

*It's on record that I am HIV positive. My meds are always there. They always, you know, they ask about which, you know, when the last time you might have seen a specialist and or if there's been any changes in your treatment. Are you aware of your counts? And if anybody's up on their own health then they would know all of that.*

The physical health dimensions of living with HIV and entering facilities does not create significant challenges for Bruce. This, arguably, begins to make sense when contextualized in

how he makes sense and takes control of this illness and his personal health. Bruce is up to date on his lab work, immunizations, check-ups, etc. The facilities are aware of his status, he has active prescriptions, and he knows his numbers. Bruce is the ideal patient for clinicians - informed and in control of his health status. I remember I was curious if living with HIV creates challenges in relation to navigating social contexts and relationships with other inmates.

Morgan: *Does that extend to other inmates you are with too?*

*Actually, I never really disclose anything to them. 'I am getting a med' that's it. 'You'll want some other med, they don't do anything at all... I don't sell them. They're not for sale. They wouldn't do nothing for ya' (laughter).*

It appears that the lack of challenges that Bruce experiences in relation to living with this illness amongst others is heavily influenced by his lack of disclosure. Bruce does not share his health status, because there is no need to share it. He understands that if you tell someone that your meds *wouldn't do nothing for ya* and laugh a bit, they will likely just leave you alone. It also makes me wonder about the context of the living unit and its effects on how Bruce navigates living with this illness. If there is less *banging heads, and all the bullshit that goes with being young and stupid... you know all the fighting and gang things*, then I would assume there are less social pressures and demands to learn more information about someone's health status. Having worked on the *old man unit* a number of times at the remand centre, I also understand that there is no shortage of drugs that *wouldn't do nothing for ya*. Bruce's antiretroviral medications would be hidden amongst the waves of anti-hypertensive, diabetic, and diuretics given out on a daily basis. I was visiting Bruce out at Todd's farm when we began to have longer conversations

regarding the supports that he accesses when going into facilities, specifically those related to living with HIV.

Morgan: *What would be the supports you would access living with HIV?*

*Yeah, probably the medical staff there. Your medical records would be on file, so they'd be up to date on your medical regime. And, have that in place right away, so they're usually pretty quick. Speaking of which (laughter). I will be right back.*

Bruce left the laminate table we were sitting at in Todd's trailer to go down the short hallway and grab his bottle of ART. Listening to our recorded conversation, I can hear the little pills rattling as Bruce walked back and picked up the conversation where he left off:

*as long as you know your stuff, what your, what most people if they are responsible they know what medication they are on and what their counts are and everything else. This is mine. I was put on these about 1-year ago. And it's one pill a day.*

Morgan: *Easy, hey?*

*Yea actually, it is easy to forget too!*

Bruce stated that his primary supports related to living with HIV are the medical staff. Everything is already on his file, and he is in control and aware of his counts and *everything else*. Bruce shared:

*It's all recorded. And they ask, basically, the only thing is if you want it in the morning or at night... there is no trauma involved at all. You're already in the system and recorded, so they know when you're supposed to meet your doctor.*

It appears that as Bruce goes into a facility, living with HIV does not create any significant challenges for him when accessing supports related to his illness. Even when engaging with others and creating relationships, the knowledge that he is living with HIV is something that he does not share with others and appears to be not overly concerned about.

*Most people keep their own medical history and stuff pretty quiet. Unless there is something important. Yeah, most of the time people don't really advertise what they have. I mean, I have never gone in there and been asked what I take the pills for or whatever. I don't advertise the fact that I am HIV positive either - it is none of their business.*

Bruce shared that the lack of speaking about your health status was the same both inside and outside of facilities, and that people generally keep silent regarding these pieces of their identities. It appears that Bruce has minimal challenges when accessing formal support services for living with HIV, and that when it comes to the social challenges of living with HIV, it is simply *none of their business*. I reflect on a field note from our conversation:

*Bruce and I spent a lot of time sitting together at the laminate dining table. The old wooden chairs supporting our backs and the busy tabletop providing company for our coffees and food. My notepad was resting beside a crib board when my vision began to narrow and*



*take a closer look. Instead of the brightly colored pegs that adorn the board, Bruce and Todd were utilizing stems from marijuana plants as placeholders for their game.*

*Morgan: Oh, I like the stems as the little pegs for the (gestures to crib board).*

*Oh yea? (laughter). There's weed everywhere here (laughter).*

*I laughed alongside Bruce and reflected on how open and inviting into his life he has been with me throughout this project. Taking a sip of my coffee, we continued our conversation against the backdrop of the changing poplars outside the window and across the field.*

I was always curious about Bruce's ongoing life. That fall day, this curiosity drifted between Bruce and Todd's improvised marijuana stems as Crib board pegs towards the general challenges that Bruce has experienced, or is aware of for others, when going into facilities:

*Yeah, some people, they need their psychiatric drugs, but almost impossible.*

*Morgan: Do you mean hard to access medical services for them?*

*Yeah, the doctors themselves. You know, you put in request after request after request and it might be months and months before you see them. Some of these people actually need their anti-schizophrenia or antidepressants or whatever.*

*Morgan: So, it is kinda easy to continue services on the outside, but starting anything new inside it is pretty...*

*Hard... it is just the availability I think. The volume and the overload that the healthcare is being faced with. You're constantly getting new people in and rotating through.*

A lot of the challenges of accessing supports going inside facilities stemmed from health concerns, such as accessing pharmaceuticals for mental health diagnoses or wanting to speak to a clinician. Bruce also highlighted a significant barrier for delivering accessible and timely patient care, which is often the volume of individuals accessing health services. I reflect on the stacks of health request forms we receive daily in the remand centre, and then the piles I refer to the mental health or addictions teams. Often you do not have enough time in the day to complete your medication rounds and treatments, so these requests begin to pile up. This is frustrating at times, because you want to see more individuals for their concerns, but you are constantly limited in what you can accomplish. Yet Bruce is aware of this type of challenge. Based upon his knowledge of how to prepare to enter facilities and access services, Bruce shared:

*I had an issue with gout in my toe... I brought the prescription paper... and let them pull it out... so that worked out really well.*

A piece of going into facilities for Bruce is preparation, whether that is arranging his finances or his medical records. Bruce knows what to expect when going and living inside, as he has been there before. He knows that the legal system will create a financial toll on him and create disparities in sentencing. The way that he makes sense of these experiences is also filtered through his long lifetime and the accumulation of knowledge and scenarios he has been a piece of. I remember feeling slightly confused and surprised, thinking and muttering out loud in my vehicle while driving back home after seeing him: how are accessing services so straightforward

for him? Is this a piece of his identity, and how he tries to *maintain an easy keel* when going into facilities?

### ***Going Outside***

Morgan: *What is one of the first things you think about or do when you're heading out?*

*A cigarette (laughter).*

Bruce shared with me multiple dimensions of his experiences of transitioning out of correctional facilities to his communities. We were sitting together in the shade of a cafe's patio in early September when we first began to talk about what it was like for him to leave the Fort Saskatchewan provincial correctional facility almost 4-years ago. I asked Bruce what it was like the last time he transitioned out. He responded,

*There was actually a seamless transition.*

I remember my surprise, taking a moment in my thoughts, and then the feeling of curiosity: what do you mean it was seamless? what would make leaving a facility and coming back to another piece of his life a *seamless transition*? is not the experience of leaving a facility supposed to be challenging and full of barriers? Yet in our conversations, Bruce challenges some of these ideas. I leaned in because I wanted to understand more about what this experience was like for him: how did he make sense of leaving the facility? I also wondered if Bruce was saying it was seamless because perhaps it was something that I wanted to hear. Questions went through my mind: what about finding a place to stay? how did you find employment? how did you access HIV care services? what about transportation around the city? There were multiple pieces of this

experience - a seamless transition - that facilitated Bruce's journey: a transitory place to stay when he was released, the formal supports of a ASO and other organizations, and relationships with people composing these organizations.

*When I got out, Cindy and Ashley, at the office there, they had a support worker already lined up... so I met him and it was a seamless transition cause I was actually staying at a friend's place whose mother was living in an apartment. He was being released a few months later than I was. And, it was like, go help my mother sort, so I did.*

Before Bruce was released, Cindy and Ashley - outreach and support workers with the local ASO - had a housing support worker already in place to support Bruce when he left a provincial facility. Bruce also had an initial place to stay immediately after his release. I wonder: what made this place helpful for him and what was his relationship like with his friend's mother? Because he had a place to stay when he first transitioned into the community, he did not have to find alternative housing or stay at shelters. Bruce continued:

*Then I started looking for my own place... I actually wasn't living there when he (his friend) was released, because I had already been set up with my own apartment. It was really a seamless transition. It was great.*

For Bruce, a piece of a seamless transition was having a transitional home - somewhere he could stay - immediately post-release and as he waited and worked with housing supports to find him a more long-term home. Housing, a significant dimension of leaving facilities and a precursor to be going into facilities, has continued to be embedded and forefronted in our

conversations. The support worker that was assigned to Bruce, arranged by Ashley and Cindy, was with a local housing support service, underneath the Homeward Trust umbrella.

*The first time it was Homeward Trust... He was good. XXXX (housing support service), they helped me immensely, because I had a worker already online... so it was a short period of time and that I got housed by myself.*

The housing support service is a non-profit that assists people with finding housing options among other supports. Bruce reflected on working with this support worker from this organization:

*They knew I had a place there, while we looked. So I wasn't hanging around the shelter or the street... I was safe, but it was pressed. I mean, we did multiple applications and such, and found a nice place. Good place.*

In this experience, Bruce's relationship with Cindy, Ashley, and the housing support worker alongside a temporary home immediately post-release were significant pieces that facilitated his seamless transition into the community. Bruce's experiences of a seamless transition into the community highlight the importance of preparation and having housing supports available immediately after someone leaves a facility. If Bruce did not have access to his friend's mom's home, and he had no other friends to stay with, he would have likely had to live in shelters or outside as he waited for his housing applications to go through. Integral to these initial supports that helped Bruce experience a seamless transition outside were trusting relationships with individuals that worked for community organizations, specifically Ashley and Cindy.

Morgan: *You said it felt like they had your back, that you trust them?*

*Absolutely. Unequivocally... when I, umm, when I need to be grounded or muddled through things that are going on my life. I seek them. I talk to them. I don't feel them as staff and counsellors. I think of them as my friends, ya know? My friends are smart and they got good advice. When I need to be put in my place, they are the people who put me in my place.*

Morgan: *Yeah, they put you in your place?*

*Yeah, they. I know when, if I am way off base, and they're not gonna back down and say anything different to the fact that, you know, they're going to point out to me that you are way off base, you have no grounds for any... there is no doubt about any questions that I might divulge or ask about them. There are never any suspicions about endgames or anything else. There is total trust, more and more so all the time.*

The relationship that Bruce has built with the ASO's outreach workers was something that continued to come up in our conversations and as he reflected on his experiences leaving facilities and living out in the community. There was, and continues to be, an inherent sense of trust and friendship that accompanies these relationships.

*They are my friends before my counselors. They are my friends that I ask questions when I need help.*

Bruce's insights and experiences pose questions regarding how individuals involved in supporting people leaving facilities can create and maintain relationships: what makes someone

your friend, and what makes someone your counselor? How did Cindy and Ashley first spend time with Bruce and create their relationship with him? What did this space look like and how did Bruce feel? It appears that for Bruce, a friend is someone who you can speak your mind to, and they will do the same. They are someone you trust and do not have to be *suspicious about endgames or anything else*. What does it look and feel like to speak our mind? My mind also goes towards how we can learn to build relationships with those both inside and outside of facilities in the same ways that Ashley and Cindy did with Bruce.

When Bruce and I first met he shared with me, *XXXX (ASO) is someone who has your back*. Thinking with this relationship, I reflect on a field note:

*There was little snow outside yet, and it had not quite yet settled into the winter cold when I received an email from the Executive Director of the community organization this morning:*

*Hi Morgan,*

*I'm trying an email first to be least intrusive but hoping you're going to see this in the next 30 mins or so. Bruce is here and he'd like to connect with you but he's had phone issues. Wondering if you can call the office and connect to Ashley's extension and Bruce can speak with you that way?*

*Ashley's number is XXXX.*

*Bruce will hope to hear from you, if not, we'll call and leave you a message with another process to connect.*

*Thanks!*

*I felt a small sensation of worry in my stomach as I wondered what happened to Bruce and why he was in the city. My mind went towards Bruce living with Todd out at the farm and how that was a housing setup that was likely not going to last throughout the winter. I called Ashley and was able to speak to Bruce to figure out where we could meet up today to have a bite to eat and converse. He shared with me that he has just been hanging out at the community organization, having a hot drink, and will meet up with me in an hour.*

Throughout the stories that Bruce has shared about living with HIV, going out of facilities, or living in the community, there has often been an ingrained thread of interacting with the community organization and staff. For Bruce, this place is somewhere that he feels comfortable, explaining,

*It is more about a sense of belonging somewhere... they are helping me, but I try to help them in anyway for them... I just feel a sense of belonging there.*

Morgan: *Is there any other place that gives you that sense of belonging?*

*No, not like that, no.*

The ASO has been able to create trusting relationships that are built around principles of friendship to Bruce that he continues to access and speak about with admiration. The community



ASO occupies a place with a storied history, but it is also composed of people who create trusting relationships with individuals who access its services. However, accessing or providing services does not adequately describe the *sense of belonging* that Bruce feels when he goes to the organization. I wonder, how can other organizations or places create a sense of belonging for those living with or without HIV? How does creating trusting relationships with community members then lead to feelings of belonging? While the community organization provides supports that extends beyond formal services, Bruce also spoke about accessing HIV clinical services when going out into the community.

Bruce has not often had trouble accessing HIV clinical services in the community. Although the literature sometimes describes this as challenging for individuals living with this illness, Bruce appears in control of his diagnosis and physical health. A piece of his experiences of accessing services outside in the community are the relationships he has with HIV clinical teams. Bruce reflected fondly on an interaction he had with his infectious disease specialist in a downtown hospital:

*We stopped and talked on the stairwell for longer than most of our visits combined... but it was comfortable... we talked about everything and it was nice. Seeing each other as human beings and not just patients and doctors, ya know?*

Bruce's shared stories demonstrate that he values relationships that are more than *just patients and doctors*. These extend to those involved in his clinical care as well as the support services that he accesses. He enjoys the opportunity to connect with his infectious disease specialist and have a conversation *about everything*. Another piece of his experiences of leaving

facilities and living in the community was networking with others who had street identities. Specifically, Bruce found that when he was learning how to navigate different support services and where to go across Edmonton, that

*The people around you give you more insight into what you need to do, what's available, what you need to do to get it, and where to go.*

Morgan: *And for people around you, do you mean just other community people?*

*Yeah, other street people, people on the street, people who are, you know, who have been there. Ya know, the times and dates and wheres and all that. Those are the people, who will help you out, prop you up, and ... keep you moving forward.*

Bruce spoke about the people *who have been there*. For those that have shared experiences of accessing similar resources or people and agencies, they can turn towards each other to help them navigate these challenges and open up opportunities. Reflecting on my naivety and lack of experiences living outside or accessing shelters and other supports, I do not know what I would do to survive in these circumstances. Who would I turn towards? Who would I not turn towards for assistance? I, ultimately, would need help navigating and accessing the complex health and social systems. While Bruce spoke about the people *who have been there* as sources of support when leaving facilities and living in the community, these individuals can also be threats to your wellbeing.

Morgan: *You said there are no suspicions of the endgame with them (referring to Cindy and Ashley). Compared to when you talked about some friends you can't trust?*

*Yeah, how do you trust them? What are they really asking? What are they looking for? What are they trying to achieve from me? Or to use through you. What are you being used for? That is a big part of it.*

Across Bruce's stories, he had to navigate experiences where someone was trying to take advantage or use him. We were eating some meat lovers pizza together when he shared a story about an individual who tried to use him: someone saw that Bruce was having phone troubles, so they offered Bruce a chance to use their SIM card in Bruce's phone. However, they needed Bruce to first call and pay - only a bit - to restart their phone service. Bruce *called it what it is* and said *hell no* to this individual and walked away. Bruce often has to *tell people what they are about*, calling out individuals who are taking advantage of others. If someone tries to take advantage of Bruce like this, he shares that from here on out, we are not a part of each other's lives - nothing personal but there is no more relationship. Bruce has had many experiences of people trying to take advantage of him, but he uses self-protective practices to look after his own health, wellbeing, and resources. Another dimension of leaving correctional facilities was creating, maintaining, and ending his relationship with a community supervision officer.

*I had the best one ever... this last one I had 18-months probation. Her name was Jacky... She was great. She was absolutely the best.*

The last time Bruce was released from a provincial facility, he had an 18-month probation period. He had no restrictions during this period with Jacky, besides *be on good behavior and that*. I wondered what their relationship looked like and how it was maintained. I asked Bruce what made her *absolutely the best*.

*She was in my favor. In my court. I mean, I had an \$18,000 restitution order.*

Morgan: *What is that?*

*I had to pay back... and her and her superior actually made that disappear. They knew the circumstances. I didn't get any of that cash. I mean, it just went right through to whoever arranged all that stuff... So she knew that. I appreciate it, and it was the truth too. I didn't see nothing from that except jail time - got that.*

A piece of their relationship was that Jacky tried to understand the context of Bruce's life and his ongoing experiences. He had minimal money to get by and was trying to make small payments towards the restitution order but couldn't afford anything else since he was already without a home - *I was just trying to keep up*. In their relationship, Jacky was supportive, kind, and understood the context of his life. She set the bar for community supervision relationships.

*This one time I missed an appointment. I had no bus fare. I missed the appointment and it is probably a state of depression, and you start thinking the worst, right? And all it took was a phone call... it was, just stated, just phone and we will make something happen otherwise.*

Morgan: *Yeah?*

*Instead of being all scared and running and hiding from shadows. Just be straight up, be open and honest and everything gets taken care of. There is no deception.*

Bruce's approach to navigating his community supervision is also quite similar to his approach towards creating relationships across his lifespan: he does not hide in the *shadows*. Instead, he practices a truthful and honest approach to building relationships, which appears to have served him well so far. Yet his formal relationship with Jacky came to its end one day, his 18-months were up, but that did not mean their relationship completely ended. Bruce stopped by to visit her one day to say, 'thank you.'

*She had some free time, so we sat and talked for 45 minutes to an hour... I just wanted to touch base with her and thank her for everything... We talked about anything and everything... She was glad I made it through and I was glad I made it through (laughter).*

This experience is similar to the one that Bruce shared with his infectious disease specialist. Both experiences forefront the importance of being approachable in their relationships with Bruce and acting in ways that are in line with their professional roles, but also personable. Both his HIV physician and Jacky are a piece of Bruce's life and his ongoing stream of experiences, and Bruce appears to value conversation. Creating, maintaining, and changing relationships with those who provide services and supports to people leaving facilities are a key piece of Bruce's experiences that continue to be highlighted. One of the last dimensions of leaving facilities for Bruce was preparing yourself for your upcoming freedom.

Morgan: *Any ideas of 'I'm going to do good' when I get out?*

*Oh yea, you can always think about all those things you never do... it is not feasible that you can jump in and do all those things at once, because even the freedom itself is gonna*

*sidetrack you... especially if you have money in your bank account and you're coming out. Oh yeah, you are intent on making up for lost time.*

Morgan: *Do you mean have some fun?*

*Yeah, females, and drugs, and all of it. Probably buy a big expensive bottle of booze that you basically give it away because you don't like it anyway... I think you put unrealistic expectations upon yourself. That's me... and it's not that easy, cause even if your sole intent is accomplishing this one piece, one little deviation can sidetrack you completely.*

Leaving a facility is characterized by returning to your communities, but also reliving and coming back into your freedom. When individuals are released from facilities, they have a list of *all those things you never do*. These are often tied to the *unrealistic expectations* that people place upon themselves, including Bruce. I wonder what some of these expectations are for individuals living with HIV. How are they informed by dominant social, familial, or institutional narratives, and how does one internalize these unrealistic expectations? Considering *one little deviation* can derail your expectations and envisioned life course, how can someone come back to this previously envisioned journey - and identity - after 'falling off the track' for a period of time? Can you? Or does 'falling off the track' lead back to becoming reincarcerated? Bruce shared his ideas about the ongoing cycle of being released and then reincarcerated.

Bruce has witnessed individuals raised within familial and social structures that teach them from a young age how to *lie, steal, or break into* places, referring to these as *survivor skills* that lead to a cycle of incarceration. This embodied knowledge then contributes towards individuals living a life where they *can't get a job* and focus on drugs, partying, and women. As

he shared this story, I could hear the frustration in his voice and his ‘sighs’ when he spoke about these cycles. Witnessing stories of lives that go into facilities and then leave to their same conditions of living are commonplace in his experiences. They compose many of the lives that have come into and out of both our experiences, albeit to very different degrees and scenarios.

### **In Search of a Place**

*It is so hard to do anything without having a set place.*

Across our relationship, Bruce’s stories were often contextualized in his ongoing search for a place. Finding a long-term home and settling in is a critical piece of leaving correctional facilities and creating a sense of structure. For Bruce, this attempt to *do anything* was tied to his day-to-day survival: eating, creating relationships, socializing, resting, and feeling safe and secure.

Morgan: *Is getting a house over your head almost everything?*

*It is... well, it sort of gives you structure. I mean, you can sleep and rest. You’re not worried.*

Everyone needs a place that can be their home, where they can *sleep and rest* without being *worried*. Bruce’s experiences of living within and across diverse places inside and outside of Edmonton were forefronted as we spoke, with many layers of these experiences becoming unveiled. These layers were composed of diverse emotions, people, relationships, and places. Some of these experiences caused Bruce to smile and be joyful, relaxing back in his chair, and others caused significant frustration and discomfort for him. Yet, each of these experiences were

framed by his unrelenting approach to life as he continued forward and followed his journey.

Bruce had just left Todd's farm in the early winter when the ASO notified me that he was back in the city. We had just met up at a rustic pizza place to grab a bite to eat when he showed me the rock below.



### Figure 3

*Bruce's Rock.*



Bruce had found this rock a month ago, and for a reason unknown to him, he was drawn to it. Whether it was the distinct leaf pattern that he saw or the place it was first found, he was curious about it. When he was at Todd's farm he would brush and polish the rock with a Dremel and file. He was curious about the different layers hidden within it. I believe that this curiosity of uncovering the layers of this rock is a bit of a metaphor for my own curiosity regarding the layers of understanding and meaning in Bruce's stories and how he makes sense of them. While Bruce was drawn to the leaf pattern, I have seen how his search for a home is a significant piece of his story. His search for a home acted as a precursor to going into facilities and leaving them, but also as he continued to compose and make sense of his life.

## *Todd's Farm*

Bruce was living at Todd's farm Northeast of Edmonton when we first met one another. He had moved out of an apartment earlier in the spring and was invited to live with Todd in his trailer. Across our shared experiences, we spent a number of hours together at Todd's farm, both with Todd in our company and alone. I was so thankful to be invited into their lives together. Bruce's experiences at Todd's farm raised many questions about the importance of place in someone's life and the meaning that it holds for them. Living out at Todd's farm seemed to do good and be good for Bruce. He always had such great things to say about living here, and I could see these effects on his body. I reflect on a field note from the second time we met up together:

*We had just met up together at Tokyo Express for a meal, since it was close to where Bruce was meeting someone. His face and arms were tanned, which contrasted with his silvered and dark hair that had a slight curl to it. He carried with him a duffle bag as he walked over towards me. Proudly, he showed me that he had another large bag full of vegetables to bring to the group cooking program at the ASO. When we last met at the end of August, he had brought in another load of vegetables to be used at the organization's food program. Bruce proudly shared that Todd and he had recently dug up the garden as the season was approaching fall. I looked at him as he was sharing another story with me, and the laugh lines on his face were lifted together as one to greet his bright eyes.*

Bruce and Todd were growing vegetables in a greenhouse out at the farm together. There was also a vegetable garden just beside it - potatoes, sunflowers, beets, and more came out of the

earth from their hard work. Bruce shared that being out at the farm and having a hand in caring for something, watching it grow, and then having it provide for him was enriching. There was an ongoing sense that he was doing the right thing with the right results over the summer as they grew vegetables and other plants out at the farm. I could hear the pride in his voice - always sharing experiences and activities - as he spoke of living at Todd's farm. One time when I came out to visit, they filled up a bucket of home-grown potatoes for me to take back. I remember washing and peeling them for a meal with my in-laws a few weeks later. With a smile on my face, I reflected on what I took away from visiting Todd's farm alongside them. The farm reminded me of the places I grew up on in my childhood. It filled me with a sense of peace, but then I chuckled when I reflected on the shared sense of intermittent boredom that often accompanies living remotely.

*There's not so much, not really a hella a lot to do around here. I mean, go for long walks, you know once you have gone that way or that way it's just prairies and bush, you know?*

As Bruce and I conversed over the months, he found that this place also brought forth a sense of peacefulness and meaning. He loved seeing his greenhouse plants and garden grow, always speaking of them or bringing vegetables to be shared with others in the city. Yet visiting the city would elicit different emotions for Bruce. He would often describe himself as *volatile*, a *hot head*, or even a *loose cannon* at times when he is in the city. Living in Edmonton, either within a permanent home or on the streets and in the river valley, he shared that this was concerning.

*I've been self-described as a fricken hot-head, a fucking loose cannon waiting to go off in the city. Never knowing what was gonna trigger me, and not wanting to, but knowing that it was always close to that edge... always just so close to being so volatile.*

Bruce disliked being in this volatile state, of being on uncertain ground and close to *that edge*. It was an overwhelming sensation when he was in the city that was challenging to name at times.

*You can't really describe the emotion, the noise...*

Morgan: *The stimuli?*

*Yeah they are stimuli! They just constantly pile up on you.*

There is always so much traffic and noise in the city. It was never-ending for Bruce who often lived downtown or in busier areas where services and organizations such as the ASO were located. The constant stimulation was something that, when he lived in the city, he was habituated to - it was a piece of him - yet going to Todd's farm changed this.

*Coming out here and to realize what it is... you are constantly being bombarded by constant noise, constant motion and stuff around you... it really does have some effect on you... you know the tinnitus thing is one thing... to be constantly aware of the ringing in your ears and then divert it over time. It's there but it's not being paid attention to. But what helps is the quietness, I am not being bombarded with traffic and the motion and the noise and people from behind... it's not only the people it's also the environment. It's hard to describe but it's the environment. There is just so much going on around you.*

Out at the farm and living in the trailer with Todd, this place was quiet, calming, and peaceful for Bruce. Sitting at the dining table with him in the trailer, the warmth of the potbellied stove heating their home, and the cats at my feet, it resonated with me. Bruce continued:

*If you are climatized to the streets, you are hyper aware to it, you're not even aware that you're being safer, precautious or whatever. But yeah, when you come from here, and then go there, it's like, 'Whoa' you gotta pace yourself (laughter).*

There was a sense of surprise when Bruce headed back into the city. He was abruptly reminded of just how busy it was compared to the farm - the roads, people, and concrete jumped out. Yet for Bruce, he is someone with a street identity. He has spent a significant portion of his life living alongside people from the street. Bruce lives and has identities between two places that are significant and contribute to who he is and is becoming.

*I can go from here (farm) to there (city) and blend in. I am kinda torn between the two. It doesn't bother me, but I can come out here and it's totally quiet. I don't have a preference for one or the other, but I could go down right in the middle of it.*

Bruce has dual identities and dimensions of himself. These identities have deeply rooted connections to the places in his life: the farm and the city. He loved living at the farm, but he also longed for some of the activity and excitement of the city. For him, a place between these two worlds and lifestyles would perhaps suit him best.

Turning back towards a field note, I wrote: *I have heard a lot about Todd from Bruce over our conversations together, so I was excited to meet him for the first time today. Just like*

*Bruce, he was a Caucasian man with silvered and dark hair. Bruce's hair was curled and short, while Todd's contrasted with its length and flow. Todd smiled at me when we first met in his shop, my feet walking on the beaten down earth over to him and handing him a coffee. He was quiet as Bruce and I spoke together, but after a few minutes he began to become a part of the conversation, his quiet voice describing the various pieces of equipment in the shop. I looked over at Todd's hands as he held his cup of coffee and I was reminded of the hands of farmers I would see at the auction house in my youth; his muscular hands were adorned with scars that criss-crossed them, and even his knuckles had knuckles on them, formed from a lifetime of working on equipment and being abused. As our conversations continued that day and I drove home amidst the changing poplar leaves, I reflected on their relationship together. The summertime was full of activity and work, but the winter would see this slow down significantly. I wondered what their relationship would look like once the snow had fallen, and a familiar stillness covered the farm.*

Todd and Bruce had a falling out that resulted in some *diesel fuel* being thrown at Bruce with the pot-bellied stove nearby. Bruce loved the farm and enjoyed his time with his friend, but at times the relationship was something that threatened his safety. Alcohol mixed with his prescription medications could result in Todd becoming unpredictable when alone in the trailer.

*He's the nicest guy, but honestly, he does have that other side of him that is just unpredictable, right? ... there is that part that I don't want to walk on eggshells around him, especially out there.*

Bruce's home changed suddenly that day, but it was also a change that he had a feeling would approach once the winter set in. We spoke often of Todd, and Bruce shared they still stay in touch as friends. They even made plans for this upcoming summer: *We are gonna make another garden this year.* While this did not come to be during my time together with Bruce, their relationship and his time spent out at the farm was meaningful. Pieces of Bruce's complex identities were revealed living on the farm - the peacefulness drew out a sense of calmness around him that was positioned against periods of stimulus when living in the city. Visiting Todd's farm also had an effect on my experiences going forward. I wondered about the connections between places we love and find meaning in and the relationships that contextualize these spaces. When we search for a home, and find a place we love, what happens when the relationships that mark that place are ones we can no longer have in our lives? How do we make sense of this experience? How do we move forward? While I do not have the answer to these questions, I believe that thinking with Bruce's experiences may provide a starting point for thought.

### ***Shelters***

The first time Bruce and I sat down together for a recorded conversation, he shared with me his previous experiences of accessing and living within shelters in the downtown core of Edmonton.

*Shelters are just brutal... they strip you of your humanity... you're not part of society. It's really bad, you know. The bullshit that goes on... everything. I can't even begin... you*

*know, when I was deep in my addictions, I absolutely refused to go into shelters at all costs.*

Morgan: *May I ask why?*

*The predator shit that goes on... the thieving, the total acceptance of the staff for the bullshit that goes on.*

I have not worked in shelters and my limited experience within them was one or two volunteer trips that lasted only a few hours. Although I remember these visits and the people I met, I did not live in them. Bruce has lived experience of accessing shelters and he *can't even begin* to describe them. The last time Bruce accessed shelters was about 8-10 years ago, and he has not used them since. I asked him if these are helpful for people needing a temporary home while looking for something more permanent.

*Not the shelters, I don't see how they help you. They make you more bitter, and make you more... rally up against society, or that is what their solution is. That's... it's really bad actually. It's not even a bridge... it's a dead-end. It's a cliff. It is walking off the cliff.*

Bruce usually does not speak about services or experiences with such strong negative language. When reflecting on people or places he always points out the good characteristics first. Yet when he shared his experiences in shelters, I was surprised. Shelters are such a common resource and support for people to access - or at least are consistently newsworthy and in the headlines. I had no idea how it could be *a dead-end* or like *walking off the cliff*. Bruce



highlighted the social context and lack of community that was associated with living in these places.

*The people prey on each other. There's no umm, kinship. There's no looking out for each other. It's every man for himself and the boat is sinking.*

Bruce's statement causes me to reflect on how he feels a sense of belonging when visiting the ASO, and how he would haul in 40-pounds of vegetables to share with his community members at their food program. This was in stark contrast to his experiences in the shelters. When he was in these places, he would lose everything. People would steal his suitcase if left unattended for the briefest moment or even a rock:

*I could pick up a pretty rock up off the street, and I have it. And they'll steal that off you, too.*

Someone actually stole a small pebble that Bruce kept with him because of its illustrious shine. Shelters, and their complex relations and effects, stripped him of his humanity. Reflecting upon his love of welding and the kinship he had with others, I can begin to see how this was so painful for him. When asked about the types of people who used shelters, Bruce shared:

*Those who have a harder time walking or, you know, getting around or accessing meals or knowing anybody or... are destitute and abandoned and forgotten.*

Bruce believes that shelters are a place for those who *are destitute and abandoned and forgotten*. Shelters were a place for people to go that could not look after themselves living outside in the various camps spread out across the city. Flipping through the files of some of the

patients I work alongside at the remand centre, many of them access shelters for support and somewhere to stay. Once they are released, they are driven downtown and dropped off. If they do not have a friend or family member's home to stay at, the money to find a hotel, or a temporary bridging program, their options are to sleep at the shelter or outside. Considering you must be prepared if you're going to live outside, many turn towards the shelters. I thought about the cycle of recidivism and its relationship with substance use. I asked Bruce:

Morgan: *Would it be possible, going into the shelters and trying to stay clean in those?*

*No.*

Morgan: *No?*

*No, you would absolutely need something to cope... yeah, I can't see it.*

To function in this space and to deal with these living conditions, Bruce shared that one would almost have to use substances to cope. In addition to these coping mechanisms, his experiences with staff members did not contribute towards creating meaningful relationships with these places. Staff working in shelters often had a religious focus towards managing conflict between clients. Bruce found this to be a turn off, as staff would often give authority to the Lord over you. If he raised questions about ways to improve the shelter, staff would blame things on "God," and as such, it is "out of their hands." This was frustrating to Bruce and contributed towards his avoidance of these places.

Thinking with Bruce's experiences, I can imagine the diversity in lives and identities of those accessing these services. From my short experiences of volunteering at or driving by these

places, I can see the assortment of people clustered together outside. Shopping cards, duffle bags, and packs with the entirety of a person's material goods placed within them. However, from afar and amongst, there are those involved with *the predator shit that goes on*. Bruce's stories of living in the shelters sound exhausting to me. To constantly be on edge and on guard, when all you want to do is just sleep and be at peace. I cannot imagine staying for long in these experiences. I wonder: how and why do we send people to go live in places that we ourselves have never stayed? how can we come to know what supports we are recommending when we are so distanced from them? Bruce, ultimately, removes himself from the shelters so that he can be further from these environments: *I stay away from the inner city. The shelters there, I stay away from them.*

This statement by Bruce is significant. He used to live with uncontrolled substance use, but no longer. A piece of his identity is someone who no longer uses substances that control his life. Accessing shelters is potentially a dangerous direction to take. Instead, he makes his own path. I reflect on a field note:

*Visiting Bruce out at the farm was always so peaceful for me. It felt familiar and brought me back to my previous rural experiences in my childhood and youth. We were sitting together and speaking about the peacefulness of this place vs. his life in the city. We spoke about the idea that everyone has a choice of where they wish to stay and create relationships, but there are pieces that influence these decisions.*

*You're being guided by your distractions with your drug addictions or with your circles of friends or whatever, they would determine all of that, but I have always marched to my own drummer.*

People entering facilities and then leaving are guided by their relationships with substance use and diverse people. When leaving a facility, how do people begin to make sense of these complicated relationships and *distractions*? Can one say goodbye to their circle of friends that are tied to a specific place in their life? What if this place is marked by uncontrolled substance use? How does the idea of home tie to shelters, and do some people view these places as their home? Bruce shared that he has control over his life, but he also acknowledges that he is along for the ride. When things happen to him, he does not question it, but rather goes along and accepts the path he is on. Welding, relationships, substance use, living with this illness, and finding a home, he has *always marched to my own drummer*. But he will not return to the shelters. Others may access them when leaving facilities or live in them before they become incarcerated, yet they do not align with his identities. Bruce would rather live his life outside, in small camps and communities across the Edmonton area.

### ***Life Outside***

Bruce has a significant amount of experience living outside the confines of traditional homes or spaces. He has lived and worked in forests, camps, river valleys, and on the streets and avenues of Edmonton. A significant piece of this journey to find a stable and long-term home involves living life outside. Bruce shared stories of living outside that are marked by complex

relationships and processes with diverse people, places, and ideas. It was the middle of winter when we met up to have a bite to eat together. I asked,

*Morgan: You were in the river valley for one winter - what was that like?*

*Well, cold (laughter)... well, first of all, it's mostly cause I am stubborn... I hate the inner-city hostels... any of them.*

Stories of living in camps nestled within the river valley or tree planting in the summer were shared by Bruce alongside his contagious laughter. Across these stories of living in places outside the four walls of a house, he often avoided accessing shelters. He would instead create small communities with others as well as live by himself. Significant to his experiences of living outside were the physical spaces and skills to survive in remote forests while tree planting or within the city's river valley.

*I learned survival skills. I'd camp all winter... I camped out all winter. One time, it was one week shy of an entire year in the river valley.*

Bruce found that when he was living outside in these physical spaces, *you're living life on your own terms*. Bruce avoids accessing the shelters due to his own stubbornness and resentment towards these services, setting a personal record of 51 weeks camped out in the river valley about 15-years ago. A piece of this autonomy and agency that comes with living outside highlighted by Bruce was that he knows how to live outside in the natural world. He knows how to camp and was once a tree planter in remote northern regions, having been flown into some of these sites. More persistent than the sun were the relentless bugs that he lived alongside. Because

Bruce knows how to look after himself and survive, he does not have to access shelters and instead can live life on his own terms.

*No getting up at six am all hot and sweaty and getting kicked out into thirty below or something. I mean, got to sleep when we needed to, feed ourselves, got a camp stove, proper lighting, lots to like about it. Once you sealed up the tent and get it lit up, it is warm.*

Living outside in the natural world is something that most individuals would likely not be able to fathom, but for Bruce, he was *not intimidated by it*. Bruce's shared stories of living outside the formal shelter system and other supports appear to take power away from the systems that do not fit within his needs, identities, and life making. I wonder about the other ways in which he siphons power away from traditional support systems. In what other ways does he go against the dominant narratives - political, social, familial, and others - that seek to dictate how he should live a life? and in which ways does he follow some of these narratives? I asked Bruce if he would ever live outside in the river valley for another year again. He responded, *No, no, never*. When Bruce lives outside, this is often a last resort and a piece of composing his life, of just *trying to get by in the city*. Ideas of survival are at the forefront when living a life outside, and as we spoke further, he discussed multiple dimensions of these experiences.

Bruce regularly would have to navigate the creation, negotiation, and maintenance of relationships with others who share dual street and square identities. Navigating these relationships with others was constantly on his mind, requiring him to protect himself. Bruce spoke previously about judging the intentions and inferring the end-game goals of individuals

that he meets on the city streets. There are self-protective mechanisms that he uses. A piece of this sensemaking involves trusting his instinct towards individuals that come into his life:

*Peace or danger - it is instinct. It is something you just know.*

Bruce listens to his *instincts*, which arise from his numerous years and experiences of interacting and living alongside diverse people and places. Ideas of peace or danger and the need to suddenly react have been a piece of these relationships. Bruce embodies knowledge in his actions; whether they are called instincts or gut feelings, he knows how to live outside and amongst others. After Bruce first meets someone and his instincts do not tell him, *danger*, he opens up their relationship with his personable demeanor that I have witnessed throughout our time together. Living with others outside opens the opportunity for Bruce to have discussions and share ideas.

*You get to meet people on the street to exchange and trade ideas, because we aren't so driven to pay rent or buy gas... your time is your time... we are not rushed... but it is different.*

There is a sense of community amongst those who live on Edmonton's streets and in its forested areas. Bruce's experiences on the street speak to these ideas of freedom, creativity, and a life outside the constraints of dominant economic and social narratives. Walking alongside him, I realize that there is so much to learn from Bruce and others who have lived lives marked by shared stories of a life in the river valley. I was curious about how Bruce creates relationships with those who have a street life. We were sitting across from one another when I asked,

Morgan: *How do you make relationships with people who have a street life?*

*It is different... they seek relationships where you need to do the right thing and be honest with them.*

When negotiating relationships, Bruce forefronts the importance of doing the right thing and being honest. I have seen pieces of this in our relationship: Bruce does not have alternative motives in dialogue and there is a pureness that echoes his ethos of living life in a good way and emanating good karma into the universe. However, the other piece of this approach involves creating boundaries with others on the street to protect himself from being taken advantage of. Yet, having valuables stolen is a common occurrence, especially when vulnerable.

*I meet a girl. She is OK I guess... she invites me over to her place. Have a shower, and I jump on the opportunity... in between the time we hop into the shower and out of the shower, my phone is gone.*

Living life on the streets is characterized by survival. However, there are constant risks to Bruce and his possessions when living in this world. A friend visiting the girl's roommate saw Bruce's phone and walked out with it. Unfortunately, these have been common occurrences for Bruce. There was another incident recently that resulted in Bruce having a number of his important items - his wallet and bike keys - stolen by someone visiting his camp:

*I remember her name, but I don't know if it was real or not... she ran away with my keys too, so I went and chased her... everything is just shady out there.*

Morgan: *Do people just take advantage of you?*



*Absolutely. You give an inch, they will just (pauses and exhales) ... it's just like one after another after another. You know, if you're personable at all or you even talk to anybody, it seems like they're trying to get something off you or take something... If you show any kindness or willingness to help them, you get lied to and or stolen off of.*

Bruce appeared tired when he spoke about this. I can hear his pause and then a deep sigh of frustration. Bruce forefronts kindness and personability when creating relationships, yet when he is living on the streets, this causes him to *get lied to and or stolen off of*. Listening to his story, whenever something gets stolen from him, it then snowballs and creates further issues and barriers to finding a home. After his wallet and phone was stolen, he had no government ID to get a new phone and renew his plan, so he had to switch telecommunication providers. In his voice, I could hear how tired he is of being taken advantage of and living on edge.

*It is everybody. It is not just me... everybody is prey. As soon as you're on the street, you're prey to somebody.*

Morgan: *That is so hard.*

*It is like chum in the waters.*

Bruce shared with me that when he lived in the shelters, people who had never accessed them before were seen like *chum in the waters* for the sharks that were waiting for them. His recent experiences reflect these same ideas, but outside of the shelter systems. Normally Bruce can avoid these scenarios by finding others to camp with in a more remote spot. However, these experiences of being stolen from and taken advantage of continue to appear in his recent stories

of living outside. Navigating relationships with others who live on the street and are just trying to survive seems exhausting.

Morgan: *Is it exhausting almost?*

*It is. Emotionally, mentally, it's... turns you into a different kind of person. You're not as giving or free as you normally would be.*

When Bruce shares these stories with me, I do not know what to do. How does he prevent himself from turning into a different kind of a person? How does the preying upon one another stop when living life on the streets? In line with these questions, I asked Bruce what could help protect him from being taken advantage of when living outside.

*Hope you have somebody else around you, watching your back, that you can partner up with... it's a nightmare.*

It is a significant challenge to find someone that you trust in a community of individuals who are just trying to survive. There are moments, conversations, and relationships that are built on genuine curiosity and a sense of community but finding someone you can *partner up with* is different. How does Bruce know he can partner up with someone? How do you know you can trust someone enough to leave them behind at your camp - with all of your belongings - as you go and pick up food? Because it is so hard to find someone else to trust when living outside, Bruce often relies upon himself.

*You can't let it get you down though. You have to alienate yourself so much that you're absolutely a loner and don't wanna be around anybody.*

Morgan: *That is hard, eh?*

*Yeah, that is.*

Bruce enjoys the feelings of kinship and belonging to a community. He told me stories of working on large tanks with scores of others during his days practicing as a 'B' Grade Pressure Welder. Bruce would also bring in vegetables to the community organization, where he felt a sense of belonging. However, this love of kinship conflicts with trying to survive when living outside. It makes me reflect on the importance of the relationships that are created by those who support people in the community with histories of incarceration. Like Bruce said, there is no suspicion of their endgame. When conversing with Ashley, Cindy, or other support workers, Bruce does not have to be worried about his phone or wallet being stolen. Associated with protecting himself from the actions of others outside, there is an ongoing sense of mystery that accompanies those who have street identities and live outside. With a slight grin, Bruce posed a question:

*The real question: where do they go at night?*

Morgan: *Do you know?*

*Not in 100 years (laughter).*

There is a sense of mystery and the unknown about the lives and identities of those living parts of their lives on the street. I would often smile and reflect on this conversation, thinking that if Bruce is perplexed by the lives of people he lives alongside, how am I ever going to know? Yet, I acknowledge that a piece of beginning to understand the complex and rich

experiences of people is to listen and learn from Bruce. Another significant dimension of living outside for Bruce are the stories of loss that accompany trying to survive life on the streets.

*Unfortunately, you start to remember a lot of people who are now gone.*

Death, survival, and memories are a piece of Bruce's experiences of living outside and forming relationships with others who share a street identity. Losing people you know spanned his lifetime, but as he has aged, they continued to increase in number. I reflect on a field note:

*Bruce grabbed one rake and I grabbed the other, its worn wooden handle feeling familiar in my hand as the sun-bleached wood stood out against the leaves on the ground. We stood together and began to make piles of the various shades of yellow, red, and brown leaves that littered the ground outside the trailer. Together, Bruce and I participated in work, our minds wandering as we spoke to one another. A friend of his had overdosed in Edmonton about a week prior. They were only 51-years old and the last Bruce heard on the street was that they were heavily using down. Bruce shared with me that the last time he saw him, he had slapped his friend in frustration. He could see him continue to go down a path that Bruce did not want to see him go. Bruce shared that he even invited his friend out multiple times to come stay at Todd's place to escape the city. He did not look over at me as we finished raking the last pile together, but our conversation drifted towards another topic.*

When we spoke about the experiences of loss that were embedded in Bruce's stories, these were often tied to the ongoing drug crisis that has changed the streets from previous

periods. Bruce was reflecting on how things have changed for those growing up on the streets: *things are different now - drugs are different.*

The sentiments that things have now changed, that the *drugs are different*, is something I have heard and seen before from my experiences working in facilities. There have been periods of time when overdoses were almost a daily occurrence on the general population units. Bruce reflected on the changing landscape of substance use in Edmonton:

*It is the fentanyl, and the pint I guess... but that fentanyl is nasty. It makes people sick, desperate, and when desperation, they have no morals, no nothing... it is bad, and it is a lot of young people.*

The overdose and methamphetamine crises are a lived reality for Bruce. Not only has the landscape of substance use changed on the streets, but the desperation of individuals also using these substances has increased. It appears that for Bruce, the moral boundaries that have guided the actions of people with uncontrolled substance use is changing. I wonder: what kind of effects on relationships with older adults who also have street lives is this causing between youth living with uncontrolled substance use? Bruce speaks of some sense of community and kinship when outside with others, but how is the changing landscape of drug use affecting this? What is the role of support services and individuals in this changing landscape? The effects of the increased rates of fentanyl and pint use is changing one of Bruce's worlds. He shared a story about a friend who lost their daughter to an overdose:

*It's almost like I'm scared to answer the phone if a name comes up on it... yeah, she was five months pregnant... would have been 21 in February.*

While experiences of loss are familiar in Bruce's stories, the increased rate of them due to the ongoing overdose crisis is something that has drastically changed. Arguably, being *scared to answer the phone if a name comes up on it* is indicative of a significant and ongoing trauma experienced by people living life on the streets and outside. Bruce is 66-years old, and it makes me wonder about how he has survived for so many years when so many others have not made it past their 30s. While I do not know the answer to this, I believe that how Bruce makes sense of his experiences are closely tied. He protects himself from others' predatory and desperate behaviors fueled by uncontrolled substance use when living outside. For those who live parts of their lives on the streets and in the forests, accompanying these experiences are ideas around bodies that stand out in public places.

*I got chased out of a park, on a LRT (subway), fell asleep on a boardwalk.*

Across the stories that Bruce shared, he often expressed frustration in being seen as out of place in public spaces: *can't sit in the park and clip nails without getting some weird looks, ya know?* His presence in shared spaces was often seen by others as a discomfort or something that should not be visible to them. Bruce was also often called out by *idiots* if he was seen traveling or stopping somewhere with his red luggage bag and sleeping supplies. I cannot imagine what this would feel like. Senses of frustration, anger, and confusion would likely occur, and questions would be posed: why would someone be upset or want me moved when I am sharing a public space with them? Can they not see that my life is with me in this red luggage bag? With a sense of frustration and a sigh, Bruce shared that when he lives outside, *that is what your day evolves into*. These types of interactions with strangers reinforce Bruce's view that, *no wonder I wanna become a hermit*. I turn towards a field note from March 2022:

*I met up with Bruce and his friend, Brittany, today for a bite to eat at a pizza and steak place in the North end of the city. He brought with him his red luggage bag with wheels, leaving it in the front entrance of the restaurant. The eatery fit the rustic and antique aesthetic; older wooden chairs and tables adorned the space alongside the highly lacquered wooden bar top. The lights provided a warm yellow ambience that contrasted with the white snow and brown-ish ice outside. I was looking forward to meeting up with Bruce today, so it was a welcome surprise to meet his friend. However, when Bruce and Brittany ordered our pizzas, the hostess would look at me each time - why? I felt confused by this. After we finished our pizzas together, I walked up to the hostess to pay our bill. As I approached the till with her, she asked, "Would you like your receipt? You can claim it." Taken aback, my left eyebrow raised. I know I never once said anything about my relationship with Bruce or Brittany. Her question was full of assumptions about who we all were and our relationships with one another.*

This experience has stayed with me. I wonder about the stories that people tell themselves, and others, regarding the lives and relationships of others. Who is permitted the categorization of a father and son? Who is a support worker and a client? Who is from the square world and who is from the street? Bruce and his life outside contrast with the ideas and identities of those dominated by social and institutional norms regarding where bodies can and cannot be, as well as how large of a bag someone should have with them. Integrated in Bruce's experiences and relationships with those living outside are the complicated relationships with those in traditional positions of authority.

Bruce lives in a constant, dynamic relationship with peace/police officers in the natural world. Like so many service roles that coincide with the lives of people living outside and histories of incarceration, there are those who are ‘good’ and those who are ‘bad.’ Curiously, I asked:

Morgan: *What is your relationship with Peace or Police officers out in the community?*

*It is good. It is not bad at all.*

Morgan: *What makes it kinda good?*

*They’re willing to listen to you. Some of them (chuckles). Some are sympathetic to the fact that you are where you are... they understand the difficulties you are trying to navigate through.*

Just like his probation officer, some police/peace officers are aware - or at least try to acknowledge and understand - Bruce’s life. They see the challenges of living outside and amongst a community of diverse people who are trying to survive amongst drug crises, predatory behaviors, and structural barriers. However, just like correctional officers or nurses, there are some who are sympathetic and others who are not. Reflecting on Bruce’s relationships with Cindy and Ashley, I wonder how trust can be formed between law enforcement officers and those coming out of facilities. Is this a type of relationship that can have trust, or at least mutual respect? If so, what does this look like in practice? Police/Peace officers also have roles, specifically clearing out camps, in which they act as barriers and create challenges for Bruce as he lives outside and searches for a long-term home.



*In the process of that, getting roused out by the peace officer and having to move in the rain... they just roused ya - time to move... at least two weeks ago.*

This ongoing relationship with peace/police officers is complicated for Bruce, and a key piece of living outside. They are the ones who publicly enforce the dominant narratives that guide where bodies and homes should or should not be. It poses questions: how do police/peace officers make sense of this role where they remove people from camps? what would be some of their thoughts on this cycle? how can those involved in supporting people leaving facilities work together to understand these conditions of living? Throughout our conversations, this cycle of moving his home again and again seemed so tiring. I asked:

Morgan: *Do you have another tent set up?*

*I don't even know if it's worthwhile... it is either you're getting chased around by the cops or peace officers... they make it clear to you that you can't stay wherever you are, so off you go. You think you found a good spot... but it's probably about three days before you get roused out.*

The cycle of setting up his camp, getting roused out, moving everything, setting it up again, and getting roused out is ongoing and tiring for Bruce. This cycle got to the point where Bruce shared that he currently does not have one set up, because it is not worth the trouble. Instead he chooses to sleep outside. I acknowledge that living outside is not something that Bruce wants, but he must survive. I reflect on a field note when I was trying to contact Bruce:

*I called Bruce's cellphone, immediately hearing on the other end: "The customer you have dialed is not available. Please try again later." Click\*. Letting out a sigh, I closed my eyes and wondered where Bruce was and what he was doing. He had always had a working phone that would go to his voicemail, but this time his number is no longer in service. My mind wandered:*

*- Is he hurt? Well, if he was in the hospital, he would likely have a phone on him.*

*- Is he back in a facility? Likely no, because it would still go to his voicemail. Service providers do not shut your phone off that quickly, and I saw him not too long ago.*

*- Did he lose his phone? Still, his voicemail would remain the same.*

*- Did he get a new number? That would explain his line being disconnected. I do not know. I hope he is OK, and I should call the community organization and see if they have heard from him.*

*After calling the community organization and leaving a message, they let me know that Bruce had actually just come into the building and would be OK if you gave him a call. I remember my sense of relief when they shared that with me. Turns out, his phone was stolen and he could not get a new one because his ID. was also stolen.*

Throughout our conversations, it appears that Bruce lives outside because there are often no other options. He has limited family or friends to stay with, insufficient funds to rent a place (and put down a security deposit at the same time), and has to wait for any kind of formal

support from other resources. Yet, from these stories, Bruce is not someone without power. For him, he takes power away from the shelter system and instead lives on his own terms. Guiding ideologies of resiliency, good karma, and an endless perseverance and unique skillset to live outside contribute to how he lives his life and makes sense and meaning of his experiences. He always makes me laugh. Referring once to sleeping outside and joking,

*I was hoping I was gonna pop my head out and it was summer! (laughter).*

His experiences of living outside and navigating/avoiding the shelter systems are fundamentally tied to those experiences of leaving correctional facilities. They are also the precursors for entering facilities. While these experiences are tied to leaving or entering correctional facilities, they make up the context of his life that going into or out of facilities must take into account.

### ***Finding a Place***

A significant and pressing dimension of leaving correctional facilities, regardless of living with HIV or other chronic/episodic illnesses, is the process of returning to or finding a long-term home. Bruce has had homes before in the past, but across our relationship, he was often trying to find a long-term home after leaving Todd's farm at the beginning of winter.

*I am going get my own place again, or share it with somebody... not urgency, but a sense of calmness, that's what I would want. A place where I can be able to isolate myself from all the bullshit that might happen, can happen, does happen (laughter).*

To Bruce, finding his own place is critical, as most of his life then stems from this place of comfort, security, and autonomy. Bruce stayed at Todd's farm for the summer and fall of 2021, then moved back into the city during the winter and since then has been staying with friends, trying to find places to rent, while also living outside. An ongoing thread for Bruce when it comes to finding a home is that he, eventually, tends to look after himself.

*I manage to always, you know, progress enough so that I can carry it myself... even the last time I had an apartment over by Stadium. I actually went out and got it myself.*

Bruce can always rely upon himself and his knowledge of how to survive in life. His skillsets and experiences guide his actions and enable him to *carry it myself*. However, once Bruce is in this process of not having a set place, appearing to begin when he first left Todd's farm and came back to the city, he has found it *so hard* to escape living outside. He has been taken advantage of, preyed upon, and faced financial setbacks in trying to find a home. Integrated into this process of trying to find a home are formal support services, such as the ASO or other housing support services. These organizations have assisted Bruce by putting in applications to transitional housing and permanent/long-term housing supports. Bruce is currently awaiting a placement and a phone call saying that a landlord or rental manager has agreed to take him on as a tenant:

*Morgan: How long does he (housing worker) think it will take?*

*Oh Christ, who knows (chuckles).*

Key to accessing and being retained within these supports are the relationships Bruce has created with individuals in these organizations. The trust that accompanies these relationships - with Cindy or Ashley - is why Bruce has faith in the housing support system. However, the landscape of housing supports has recently changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, frustrating Bruce and posing additional barriers. Because of the in-person restrictions, he *can't show up, because everything is remote*. While this remote access has made some services more accessible for some people, others, like Bruce, have found this a barrier to accessing formal housing supports. Bruce is comfortable with taking the bus and having a conversation with someone in person to seek assistance, but the remote/online interactions are a barrier for him.

A further barrier that Bruce expressed is his ineligibility for more 'fast track' housing supports as well as certain renting criteria for those that meet age, disability, health, or mental health conditions. Pausing for a moment, he shared with me, *I keep falling through the cracks*.

*I don't meet the criteria for further help: not a young student, I don't have a cane, I don't have a mental illness... One wanted preferable age – I didn't meet that.*

As of right now, Bruce has limited other options that align with his identities and sense of self to obtain a long-term home. He can stay in shelters, with friends, or live outside until his applications are approved or he and/or his support workers find a rental - or rather a landlord or rental unit manager - who will take him. I cannot imagine how frustrating this would be. A waiting game, where options are limited, and you are in survival mode amongst a community of others just trying to get by. I know that Bruce does not feel helpless, but I can hear the fatigue in his voice when he speaks about these processes and barriers. He can stay outside and survive, but

it takes a toll on him and his physical and mental health – it is tiring. Adding further to this exhaustion are the ongoing dimensions of trying to find a temporary house to stay at while his applications go through.

On Bruce's path to find a long-term home, he has had to experience many dimensions of temporary housing. After he left Todd's farm in early December, he came to the city and was staying on friends' couches as he applied for housing and looked for somewhere to rent. Unfortunately, these setups are temporary and often fleeting, dependent upon relationships that are challenged by the intimate practices of diverse people living under one roof. Reflecting on a field note from January, I wrote:

*Met up with Bruce at a restaurant on the Northside of the city today. It has been about a month since he headed into the city from Todd's farm, and he has been staying with a couple he knows in their two bedroom apartment. Still figuring out a place to stay long-term, but he just met a woman who is staying at the nearby Travelodge Hotel that is also looking for a roommate.*

*I was gonna phone her before this morning... no expectations on either part of it, it is purely financial.*

From my understanding, the proposed roommate setup with the woman staying at the Travelodge did not end up working out for Bruce. At the same time, he was living in a temporary home and paying rent money to a couple he knew.

*I know that... Tracey and Julian need their own space. They really do, and I don't try to burden them. You know, and I try to help as much as I can, cleaning, cooking, dishes and all that... and I don't ever impose on them... but it's stressful right now, because I know that they need their own space, and it is only a two bedroom apartment.*

This scenario worked well at first, but Bruce began to feel that he was overstaying his welcome as he waited for his housing applications. He shared that this was stressful for him. I have felt out of place before in my life, but never have I felt like I have overstayed my welcome somewhere. I could see that Bruce felt conflicted. He wanted to leave and give the couple space, but he first needed to find a temporary home that could replace his current living arrangement. If only his housing applications would go through and he could find a long-term place. Shortly after, Bruce left the couple's home because he did not wish to impose any longer. He had found on an online marketplace a room to rent from an unknown couple.

I return to a field note: *I was near the end of my lunch break while working a shift at the remand centre when I saw that Bruce had left a voicemail message. Listening to it, he asked me to give him a call back. When Bruce picked up, he sounded frustrated on the phone - his pace of speech increasing and letting out a sigh\* in frustration. The unknown couple he rented from had taken advantage of him. He came home to find all his stuff outside the building and the doors locked. His calls ringing and ringing until they hit voicemail. Bruce was at the community organization now but was wondering if I had time to meet up. We are going to meet up tomorrow to connect.*

An ongoing piece of finding a home, while waiting for a long-term or even temporary place, is the risk of being taken advantage of/abused by others. Bruce wanted to find someone he was comfortable with and could share rental costs. He thought he did this, but after paying rent, letting them borrow money, and staying with them for only a few days, they threw all of his belongings outside the building. Bruce lost a significant amount of money and turned to the police for help. However, the police told him that this has happened before at this address, but because *this is a tenant issue*, it is not their responsibility. Bruce was so frustrated when he shared this with me, his face shaking with disbelief on how he was offered no assistance after being taken advantage of, stating: *they don't care*. Unfortunately, Bruce did not *even know these peoples last name* to follow up with. It was the day after and he was sharing his story over a bite to eat when he still had the energy to crack a joke:

*If they ever come through you, you know what to do! (laughing and referencing my role within correctional facilities)*

Across our conversations, Bruce has always been trusting and personable towards others, so I could hear his disbelief when speaking about how he was taken advantage of. After this experience, he asked: *how do you trust?* I reflected on this question: how *do* you trust someone with your home and scarce resources? what is trust, and what does it look like? how do you begin to trust someone when finding a home and living with them? is the trust that Bruce has with support services and individuals within these organizations the key to finding homes where Bruce can trust the landlords? The processes and barriers that accompany trying to find a home continued to be a part of his experiences during our relationship.



After this last experience, Bruce felt beaten down. Shaking his head, he shared that he would have to start again to find a place to rent, but *I have less than twenty dollars till the end of the month*. For Bruce to begin again, he would have to first *double up* (referencing his security deposit and first month's rent) and try to navigate the often formal and square rental processes to find a place. Bruce can rent through online marketplaces, such as Facebook, Kijiji, or Rentfaster, and he can walk around neighborhoods, looking for rental signs. Earlier in his life, he would do the latter, going into a neighborhood that he felt comfortable in and calling the numbers on the rental signs. However, things have changed.

*Used to be easy... just could call and meet up, but now it is a process.*

Bruce faces barriers when trying to access housing through mainstream rental companies, as they require extensive applications. He shared that rental companies are *too fucking picky and discriminating*. They want non-smokers and their tenants to live certain lifestyles – sticking to themselves and not bringing others home nor coming and going at late hours. Bruce shared that they read too much into who you are and what they want you to be. This all results in a challenging process.

*It takes a hell of a lot of effort to see a place... It's like a job... It's complicated and hard.*

There were many barriers for Bruce when trying to find a home, but few facilitators. Rental companies put up constant roadblocks to Bruce renting from them: applications, past references, credit card checks, criminal record checks, and also a minimum monthly income of approximately \$2300 – \$3000 to apply. Navigating these formal rental processes for Bruce is something that excludes him from applying. He is also constrained by the effects of living

outside amongst others who are desperate. His phone and wallet were stolen, so now he does not have a government ID to even apply. Bruce shows in his stories the cascading effects of living outside and how events begin to pile up on him, further limiting his housing options. Further understanding these pieces of how Bruce makes sense and navigates trying to find a home are integral to learning how to support people going into and out correctional facilities. Throughout his stories, he was navigating how to find a home, yet the challenges and mechanisms to keep a home once he found it were also forefronted.

### ***Keeping a Place***

Bruce has lived in diverse places across the stories that he shared with me. Intertwined with his experiences of searching for a home are what he must do to keep a home after he finds one. Relationships with roommates, landlords, and other community members are significant in understanding and making sense of these experiences of keeping a home.

Bruce can live by himself or with roommates. However, he does enjoy the companionship of others and the ability to share ideas and converse. Throughout the stories he told, he lives in relation to others and creates relationships based upon his ethos of emanating good karma. This connection to others extends to the processes and actions required to keep a home. Bruce often looks for roommates to live with, so they can split the bills and share companionship. However, this is often hard for him. Sometimes roommates do not want to spend a significant amount of time with him. As well, his experiences are marked by ongoing occurrences of being taken advantage of or preyed upon, posing the question: *how do you trust?* Thinking back to his time together on the farm with Todd, they shared a relationship that

appeared to work well for Bruce and fit what he looks for in a roommate. They would spend time collaborating on projects together: upgrading the trailer, chopping firewood, growing vegetables, and taking care of the greenhouse. I turn towards to a field note:

*I visited Bruce out at Todd's farm that is in Central Alberta. Driving down the highway, I took a turn onto a gravel road. The familiar 'roar' of the dirt and gravel moving under the vehicle took over from the 'hum' of the asphalt. Looking behind me, the billowing cloud of dust began to lift. Finding the turn off for the farm, the entry was framed by the barbed wire and wooden posts that decorate most of Alberta's rural areas. Small rolling hills with the short haircuts of hay recently harvested dot the area around the farm. Small, dispersed pockets of poplar trees with their changing fall colors added some texture to the fields. Pulling up to the farm, you can smell a slight scent of smoke mixed in with the cow pastures. It is so still out here. Pulling my backpack and our coffees out of the vehicle, I was greeted by Bruce coming out of the trailer.*

Creating and maintaining roommate relationships with others is an ongoing dimension of keeping a home. These relationships would often work for a period of time, such as when Bruce lived with another individual before we met - *it worked out for a year*. Yet Bruce is introspective and reflective on his actions when living with others, adding that he needs to be selective about who he chooses to live with:

*I'm not comfortable.. But you have to know if you can live with someone.. Or me (laughter)... You'll have to tone down your shit and same for me (laughter).*

It is with his usual sense of humor that Bruce looks back on his experiences and acknowledges that he, too, brings with him certain personality traits and behaviors that may be challenging to live with. Finding a trustworthy and compatible roommate is part of keeping a home. They should be personable, somewhat enjoy spending time with Bruce, and be aware that they need to *tone down* their shit. Another dimension of keeping a home that Bruce spoke about was navigating and guarding himself from those with street identities that come to his place.

The last time Bruce had a place to himself, he was evicted from his apartment by the sheriffs. His 'friends' were conducting shady activities at his building when they came to visit him. It was a place in north Edmonton, and he would often reflect on this experience. It was so frustrating for him. When people with street identities visit and have predatory intentions, their name is not on the lease nor are they the ones paying for rent: *it's not on them*.

*Stuff starts happening to the property itself, like mailboxes start getting broken into or this or that.*

After this occurred, Bruce moved out to Todd's farm in the Spring of 2021. Bruce would express frustration with the challenges of having people come over to his home which could then lead to him becoming evicted. A piece of this frustration also stemmed from his personable and community-orientated disposition. Bruce has a motto to give back to people and the communities he has been a part of. He often will not refuse someone a warm place to stay, a shower, and some hot food, because he has been there. However, he needs to protect himself, and his home, from those that may threaten it.

Bruce enrolls in some self-protective mechanisms to protect his place from those that may threaten it. One example he shared was telling someone visiting that he will be home in about two hours, but then, unexpectedly, arriving home about an hour early. Bruce does this to protect himself and his home.

*People want to portray themselves as being honest and blah, blah, blah, but, given the opportunity, let's see what happens.*

Overall, it appears that Bruce's experiences of keeping a home begin to come into conflict with his motto to always help out other community members. He balances helping others while protecting himself and his home. I cannot imagine the frustration that would occur if after all the work and frustration of living outside, having your camp taken down, being preyed upon, finding a home and roommate, that then someone who came over brought a friend that got me evicted. I wonder about the other self-protective mechanisms Bruce engages in across his experiences of searching for and keeping a home. I also wonder about the role of service providers and organizations in assisting Bruce with keeping a home - what can be done to support him? And in which ways does supporting Bruce maybe limit his freedom to participate and be a part of the communities of people that he loves?

Bruce's experiences of searching for a home are fundamentally tied to how people make sense of their experiences going into and out of correctional facilities. Reflecting on his words - *it is so hard to do anything without having a set place* - and his ongoing journey to find a home, having a long-term place to call your own is critical to providing structure in life. While Bruce lives with HIV, it appears that this illness has a minimal impact on his journey to find a home,

because he is in control of it; he still finds time to attend his appointments and keep his counts up. Thinking back on his search for a long-term place, Bruce is resilient. Each time we meet, I am reminded of that through the stories he lives and tells.

## **Future**

Bruce and I sat down together and spoke about his future. In his immediate future, he wishes to have a place of his own where he can find some peace, comfort, and create a sense of structure. Yet when we spoke about the period of time beyond finding a long-term place, he shared:

*I think about it all the time. I don't know if I think short term or long term. I mean, obviously, I know that... at some point, you have to admit to yourself that, 'Hey, I am 65. I ain't going to make another 40-years.'*

The lenses that Bruce interprets his future with are based upon his 66-years of life. Bruce has lived a significant life over many years, places, and alongside diverse people. When we spoke about ideas of the future, his stories were often connected with his ideas on mortality, reincarnation, and an ongoing journey where he is both the pilot and the passenger. These experiences and the stories he shared with me are significant, and they begin to set the context of the future for him that begins with his own sense of mortality. In Bruce's words, *there's nobody who ever gets out of this alive. We are all born to die, and life kills you.* I reflect in a field note:

*Bruce and I met up at a downtown pizza place. It was the early winter and right after he had to leave Todd's farm because of the 'diesel' incident. Bruce was staying on a friend's couch*

*as he figured out what he needed to do next. Sitting down and eating our pizzas together, I enjoyed the chance to connect with Bruce. Midway through our time together, he started speaking about the downtown location and its familiarity with Bruce. He did not realize until now, but one or two buildings down the street was a funeral home. He had attended this building many times in his life. Specifically, he mentioned his older sister, Jennifer, and his father's memorials. These were just two of the times he visited that place, but they stuck with him as we spoke.*

Bruce's ongoing sensemaking of his experiences is framed in the context of those he has lost. He understands and is able to prioritize what is a trivial matter in life and what is significant and important to him. He holds such knowledge in his years of experience. Bruce's understandings are informed by the relationships and identities that come into and out of his life.

*I've seen a lot of people die. You know, in the course of 3-4 people per year... there is a natural progression I guess, and that is probably what motivates me to be out there doing it in their memory or something.*

A piece of how and why Bruce lives his life and understands his sense of becoming is based upon the memories of those who have passed away. Bruce acknowledges that his time on this earth is finite, but he wishes to continue on his journey that is guided by an ethos of doing good in life and emanating good karma.

*I do not have a lot of years left on this earth, but I do hope I make some impression with someone... somewhere along the line.*

While Bruce does not know what his future will hold for him nor what experiences may occur, he spoke about the metaphysical and spiritual components of his life and identities, such as reincarnation. We first spoke about reincarnation while sharing a meal with his friend, Brittany, in the late spring when the water falling from the sky could not make up its mind between snow, sleet, or rain.

*Firm believer in reincarnation... you are here for a set reason... after that you either go back or forward in time... anything is possible.*

Morgan: *Do you know your reason?*

*Not yet... no idea, but might know when I die.*

I love the mystery and sense of unknown that Bruce contextualizes this life, and the next, within. To go forward or backward in time, with *anything is possible*. The opportunities and moments of discovery that this sensemaking approach creates for Bruce speak to his ongoing resilience, creativity, and imagination. There is some guiding reason - *a set reason* - for why we are here in life, only potentially becoming known to us after we die. My sense of curiosity creates an urge that I could hear from Bruce when he finally finds out what his reason was for being here. However, I know the answer is just for him. Bruce continues to live his ethos in life of being honest and truthful, of not giving into ideas or practices of taking advantage of others. I can hear the sense of relaxation and calmness in his voice as he reflects about his future:

*Never fear where you're gonna go, and always know that you will be taken care of.*



For Bruce, it appears there is a set reason for our lives, but we are not allowed to know this until this piece of our being and becoming has finished in some way or another. Intertwined in this idea of reincarnation is Bruce's belief regarding the journey and sense of direction.

*Once you point yourself in that direction, it will come down. This is going to happen. And when you have that happen to you a few times, you have no sense of worry, because you are on your way, right? Your path is crossed and you're off... I'm going that way and this is what is now going to be in front of me.*

When I first met Bruce, he struck me as someone who has weathered many experiences and periods of time over his life. He had a sense of stillness and calmness that emanated from him. Thinking back on this, perhaps it was, in part, his *no sense of worry*. Once he begins another chapter of his ongoing life, he orientates himself to the immediate path now in front of him, knowing that he can take care of himself. If this path opens upon today, tomorrow, or next year, Bruce acknowledges that he will then be off.

I can imagine Bruce walking along a forested road, the clouds overhead highlighted by the rays of sunshine finding their way through them. With a set pace, he continues to take one step at a time, moving forward and smiling. He knows that he has been walking along the same path for a while now, but he does not care. There are no pestering bugs, his body does not ache, and he is not bored with the journey so far. Up ahead and hidden amongst the poplar and spruce trees he spots a signpost indicating a fork in the road. Walking up to the sign and moving the tree branches away, the destinations are blurred to him; yet his instinct tells him, *I'm going that way*.

## Chapter 6: Narrative Threads

In this chapter, I highlight the narrative threads that resonate across Bruce's and Kyle's accounts. By identifying narrative threads, I begin the process of moving from interim to final research texts. During this process I am attentive to my responsibility when listening to, and thinking *with*, the stories of Bruce and Kyle; being a good listener is difficult work, as I have a responsibility to avoid reducing someone's stories into a set of circumstances or categories (Coles, 1989; Greene, 1995). The process of exploring, identifying, and discussing Bruce's and Kyle's narrative threads is guided by the relational ethics of narrative inquiry, specifically my relational responsibility to them (Clandinin et al., 2018).

Bruce's and Kyle's experiences are contextualized in the metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, which opens up ways of knowing and being (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By thinking with a Deweyan-inspired view of experience, specifically temporality, sociality, and place, I begin to highlight the complexity of their experiences (Caine et al., 2022). Thinking with the notion of temporality, their experiences of going into and out of facilities are embedded within their ongoing stream of experiences and life making. I cannot separate the experience of going into a facility from that of living within a facility nor leaving; facilities are all but one part of their experience. I looked to ideas and plotlines that extended across participants' experiences of going into and out of facilities, asking questions such as: how do I understand Kyle's and Bruce's conditions of living before they go into a facility? And how, and in what ways, do they return to these same, or similar, conditions upon release? How do these conditions extend into facilities? Thinking with their experiences within the ideas of interaction enacted in situations, their stories expressed feelings, dispositions, and hopes during experiences

involving facilities. These internal pieces of who they are and are becoming is constantly interacting with their external conditions of experience, specifically dominant institutional, familial, social, and cultural narratives. Their experiences are also contextualized in place, whereby their stories lived and told are rooted in storied landscapes across Alberta and North America. As I attended to the narrative threads, I was reminded of Bateson's (1994) work on peripheral vision.

Bateson reminds me to depend on my vision on the periphery as I engage in the inquiry, co-compose accounts, and turn towards narrative threads. By being open to differences, I was open to learning alongside Bruce and Kyle in the midst of their stories. Thinking *with* their stories (Morris, 2002), I was confronted with different ways of knowing and being. Kyle had worked for many years as a sex worker across North America, and Bruce had lived outside in the river valley for almost a year. Their stories invited me to live alongside them as I, too, lived my stories. Visiting the river valley or the ravines in Edmonton, I would think *with* Bruce's stories as I walked along the paths. Each of the different ways of seeing and knowing that I was exposed to contributed towards my changing understandings of the inquiry. Coming back to work a shift at the remand centre, during my interactions with men whose sexual orientation gravitated towards other men, I would remember the stories Kyle shared of being gay. Attending to peripheral visions not only assisted me in constructing and thinking through Kyle's and Bruce's narrative accounts but opened myself up to the ongoing inquiry. My peripheral vision coincided and built upon the ideas of Greene (1995), specifically regarding her stance towards seeing people as 'big'.

In another piece of work (Wadams, 2022), I thought with Greene's (1995) ideas on viewing people as 'big' within the context of my experiences working in correctional facilities. Her ideas encourage me to view an individual as 'big' or whole, in all their particularity and individuality, while expanding my understanding and opening myself to learn alongside their experiences (Greene, 1995). In this way the complexity of their lives and relationships are highlighted. Making visible the lives of Kyle and Bruce was part of my relational responsibility to them as we engaged in the inquiry. While only offering a glimpse into their lives and identities, their narrative accounts and experiences of transitions were the beginning of viewing their lives in more complex ways.

Transitions occurred in the midst of Kyle's and Bruce's stream of experiences. Their experiences of transitioning cannot be separated from the rest of their ongoing stream of experience. The narrative threads acknowledge and further explore this understanding. Although there were multiple threads that resonated across these two accounts, I will speak to two in this chapter. These threads include: a) expressed through Crite's (1971; 1986) ideas on the three narrative qualities of experience, going into and out of correctional facilities is part of an ordinary life for Bruce and Kyle, yet these experiences of 'ordinary' create tensions – or a lack of narrative coherence when coming up against dominant narratives; and b) relational agency as a way to shape a life. This chapter draws upon and makes visible two threads that underpin and emphasize a narrative conceptualization of transitions.

## Ordinary Lives: Tensions and Narrative Coherence

Kyle and Bruce were each in the processes of identity and life making throughout the inquiry (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin et al., 2013; Clandinin et al., 2018). They shared stories that provided insight into how their sense of self shifted through time:

*Kyle: I am feeling like I am going too far [...] like doing crime and stuff like that... it's just like, am I pushing it? Am I gonna end up back in jail?*

Kyle began our time together with stable housing to one that was more precarious – he could feel himself getting closer to becoming reincarcerated. Bruce's trusting nature shifted as he left Todd's farm and started to live outside, where this act of living *turns you into a different kind of person. You're not as giving or free as you normally would be.* Both men's sense of self was not static. Instead, I understood their sense of self as dynamic across time. Crites (1986) reminds me that a coherent life is not a given nor a track laid down in the living, but instead that a coherent life must be made and revised from the recollecting 'I'. If one does not construct a coherent sense of self, disruptions and tensions occur.

Tensions arose from the lives Kyle and Bruce lived and the stories they told themselves and others about who they are and what they are about. Their lives and identities, as human beings living storied lives on storied landscapes, are ordinary. Yet their lives and identities rubbed up against dominant narratives that most often guide what people should and should not do. Living in a public space or committing *dirt* to keep a roof over your head began to create a lack of coherence with dominant ideas of where people should sleep or the activities someone can do to keep their home.

Kyle's and Bruce's lives were ordinary, yet when bumping up against institutional discourses, it created incoherence expressed in tensions across their stories. Thinking with Crite's work (1971; 1986) on the three dimensions of a narrative quality of experience (sacred stories, mundane stories, and the temporal form of experience) and Carr's ideas (1986a; 1986b) on narrative coherence informs how I come to understand and possibly support Kyle and Bruce in the context of their lives transitioning into and out of correctional facilities and living with HIV.

### *Temporal Form of Experience*

Narrative is a cultural form capable of expressing coherence through time (Crites, 1971). Carr (1986a; 1986b) goes further by indicating that the narrative structure and coherence is the very extension of reality and human experience. By understanding the temporal form of experience as having narrative qualities, this "unit of form" creates a starting point to further explore movements into and out of correctional facilities (Crites, 1971, p. 303). A temporal form of experience proposes that memory, anticipation, and direct attention builds on one another and forms part of our present moment.

The recollected past, present moment, and anticipated future are all connected: all of us are forever moving towards the future – an inescapable horizon that we construct via desires (Crites, 1986). Our memory is the depth of our previous experiences, anticipation is the trajectory of plausible experiences, and direct attention is a focus on the present (Crites, 1971). Narrative form unifies these ideas of temporality into something coherent. Crites (1986) writes:

the future is the universal fluidity from which everything new is born. The merely possible child, before it is so much as conceived, much less born, subsists in the future of its parents. Of course, the child does not actually exist until it becomes present. So, all new things come into existence out of the future, become present and pass over into the past where they achieve clear enough definition to be recollected: understood. (p. 167)

Our memory is the recollection of our past experiences – not only what we sensed – but what we experienced (Crites, 1986). Memory then shapes the pivotal point – the unmeasurable present moment - where the I recollects and retrieves its own self (Crites, 1986). In other words, our recollection of our experiences takes form in our identity. Our identity, in this present moment, leans into the void that is the future, projecting our identity and desires forward (Crites, 1986). Implicit in this understanding is that peoples’ identities are forever shifting and changing while being part of a dynamic present.

The present is “the point of tension that both joins past and future and also places us in fundamentally different relations to them” (Crites, 1986, p. 155). A temporal form of experience demonstrates that “future, present, and past mutually determine one another as parts of a whole” (Carr, 1986a, p. 32). This ‘wholeness,’ as observable as it may be, is surveyed “prospectively and retrospectively from within an everchanging present” (Carr, 1986a, p. 75). Situated in and encompassing the present is a conscious present.

The conscious present is that of a body impacted in a world and moving, in process, in that world. In this present action and experience meet. Memory [past] is its depth, the depth of its experience in particular; anticipation [future] is its trajectory, the trajectory of

its action in particular. The *praesens de praesentibus* is its full bodily reality. It is, moreover, the moment of decision within the story as a whole. (Crites, 1971, p. 303)

Summarized in the conscious present, a temporal form of experience is one of Crite's three ideas constituting the narrative qualities of experience (1971). The stories Bruce and Kyle live and tell are marked by their conscious present. Based upon the work of Carr (1986b) and Crites (1971), consciousness is situated at the interstices of where we remember, anticipate, and directly perceive. When we further explore the other two narrative qualities of experience – sacred stories and mundane stories - we understand that our conscious present is largely social. For mediating between the mundane and sacred stories is the form of experiencing consciousness (Crites, 1971). Although Kyle wishes to separate himself from society at times, how he makes sense of his experiences transitioning into and out of facilities while living with HIV cannot be separated from the social. Kyle nor Bruce can separate their sense of self from the 'we'.

### ***Mundane and Sacred Stories***

Stories are “told in being lived and lived in being told” (Carr, 1986a, p. 61). Stories are the portal through which a person enters the world and makes sense and meaning of their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). For Crites (1971) mundane and sacred stories are the other two narrative qualities of experience.

The stories that Kyle and Bruce shared are mundane. They are the stories consciously told and the stories consciously lived (Crites, 1971). They transitioned into and out of correctional facilities and lived with housing instability, HIV, and substance use. These stories are mundane in how they express themselves; Kyle and Bruce are consciously aware of these



stories and their actions in them. Bruce shared mundane stories that revolved around living with HIV:

*It doesn't affect my life... no, it did at first. Makes it that much harder... how do you disclose to a partner that you're interested sexually? K? You know, that is a pretty crummy opening pickup line! (laughter).*

Bruce is aware of the impact that living with HIV has on his intimate relationships. The mundane stories of Bruce and Kyle opened up a world of living with a chronic and episodic illness, like HIV, that was predominately a nuisance for them. These stories were also intertwined with experiences of HIV-related stigma, cautiously optimistic relationships, and trying to remember if you took a single pill each day. Mundane stories weave alongside and bump up against the sacred stories that contribute towards our internal coherence of who we are and what we are about (Crites, 1971).

Kyle and Bruce dwell in sacred stories. These stories live within our “arms, legs, and bellies” (p. 295) and are “absorbed without being directly heard or seen directly told” while projecting a symbolic world (Crites, 1971, p. 304). Sacred stories carry authority in our lives and enable us to understand our ongoing life in relation to them, acting as a fundamental narrative form where “men’s sense of self and world is created” (Crites, 1971, p. 295). We can dwell in multiple sacred stories, for there is not only multiplicity in our identities, but also our worlds (Crites, 1971). The mundane stories lived and told by Bruce and Kyle are the expression of the sacred stories that they carry. As I lived alongside Bruce and Kyle, I wonder: how do I come to

know the sacred stories that guide who Bruce and Kyle are and are becoming? and if I can come to know them, how did Bruce and Kyle make sense of these stories?

Sacred stories arise from the social, i.e., “culture” (Crites, 1971, p. 295). The temporal dimension of experience emphasizes that the way we remember, anticipate, and perceive is predominately a social endeavor. Sacred stories have experiences at their root and carry forward this link between a “man's individual consciousness with ultimate powers and also with the inner lives of those with whom he shares a common soil” (Crites, 1971, p. 304). A common soil may be understood as part of the “cultural forms” – these forms “help to link men’s inner lives as well as orienting them to a common public world” (Crites, 1971, p. 304). Specifically, on shared storied landscapes and within public worlds, the “way people speak, dance, build, dream, embellish” (p. 291) are cultural expressions that hint towards how one came to name and think with sacred stories. In what ways do Kyle’s and Bruce’s lived and told stories come alongside those they share a common soil with to dance, build, and dream? What tensions may arise from this interplay?

Our forms of cultural expression are inherently guided by dominant social, familial, historical, and political narratives that bump up and come alongside our lives. Bruce and Kyle both shared street identities. They lived in a world that is shaped by cultural forces tied to the street. Kyle does not do ‘dirt’ (i.e., crime) that physically hurt others, yet he does do dirt to provide for himself. Bruce does not do dirt, as he believes in emanating good karma, but he faces housing instability, lives outside, and faces predatory intrusions in his life (e.g., being pepper sprayed and robbed when sleeping outside). These are the mundane stories that Kyle and Bruce tell and live, for they are an expression of the sacred stories in a certain culture. Yet, across their

accounts, tensions arose amongst the stories they lived and told. These tensions are best expressed through Carr's (1986a; 1986b) ideas on narrative coherence.

### *Narrative (In)Coherence*

Narrative coherence structures reality and is a fundamental piece of a narrative understanding of experience (Carr 1986a; 1986b). Achieving a sense of coherence is a purposeful endeavor that even “with all its attendant problems, is a matter closest to all of us” (Carr, 1986b, p. 20). We make sense of our unfolding life in a way that restructures it, moving away from a sense of randomness towards a life and identity purposefully put together: “for most of us most of the time, things do, after all, make sense, hang together” (Carr, 1986a, p. 90). Ultimately, a sense of coherence is the “standard which determines even that which deviates from it” (Carr, 1986a, p. 90); if our life and sense of self no longer has a sense of coherence, we make sense of it via improvisation or imagination, and if coherence was never there to begin with, we create it. Achieving a final sense of coherence is not possible - we may realize coherence in one stream of our life, but it is something we are always seeking (Carr, 1986a). Kyle and Bruce were perpetually in the pursuit of a sense of narrative coherence across and beyond two worlds and identities: street and square.

Kyle and Bruce shared stories of who they are and what they are about, and in these stories, there were moments that lacked narrative coherence (Carr, 1986a). Their stories created tensions with dominant social, political, and familial narratives across street and square worlds. Kyle shared stories of being a sex worker:

*To me, it doesn't bug me but it's part of my life. You know what I mean? It is the biggest page in my history book. It's the longest chapter. The only chapter that I would probably ever write about, because the rest is just... fluff. You know what I mean? Like, I loved what I did. I made such good money, it wasn't funny.*

Dominant narratives are elusive but also direct, telling us how intimacy, relationships, or bodies should be and how they should be treated. While living as a sex worker was coherent in Kyle's dance in the street world, it bumped up against dominant ideas of family and relationships in the dances of those more comfortable in a square world. As well, Bruce lived outside – *one time, it was one week shy of an entire year in the river valley* - and found comfort amongst communities camped in forested areas. This is coherent with how one builds a home for those living in the world of the streets, but begins to create tensions and a lack of coherence when coming up against dominant social ideas of where bodies should be seen and what a home should look like. A lack of narrative coherence also permeated other streams of their lives.

Both Kyle and Bruce lived and told stories of being independent and relying upon themselves as a primary support when going into and out of facilities. Kyle stated: *Me, myself, and I.*, and Bruce referenced how he can

*always have a backup plan, whether it be to do it by myself or get it done by myself... even if it means getting all this stuff on a bus or off a bus or on the back of my bike ... but I never take for granted that whatever is said is gonna be done - I'll believe it when it's done... I trust myself to do it.*

Trusting oneself and knowing you can depend on yourself as a primary support is arguably coherent with how one dances amongst the street and square worlds, yet this idea also creates a sense of incoherence within worlds. Kyle wished to find a roommate – or a friend he could wholly trust, yet repeatedly potential roommates would violate his three-strike rule and place his home and freedom at risk. Bruce would reference his *hope you have somebody else around you, watching your back, that you can partner up with* as well as his desire to *meet people on the street to exchange and trade ideas*. Yet Bruce expressed a sense of incoherence and lack of trust towards others, resulting in him telling himself and others, *you have to alienate yourself so much that you're absolutely a loner and don't wanna be around anybody*.

Bruce's and Kyle's stories share the idea that loneliness and distrust accompanied living with a street identity – dwelling and dancing within this world – and it was a part of going into and out of correctional facilities and living with HIV. An inability to trust others, despite a need for companionship, friendship, and intimacy developed a sense of incoherence and state of “acute unease” in their lives (Crites, 1986, p. 162). I wonder: when one's story is incoherent at times, how does one begin to create a sense of coherence in the worlds they build and dance in?

Achieving a sense of narrative coherence involves the unification of three roles: the subject of a life-story, the principal teller of this story, and the audience to which it is told (Carr, 1986b). For all of us, “the story of one's life and activity is told as much to others as to oneself” (Carr, 1986b, p. 18). In the telling and living of this story, incoherences can develop between the subject, the storyteller, and the audience.

Between the mundane stories of selling thrills, welding, or finding a place to live and the sacred stories of trust and companionship is “the form of the experiencing consciousness itself” (Crites, 1971, p. 297). Consciousness is inherently tied to the social - the cultural expressions of a common soil and a world’s dominant social, family, and political narratives (Crites, 1971). These dominant narratives are also the audience to which Kyle and Bruce tell their stories. Arguably the ‘I’ cannot be separate from the ‘we’ in a narrative understanding of transitions, as a result there exists a lack of coherence in Kyle’s and Bruce’s lives that contributes towards the tensions in their stories. However, these points of tension may offer a way to further understand how one works towards achieving a sense of coherence.

### ***Changing the I***

Understanding transitions from a narrative conceptualization of experience includes the three narrative qualities of experience (Crites, 1971; 1986) and narrative coherence (Carr, 1986a; 1986b). A lack of narrative coherence was seen across Bruce’s and Kyle’s stories, creating disruptions and tensions for them and a state of dis/ease. Future dreams, wishes, and plans for projected actions are common, yet while people improvise, it is never random. I wonder: how can someone’s plans for projected action be shifted? To gain a sense of coherence, it is important to acknowledge what gives birth to a conscious present - “the moment of decision within the story as a whole” (Crites, 1971, p. 303).

This moment of decision that calls people to act differently is significant. Especially when this moment - characterized by hurling oneself towards the future – is marked by uncertainty. How does the conscious present, that is composed by our narrative understanding of

experience, shift? In thinking with Kyle's and Bruce's narrative accounts I can see that a conscious present may be shifted by engaging in relationships with others, relationships that are marked by trust. This trust is an outcome – or an effect – of understanding Bruce's and Kyle's lives from a place of wholeness; the audience who Bruce and Kyle tell their stories of who they are contributes towards a sense of coherence. They at times turn towards the 'we' to change the 'I.' This idea is fundamentally tied to the idea of hope - "hope to be something different than he has yet understood himself to be" (Crites, 1971, p. 166). Moving towards narrative coherence – the alignment of oneself as a subject and storyteller with an audience – is an ongoing endeavor. When throwing oneself towards an uncertain future, there is a hope to become something different. Amidst trusting relationships, one can experience a consciousness in which one can interpret and act upon the world in new ways. These social groups may take the form of families, in the narrowest sense (Carr, 1986a), but in Kyle's and Bruce's stories, these were often relationships with others that are marked by agency, hope, and an increasing capacity to interpret and act upon their worlds in different ways.

### **Relationships and Relational Agency**

When I came alongside Bruce and Kyle during the inquiry, they were in the midst of their lives. I joined them during a specific point in their temporal journey and continued with them for a period of time, leaving the inquiry in a sense of 'for now' while their lives continued (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I have continued to think and live my life with their stories; I acknowledge that I have changed over the inquiry, my world growing larger (Dewey, 1938).

A narrative thread that resonated across Kyle's and Bruce's accounts were the relationships they created with diverse people on changing landscapes. These relationships were based upon their experiences and ongoing identities intersecting with friends, families, children, support workers, and intimate partners. These relationships were a part of their experiences as they composed their lives and identities. As I paid attention with my peripheral vision, I noticed relationships with individuals in service or outreach organizations taking shape that seemed different from others. Kyle spoke about Cindy:

*She has been a counselor at the network for over 20 years... Like, Cindy is my family.*

Someone working for a support agency has created a relationship with Kyle that spanned two decades and is built on familial ideas. Because both Bruce and Kyle were recruited from a local ASO, Bruce also knew Cindy. Bruce shared a piece of his relationship with her and another counselor:

*They are my friends before my counselors. They are my friends that I ask questions when I need help.*

While Cindy and Ashley are both outreach workers/counselors, they are Bruce's friends. Bruce can turn towards them when things are going well in his life. I wonder: what was it about these relationships with Cindy and Ashley that were unique? As we continued to converse, there were another set of relationships. Kyle shared his thoughts about his probation officer, Mary:



*I had respect for her, and I never have respect for those kinds of people in that position, you know? In corrections of any sort, but her... I would definitely be friends with her on the street. She did try her hardest to work with me, and I appreciate that.*

Kyle and Mary disrupt the traditional narratives of a community supervision and community supervised relationship, where one holds a traditional position of power and authority (i.e., ability to threaten one's freedom or home) over the other. Bruce also shared a positive relationship with his last community supervision officer:

*I had the best one ever... this last one I had 18-months probation. Her name was Jacky... She was great. She was absolutely the best.*

Jacky was to Bruce as Mary was to Kyle – both exemplars of community supervision relationships. Jacky and Mary held traditional positions of power and authority, but something was different about how these relationships were storied by Bruce and Kyle. Attempting to view Kyle and Bruce in the wholeness of their lives and with particularity, I began to wonder: what was so unique or empowering about these relationships with individuals who held positions of power/authority? and how did Bruce and Kyle story these relationships?

Kyle's and Bruce's relationships with the outreach workers and their community supervision officers were marked by trust and the capacity to develop agency. I approach agency in this thread as the will and resulting ability to act upon and evaluate one's desires and needs in relation to the processes of identity and life making. Understanding how relationships were able to develop agency as a capacity in both men's stories is part of this thread. Fundamental to understanding agency in the context of these relationships, and how one 'gains' agency, is

relational agency (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004; Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005; Edwards, 2005; Edwards, 2011). Relational agency contributes towards an understanding of transitions conceptualized narratively and is explored as an avenue to begin realizing the significance and effects of those relationships that created connections and 'saw' Bruce and Kyle in the wholeness of their lives.

### ***Relational Agency***

Relational agency was conceptualized in the field of teaching and learning from the work of Edwards and D'Arcy (2004) amongst student teachers in the United Kingdom. Edwards and Mackenzie (2005) expanded on these ideas in their work exploring trajectories of inclusion and resilience amongst women facing social exclusion at an inner-city drop-in centre. Relational agency is described as "a capacity for working with others to strengthen purposeful responses to complex problems" (Edwards, 2011, p. 34); it occurs within a two-stage, dynamic process:

(i) working with others to expand the 'object of activity' or task being worked on by recognizing the motives and the resources that others bring to bear as they, too, interpret it;

and (ii) aligning one's own responses to the newly enhanced interpretations with the responses being made by the other professionals while acting on the expanded object.

(Edwards, 2011, p. 34)

Relational agency is a capacity, and thus can be developed (Edwards, 2005). The "object of activity" can refer to complex phenomenon or conditions of living, such as housing instability,

adhering to ART, or following community supervision orders. Relational agency may begin to shift agency for Kyle and Bruce while changing their trajectories of learning and positively impacting their ability to interpret a phenomenon, gather available resources, and then take purposeful action (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005).

### ***Narrative Inquiry and Relational Agency: Theoretical Congruence***

I approach experience in this work as a narratively composed phenomenon, primarily based upon a pragmatic framework and Deweyan-inspired view of experience (Caine et al., 2022; Clandinin, 2013). The philosophical foundations of narrative inquiry are congruent with relational agency and help us to further understand transitions composed narratively. Thinking with Dewey's (1938) idea of interaction enacted in situations, one's internal disposition cannot be separated from its external conditions of existence. Knowledge becomes embodied and enacted through my consciousness and stream of experience. When interpreting and responding to an object of activity, we use the conceptual and material resources available to us (Edwards, 2005). These resources may take the shape of dominant institutional narratives (i.e., sacred stories) as well as the physical objects and conditions composing our worlds. Relational agency approaches the understanding of others – who they are and what they are about – not as a matter of “getting inside their heads” but as a product of collaborative action (Edwards, 2005, p. 171). Engaging and negotiating with others reveals their interpretations of the object, creating shifts in relational knowing (Edwards, 2005). In the joint-action of working on the object, those involved in the relationship are impacted; this inter-individual change occurring through mutual collaboration is a point of emphasis in relational agency (Edwards, 2005).

Overall, the foundation of thought informing relational agency is, arguably, congruent with a narrative understanding of experience. Edwards and Mackenzie (2005) summarize: “we usually learn about our worlds and what we can do in them in interaction with others and or with materials created by others” (p. 289). In line with Crites’ (1971; 1986) ideas on the three narrative qualities of experience, relational agency emphasizes how the ‘I’ arises, and is inseparable from, the ‘we.’ Relational agency provides a way forward for those coming from different worlds, to ultimately change their learning trajectories and adapt who they are and are becoming.

### ***Dimensions of Relational Agency***

Thinking with Kyle’s and Bruce’s experiences, when someone is released to the community their housing, social supports, and economic conditions are often fragmented, and they face challenges accessing services spread across the city. These fragmented supports are also the same conditions of experience before they enter correctional facilities. I wonder: what are we transitioning people to if the systems to support people are fragmented or non-existent? When further understanding the supports for Kyle and Bruce, both men would a) rely upon themselves to look after their own needs and b) interact with individuals and organizations they trust. I turn toward understanding relational agency as a way to help make sense of Bruce’s and Kyle’s experiences.

**Trust.** Trust is foundational in relational agency. Kyle and Bruce trusted other individuals, such as Cindy or Ashley, to support them. I remember asking Bruce:

Morgan: *You said it felt like they had your back, that you trust them?*

Bruce: *Absolutely. Unequivocally... when I, umm, when I need to be grounded or muddled through things that are going on my life. I seek them. I talk to them.*

While Bruce trusted Cindy and Ashley, both men trusted themselves above all else; they were their primary support when going into facilities and upon release. For example, Kyle shared: *Me, myself, and I. [...] Plain and simple. I've never relied on others.* And Bruce stated: *I have always had a backup plan, whether it be to do it by myself or get it done by myself. [...] I trust myself to do it.* Reflecting on Kyle's narrative account, I wonder: how can service providers or agencies be invited into Kyle's fortress? What type of a relationship would they have to form with him to connect, and what may this look like?

Kyle will only invite people into his home who he trusts. In addition, the relationships of people who he invites into his home would need to show the dimensions of relational agency. It is important for those who enter their lives to demonstrate that they believe that Kyle and Bruce have agency. This in return can enhance how an individual "engage[s] with and transform[s] features of their worlds" (Edwards and D'Arcy, 2004, p. 147).

**Actively Learning.** Being purposefully active in others' worlds is an aspect of relational agency. Activity is purposefully engaging and being open to relationships with others. Edwards and Mackenzie (2005) describe learning "as a capacity to recognize and use what is available to support one's actions and an ability to acknowledge the purposes and direction of those actions" (p. 297). Thinking with Kyle's and Bruce's experiences, I can see that Cindy, who they are both connected with, is purposefully involved with creating opportunities to further engage with Kyle and Bruce. Kyle does not engage with others at the agency Cindy is situated in, he is clear when

he says: *I have never, ever talked with anybody there... I try not to be a snobbish person, but I can't carry a conversation with them.* Yet he is actively involved in his relationship with Cindy and reaches out to her. When thinking with Bruce's experiences, he was more actively involved with both the community organization and with Cindy. When living at Todd's farm, he would stop by the agency to bring fresh garden vegetables or have a cup of coffee. Often enough, being purposefully active in one another's worlds is marked by its intentionality, yet also by developing a capacity to do so.

**Agency as a Developed Capacity: Small Steps.** Relational agency can be described as an emergent capacity that can be further developed, rather than an innate one (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). Since there is little distinction between "learning and shifts in identity", the act of increasing capacity for relational agency contributes towards a shifting identity (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005, p. 290). Opening oneself to other ways of knowing and being, especially lives and worlds different from our own, is part of developing capacity to engage in relational agency (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). Bruce shared:

*You get to meet people on the street to exchange and trade ideas, because we aren't so driven to pay rent or buy gas... your time is your time... we are not rushed... but it is different.*

As a capacity, engaging in relational agency can occur in multiple ways. Bruce was engaging with many people who were experiencing homelessness and was always open to ways of knowing and being alongside others. For Edwards and Mackenzie (2005), social inclusion is an example of building the capacity to engage in relational agency; although they realize that

“integration will take time” (p. 298). Peoples’ trajectory of learning and capacity to engage in relational agency develops over time and through multiple avenues; often it involves becoming active with a social context and being part of others’ lives in passive, peripheral, and active ways (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). Relational agency involves reconfiguring social practices - related to lifelong learning/community engagement - and is marked by small but gradual changes in a person’s identity. These gradual changes call for patience and understanding; shifting one’s sense of self is difficult to visualize in the short-term, but over time these changes become evident (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005).

Trajectories of learning do not follow linear paths, instead these paths are marked by periods of closeness/distance in relationships, as well as a changing capacity to engage in relational agency (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). I do not know what Kyle and Cindy’s relationship was like when they first met, but their history would suggest it has changed over time. Kyle would often try to support himself before turning towards their relationship:

*I’ve never relied on others. Even when I get out, I don’t rely on these people. If there is something that Cindy can do for me, I will try, a million times, to do it - fall down and pick myself up and try again.*

While relational agency is the capacity to work with others, it is important to highlight that Kyle does not *rely on these people*. However, these people, more often than not, include Cindy rather than exclude her. In Kyle’s experiences, he first attempts to do something by himself before turning towards Cindy and the supports she can facilitate. Thinking with Bruce’s and Kyle’s experiences alongside the ASO and Cindy, I acknowledge I was only a part of their

lives for a period of a year. The relationships that both men held with her and the organization reached back over 20-years. I wonder what other moments of gradual change and an increased ability to act upon their worlds accompanied their unfolding relationship.

**Spaces for Relational Agency.** Individual learning trajectories may be facilitated by certain environments and not others (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). The storied past of the inner-city drop-in centre from Edwards and others' work contextualizes a space that enabled relational agency. This centre was around for 20-years and built strong relationships based on trust with community members (Edwards, 2005). Much like the ASO and Cindy, the workers in this centre worked across professional boundaries and with community members on the objects of activity, such as housing instability (Edwards, 2005). This space acted as a responsive resource that could be accessed with flexibility – its metaphorical and literal doors were open (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). The centre was also marked by both stability and fluidity in its social practices. People accessed the centre and workers for support, thus becoming a part of its social practices. Over time the same people built their capacity to engage in relational agency, eventually assisting and supporting newcomers to the centre (Edwards, 2005). These social processes incorporated trust, stability, and fluidity in practice which contrasted the drop-in centre with other formal institutions that community members also accessed.

The drop-in centre warns us against seeing learning as an individual endeavor and instead focuses on the affective (i.e., feelings, attitudes, emotions) and dialogic components of learning found in relationships (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). Much like the community agency, a centre that is purposeful about engaging in relational agency may act as a space of belonging to build



relationships where individuals can reshape how they interact and think about their worlds.

Turning towards Bruce's reflection on the ASO, he shared:

*Bruce: It is more about a sense of belonging somewhere... they are helping me, but I try to help them in anyway for them... I just feel a sense of belonging there.*

*Morgan: Is there any other place that gives you that sense of belonging?*

*Bruce: No, not like that, no.*

These spaces facilitate both the opportunity to succeed in developing Bruce's capacity to engage in relational agency, but also the opportunity to fail in a supportive environment.

Thinking with Kyle's experiences, he knows he can attempt something on his own and fail, because he has Cindy or the ASO to turn towards as support. Relationships contextualized in spaces engaging in relational agency encourage the opportunity for people to play in and explore new ways of thinking and being (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). Being supported enough in a relationship to experience failure also builds resiliency amongst individuals (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005).

**Acknowledging the Ordinary: Relational Agency at the Individual Level.** By emphasizing togetherness and solidarity, relational agency shifts our interpretation and understanding from an 'I understand and act upon this object' towards a 'we understand and act upon this object', which involves building individualized relationships that are supportive and non-judgmental (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). The genesis of a relationship of this nature involves supporting and understanding Kyle and Bruce in the wholeness – and ordinariness - of

their lives. A supportive relationship in line with these ideas was also visible between Kyle and his probation officer, Mary:

*In 2019, me and Mary were going to Gay Pride in Toronto, and I asked her (probation officer) if I needed permission due to curfew and stuff like that. She said, 'No, but I will put a note into the police officers that you're out of town. Not telling anyone where you're going, cause ya know, it's none of their business. Just go have fun, but don't let me see you drunk or high.*

Kyle was a private individual - he would only share information with those he trusted. Mary demonstrated respect towards Kyle and the lack of trust he has with traditional positions of authority, such as police officers, by noting that Kyle was simply 'out of town' instead of sharing his destination. Creating a supportive relationship involves trust, which can then become contextualized in a safe space that accommodates flexibility. Creating an open learning zone, or supportive relationship, involves an open invitation to not only attend a place and access its services, but to also stop by to have a conversation or coffee without purpose (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). For example, after Bruce completed his probation period he visited his supervision officer, Jacky:

*She had some free time, so we sat and talked for 45 minutes to an hour... I just wanted to touch base with her and thank her for everything... We talked about anything and everything... She was glad I made it through and I was glad I made it through (laughter).*

Relational agency is based upon the idea that you do not "need a reason to step over the door" (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005, p. 294). Kyle and Bruce would mention they know they do

not need a cause to visit the agency nor its support workers. They feel that they can stop by anytime. Edwards and Mackenzie (2005) share that a centre can offer physical resources all it wants, but unless the capacity to understand and use those resources is facilitated through relationships, people will not engage with and utilize them in a way that expands their worlds. The goal of any centre is to create an 'open enough system' for that kind of fluid relational agency to emerge (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). Relational spaces are also facilitated by those who do not approach relationship building from a lesson plan or checklist, but from a position of flexibility, uncertainty, and openness (Edwards, 2005).

Fundamental to relational agency are supportive services that are individualized (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). In the relationships that Bruce and Kyle shared with their community supervision officers, it is arguable that Jacky and Mary did not approach Kyle's and Bruce's relationship as a checklist that warranted completion. Bruce shared an experience with Jacky:

*Bruce: She was in my favor. In my court. I mean, I had an \$18,0000 restitution order.*

*Morgan: What is that?*

*Bruce: I had to pay back... and her and her superior actually made that disappear. They knew the circumstances. I didn't get any of that cash. I mean, it just went right through to whoever arranged all that stuff... So she knew that. I appreciate it, and it was the truth too. I didn't see nothing from that except jail time - got that.*

I think about the checklists used to guide transitional care services, and while these offer a starting point for those new to the field, they do not facilitate relationships that are purposeful about engaging in building relational agency. Moving beyond the checklist involves engaging in intentional ways that focus on knowing someone in the wholeness of their ‘ordinary’ life.

**Reciprocity.** A capacity to support another person, and ask for support in return, is part of relational agency (Edwards, 2005). Reciprocity counters ideas of dependency; resilience gained through relationships does not lead to dependency but growing independence and the capacity to support others and act through a changing sense of self (Edwards, 2005). For example, at the drop-in centre individuals became helpers to others, acting as experts at drawing upon the available resources in existing systems and connecting others to these resources. Reciprocity is part of a responsive approach to building resilience in others and how an individual’s sense of self becomes embodied in relationships (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). Across Kyle’s and Bruce’s accounts, reciprocity in relational agency highlighted two primary gifts: a) trust in one another and b) the changes in a sense of self.

Bruce trusted Cindy and others at the ASO, and this trust continued to grow throughout their relationship: *There is total trust, more and more so all the time.* In addition, Kyle trusted Cindy as family. These relationships were framed with reciprocity in mind; they exchanged trust, along with gifts of vegetables and humor. Another piece of reciprocity in relational agency are the changes in our identities as we engage with one another’s worlds.

Engaging with another person, when being purposeful, ultimately creates an opportunity to shift a sense of self and that ‘moment of decision’ within our story (Crites, 1971). An

assumption underpinning relational agency is that not only does one person change in the relationship, but both individuals' capacity to engage and interact in and with the world is enlarged. When I think with both men's stories in the context of my work as a nurse in corrections, I can see that I carry these shifts in my sense of self onward to future interactions with others.

A natural piece of relational agency is the idea of saying goodbye in some way or in a sense of 'for now' (Clandinin, 2013; Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005). By expanding the network of resources that an individual understands how to find, interpret, and utilize, it is natural that they may eventually distance themselves from their relationships with certain individuals and organizations that facilitated their capacity to navigate their worlds. I think with Kyle's stories and how he distances himself from the ASO due to social mechanisms:

*I think it's another reason why I don't talk to people or clientele from there. If I see them in public, I don't want them saying, 'hi' to me. In public and if someone knows who they are and blah, blah, blah, you know? 'Oh he goes to the clinic too.' It's like, 'No, no thank you.'*

Kyle builds and dances in both the street and square worlds, and he must protect his home and his freedom in both. He likely distances himself from the spaces of the agency, because he knows that his relationship with Cindy is open – he can always return with a phone call or an unexpected visit. Kyle's stories remind me that when engaging in relational agency, it is not a static process; identities and actions shift as worlds begin to expand. People come close together, but then move away for periods of time (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005).

## **A Narrative Conceptualization of Transitions**

Thinking with both threads, I can come to see how a narrative conceptualization of transitions begins to differ from the spatially segregating metaphors of inside and outside. Crites (1971; 1986) work on the narrative qualities of experience challenge me to think about how ordinary lives may lack narrative coherence and thus face tensions. Yet his ideas also provide a way to think about how the 'I' and 'we' are bound together, allowing an opportunity to shift our sense of self. Edwards and others invite me to think with aspects of relational agency in the context of Bruce's and Kyle's experiences. Both threads are underpinned by the intentionality required to engage with ideas and build relationships. In other words, I must be purposeful when coming alongside to support lives that are different from my own.

## Chapter 7: Personal, Practical, and Social Significance

The intent of the inquiry was to provide insight into the experiences of people who have faced significant inequities, specifically people who are living with HIV and have moved into and out of correctional facilities. Advancing understandings of transition from a life course perspective and thinking with, and about, stories to live by was another purpose of this work (Clandinin, 2013; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999). These intentions were inseparable from my relational commitment to Bruce and Kyle as I came alongside them in the context of their lives (Clandinin et al., 2018). I return to these intentions in this chapter by taking a reflective turn towards the personal, practical, and social significance of the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The significance of the inquiry is discussed within the context of specific audiences, such as academics and practitioners who find themselves living and working within and outside the walls of correctional facilities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is from my experiences of working as a nurse in corrections that I understand this work, yet I acknowledge that my own interest and ways of thinking are not enough and that the work should connect to larger questions of social significance (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My reflections in this chapter are guided by questions of ‘so what?’ and ‘who cares?’ as I make visible how Bruce’s and Kyle’s stories may begin to disrupt the stories that people tell around transitions for PLWH and a history of incarceration. In a response addressing the inadequate progress on improving transitions into the community for Indigenous peoples, Zinger (2017) stated: “It is clear that more of the same will not produce better or different results” (p. 51). I reflect on this statement and how the insights

from the inquiry can provide a starting place to rethink and imagine otherwise transitions into and out of correctional facilities for PLWH.

### **Personal Significance**

I have changed over the inquiry; through the retelling of my stories and being wakeful to participants and their experiences, I relive future experiences with new relations and insights (Dewey, 1938). The changes in who I am and are becoming that occurred over the inquiry are now how I come to understand my experiences alongside PLWH inside and outside of correctional facilities. The inquiry arose from my own narratives of experience as a nurse working within correctional facilities. I return to my experiences but with newfound insights (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### ***Returning to Paperclips***

I used to see people coming into the ERC within a predominately clinical gaze that was concerned with health assessments – peoples' lives found their genesis and came into my stream of experience through a paperclip holding together a file. As my shift carried on, piles of paperclips would grow. At the end of each shift, I would dump the paperclips into an even larger pile in the cabinet drawers. I never asked who came to take those paperclips away, nor what kept them from spilling over their neat little boxes. If Bruce or Kyle had come through the door to my assessment room, I wonder if I would have noticed who they were, or if I would have seen them as simply one more paperclip? When I was a cog within the well-oiled system of incarceration, it was challenging to change my gaze from a clinical perspective. However, coming alongside



Bruce and Kyle in the midst of their lives, creating a relationship with both men, and thinking with their stories has changed me.

### ***World Traveling***

Lugones (1987) presents the idea of world traveling through playfulness and loving perception. Engaging in world traveling is a dimension of relational ethics, which has guided this inquiry and the relationships I have become part of (Clandinin et al., 2018). Worlds are characterized by similarities between inhabitants, including certain constructions of gender, race, relationships, etc. (Lugones, 1987). Traveling between worlds involves a willful or unconscious shift from being one person in a certain world to being a different person in another world (Lugones, 1987). I often do not recognize these shifts, as they are not a matter of ‘acting’ - I do not pretend to be someone one day and someone else another. Rather, I am my same sense of self that uses spaces and languages in different ways across different worlds (Lugones, 1987). Lugones’ (1987) concept of playfulness – characterized by a sense of uncertainty and openness to surprise - involves attitudes that guide activities during interactions with others across worlds. When I think with Lugones’ (1987) work and reflect on my experiences as a nurse in corrections, I am reminded:

Without knowing the other's "world," one does not know the other, and without knowing the other one is really alone in the other's presence because the other is only dimly present to one. Through travelling to other people's "worlds" we discover that there are "worlds" in which those who are the victims of arrogant perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream

construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver and are pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable. (p. 18)

The lives coming across my clinical gaze in my previous experiences were “pliable, foldable, file-awayable, classifiable” – they were paperclips (Lugones, 1987, p. 18). Yet this is no longer true. I acknowledge worlds constituting penal facilities can be marked by “agon, conquest, and arrogance” and entered out of necessity (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). However, I can still world travel, because while I am not necessarily playful at all times, I can embrace a loving perception that connects me to some of the inhabitants (Lugones, 1987). By purposefully engaging in world travelling, I begin to see and understand lives differently; paperclips take further shape and form, shifting into individual lives with multiple identities of lovers, husbands, sons, fathers, and friends. The wholeness of someone’s life becomes illuminated when I world travel, and I can begin to create a relationship, much like I did with Bruce and Kyle, that recognizes the person as a “source of wisdom and delight” (Lugones, 1987, p. 17). I wonder: if I was to world travel in my previous experiences alongside PLWH transitioning into a correctional facility, how would the stories I told have changed? and how would this have shifted my understanding of transitions?

Purposefully engaging in world traveling opens the possibility to see the ordinariness and wholeness of peoples’ lives who are transitioning, as well as creating the opportunity to engage in relational agency. World travelling with loving perception and an openness to playfulness involves “seeing multiply” and understanding the interconnections in our worlds (Lugones, 1987, p. 16). Kyle and Bruce are ordinary men living ordinary lives, and over the inquiry I was able to join the worlds they inhabited that I did not even know I shared with them. I had

previously held an arrogant perception, and it was comfortable. Yet I acknowledge that through world travelling, my experiences that were characterized by certainty with a clinical gaze were disrupted with the uncertainty and surprise associated with living a life and forming relationships. If I revisited my relationships with people in facilities, coming back to my experiences alongside Doug, Cole, Travis, and Josh, I wonder what would change? would tensions – or a lack of narrative coherence - be alleviated? how would their lives become illuminated? what else could I have learned from them? Like dimensions of relational agency, world traveling through loving perception and playfulness opens new worlds, interpretations, resources, and ways of being and knowing.

If I want to support PLWH coming into facilities and upon their release, I must be purposeful when attending to relational agency. I acknowledge that when someone enters a correctional facility, they are entering a different world, and that there is no trust between us. I am one of the first people they meet that is a representative of the health system, and I come alongside them in their initial trajectory of care. Arguably I initiate, or pick up, old-standing relationships that people have with the health system and create an opportunity to establish further relationships with others after me. If people are to be more than pliable and categorizable paperclips going through a system, it must start with me. Purposefully engaging in world traveling and relational agency does not mean turning away from my practice responsibilities, such as performing a health assessment or completing paperwork. However, it involves going beyond these tasks and attending to a life. This is a simple idea yet enormously complex in practice. Retelling my stories and reliving them in different ways has helped me understand the practical significance of the inquiry (Caine et al., 2022).

## **Practical Significance**

The practical implications of the inquiry are grounded in my experiences of working as a RN within a correctional facility. Examples of these practical insights and how they have changed my practices relating to transitions around correctional facilities for PLWH have been made visible throughout the inquiry. My experiences relating to trajectories of care across and within penal facilities and communities has involved diverse people, practices, and places. I also acknowledge the diversity in professional fields, such as pharmacy, nursing, social work, or corrections and the unique lives encompassing the inquiry's intent. Shifting and changing the practices of those involved with understanding and supporting lives transitioning forms the practical significance of the inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Returning to the practical significance involves understanding the diverse points of emphasis and concern amongst practitioners.

## ***Successful Transitions***

I have previously questioned the assumptions underpinning the field of knowledge guiding research on transitions around correctional facilities for PLWH (Wadams, 2021). Traditionally, 'successful' transitions between correctional facilities and communities for PLWH have been defined by the HIV care continuum's evaluative criteria (Baillargeon et al., 2010; Dong et al., 2021; Gardner et al., 2011; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2020; Subramanian et al., 2016; Meyer et al., 2014), which often continues linear trajectories of care within segregating metaphors of inside vs. outside facilities (Wadams, 2021). Disciplinary work within correctional facilities has been predominately concerned with the implementation and evaluation of

interventions to increase HIV testing (Eastment et al., 2017; Iroh et al., 2015; Milloy et al., 2014). Research focusing on transitions into the community have tended to concentrate on achieving and maintaining HIV care continuum targets, such as viral suppression, through understanding the individual and structural barriers to being retained in care (Moher et al., 2022; Woznica et al., 2021). In light of these priorities, it is logical that transitional care for PLWH is often organized around the HIV care continuum targets: does the patient have a 3-day supply of ART medication? do they have a pharmacy nearby they can go to pick up their medications? and do they have a referral to an outside HIV care physician/are they booked to see the physician within the facility? do they have a home they can stay at, and if not, do they have the number of a shelter to call? While I acknowledge that these questions composing discharge summaries or health assessment forms offer a starting place to guide our clinical practice - checking off liabilities and responsibilities – this cannot be our understanding of people living in transition. Bruce’s and Kyle’s experiences disrupt these practices.

Bruce and Kyle discussed activities associated with achieving HIV care continuum targets, such as attending appointments or remembering to take medications, but these were often voiced as an inconvenience. Across their stories were other barriers and injustices faced by them, such as HIV-related stigma, housing instability, and a lack of trusting relationships. Some of these concerns mirror the individual and structural barriers facing PLWH, such as unstable social support networks or housing instability (Fuller et al., 2018; Kemnitz et al., 2017; Lim et al., 2015; Pluznik et al., 2021; Rozanova et al., 2015; Woznica et al., 2021). However, the focus of the literature is addressing these barriers in the context of the provision and retention of PLWH within HIV care trajectories. Bruce’s and Kyle’s experiences remind me that the starting point

for transitional care is individual lives and identities. For Bruce and Kyle, seeking HIV care was not a primary concern; both men's experiences of transitions disrupted the priority areas and ways of thinking that compose points of emphasis within the literature.

### ***Disrupting Practices***

When transitioning around penal facilities, Bruce's and Kyle's experiences emphasized themselves as their primary support along with trusted relationships that created a capacity to engage in relational agency. If health, justice, and social services are concerned with providing supports across diverse settings, Kyle's and Bruce's stories must be situated in these attempts; specifically recognizing how the 'we' intercepts the men's lives to build relationships and support them. A sense of narrative coherence involves unifying the subject, story teller, and audience of a life-story (Carr, 1986b). Practitioners are the audience of the stories that Bruce and Kyle tell of who they are and are becoming. Yet I wonder, how can we become respectful and open audiences in our practices? How can we listen to the stories of those who have differences of experience? Two relationships that engaged in relational agency were the ones that both men held with outreach workers, Cindy and Ashley, as well as their probation officers, Mary and Jacky.

These relationships disrupted the 'checklists' often associated with providing health or justice services when experiencing transitions around facilities; we cannot become disconnected from the lives of those we are working alongside. I do acknowledge the challenges associated with building trusting and flexible relationships within a context of time-restraints and fewer resources for practitioners, but relational agency is a necessity for starting with the lives of

people living in transition and disrupting current practices. Both the outreach workers and probation officers were active participants in their relationships with Kyle and Bruce. By attending to the dimensions of relational agency and seeing the ordinariness of lives in our practices, practitioners can begin to mitigate barriers, such as HIV-related stigma, housing instability, and a lack of relationships. When building relationships, I must be purposeful in my intent to recognize the individuality of Kyle and Bruce – and not as paperclips nor someone living with HIV – and foreground relational agency. I wonder, what trajectories of care or supports may look like if we focused on relationships instead of checklists? How could relational agency be practiced within, outside, and across the walls of penal facilities?

### ***Relational Agency Across Walls***

Professions have the opportunity to build their practices to support people living with and without HIV experiencing transitions from the dimensions of relational agency (Edwards, 2005). Bruce's and Kyle's experiences of transitions spanned the walls of facilities, and the relationships they shared with the outreach workers followed them across these spatial boundaries. Coming into established practices, such as performing a health assessment questionnaire or a discharge summary is one piece of what we do, yet it does not, and cannot, constitute the whole. Because relational agency acts upon both the supporter and supported, it enhances the capacity of someone to interpret and approach problems, contest interpretations, read the environment, draw upon diverse resources, be a resource for others, and understand how to focus on the core challenges (i.e., object of activity) facing PLWH (Edwards, 2005). Relational agency can also compose the relationships between professional disciplines.

**Relational Agency Between Practitioners.** Practitioners involved in care can purposefully engage in relationships with other professionals that attend to the dimensions of relational agency (Edwards, 2005). Those involved in transitions around correctional facilities, such as outreach workers, social workers, community supervision officers, or nurses work across multiple disciplines and physical locations, involving diverse social, health, and justice organizations; their work is complex and challenging. Practitioners bring diverse perspectives and disciplinary knowledge to understanding and supporting the individual when transitioning. Relational agency enacted between practitioners contains certain features, such as focusing on the whole individual (i.e., client) within the wider context/conditions of living, clarifying the purpose of work and an openness to alternatives, taking a pedagogic stance, being responsive to others, engaging in both rule-bending and risk-taking, developing processes for knowledge sharing and pathways for practice, and learning from practice (Edwards, 2011). Specifically, when working with other professionals on the trajectories of learning with clients, the combined expertise of professionals should be woven together and highlight the importance of understanding how support is coordinated (Edwards, 2005). Practitioners must recognize other practitioners as resources and be able to align their responses together (Edwards, 2005). I wonder: what would trajectories of care look like for PLWH and a history of incarceration if disciplines and organizations could effectively develop processes for knowledge sharing and pathways for practice with one another? how would care around transitions be redefined if diverse practitioners *consistently* worked as a team and embodied relational agency alongside the client? and what would an openness to alternatives look like in practice if certain disciplinary values or knowledge were not prioritized over others?



**Peer-based Programming.** An individual's trajectory of care or social inclusion is mobile and changing, forever opening up new possibilities, challenges, and opportunities ahead of them and those who wish to support them (Edwards, 2005). Bruce's and Kyle's experiences of transitions spanned across penal facility walls; relationships, interventions, and programs to support them should also span the walls of facilities. In line with these points of emphasis is the understanding that successful linkage to care after release from custody should begin upon admission to facilities (Krsak et al., 2022). Fernando et al. (2022) acknowledge the need to build up supports before and during incarceration, specifically around relationships in peer-based programming that will be there for PLWH upon incarceration and release. In line with these ideas, relational agency forefronts the importance of longitudinal relationships and building the capacity to access resources and supports that were there before going into a facility. Peer-based programming that continues across and within facilities and engages in relational agency amongst people with similar life experiences is a part of achieving the HIV care continuum targets (Dauria et al., 2022; Fernando et al., 2022; Koester et al., 2014; Moher et al., 2022; Myers et al., 2017; Ostermann et al., 2021; Woznica et al., 2021) as well as building individual agency. Organizations that facilitate peer-programming services should also ensure that they offer a range of diverse, flexible, and formal/informal services inside and outside of facilities. Thinking with Kyle's experiences, individuals facilitating programs who share 'worlds' with those enrolled in the program is important. Engaging in relational agency alongside other health, social, and justice professionals and people with lived experience is not confined by walls, yet there are different practices within and outside of correctional facilities due to its traditional emphasis on social control (Holmes et al., 2007).

**Thinking Within Walls.** Practitioners within penal facilities must be purposeful when engaging in relational agency. While in the personal significance of this work I have discussed how my practices have changed over the inquiry, these insights apply to others within facilities. I wonder: what would care look like during interactions if we purposefully viewed people as resources for how we should make sense of their lives? what would relational agency look like in admission or discharge practices? and what would primary care practices on general population units look like if nurses engaged in world traveling?

Kyle shared that when someone is incarcerated, they are more likely to engage with you because there is, frankly, nothing else to do. Individuals also reconnect with themselves and shift towards a mindset of ‘doing good’ when they get out. While both Kyle and Bruce voiced no challenges accessing HIV care within facilities, I acknowledge this is not the same for everyone; access to appropriate HIV care differs between types of institutions, funding structures, and length of incarceration (Blue et al., 2022). However, if teams within facilities wished to develop interventions and programs to increase access to testing or retention in care, such as opt-out testing, telemedicine/telehealth programs, or enrollment in long-acting ART injectables (Krask et al., 2022; Pluznik et al., 2021), these interventions would need to be created and facilitated in appropriate spaces with relationships that acknowledge HIV-related stigma in facilities (Blue et al., 2022; Erickson et al., 2021; Muessig et al., 2016; Wadams, 2022). Individual and structural interventions and programs within facilities must first create relationships that engage in relational agency if they are to succeed and improve the wellbeing of PLWH who are incarcerated.

**Thinking Outside Walls.** There is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach to supporting and understanding trajectories of care for PLWH (Ostermann et al., 2021). Relational agency acknowledges the diversity of practitioners involved in supporting trajectories of care and incarceration around penal facilities. Specifically, PLWH were more likely to be retained in HIV care post-release from facilities if they were connected with social supports, via friends, family, or treatment programs, highlighting the importance of relationships (Dong et al., 2021). However, while retention in HIV care was not a concern for Bruce or Kyle, relationships with justice system representatives, specifically community supervision officers, were highlighted and contextualized by relational agency.

**Community Supervision Relationships.** The relationships that Kyle and Bruce shared with Mary and Jacky disrupt traditional practices of community supervision relationships. Kyle highlighted how he normally does not respect people in positions of authority. The importance of community supervision officers in supporting people leaving facilities has been voiced, specifically building individualized relationships (Chamberlain et al., 2018; Green et al., 2013; Kennealy et al., 2012). Trusting relationships with community supervision officers are a part of reducing rearrest and recidivism amongst people with histories of incarceration (Chamberlain et al., 2018; Keannely et al., 2012). Like Mary, community supervision officers can begin to challenge traditional views on the distribution of authority within relationships. These insights can also be extended towards the relationships with correctional officers in facilities. World travelling and engaging in relational agency challenge practitioners to view the individual as both a resource and collaborator. I wonder: in what ways could community supervision officers collaborate with outreach workers to engage in relational agency with clients? Mary and Jacky

respected Bruce and Kyle and facilitated an increased capacity to practice agency in their lives. Facilitating the ability for Bruce and Kyle to purposefully identify and act upon their desires also extends towards how practitioners may conceptualize and deliver programs intending to assist PLWH.

Significant barriers and stressors to living in the community for Kyle and Bruce involved a lack of trusting relationships, money, and ongoing threats to their home and freedom. Because both men were their primary support, programs that supported their autonomy and individual agency could be seen as beneficial. Practitioners will struggle to support people transitioning unless they are purposeful about world travelling and opening themselves to the wholeness of a life. Health assessments and discharge summary forms cannot be our understanding of people living in transition. Instead, supporting people experiencing transitions begins by acknowledging the individuality of lives and the importance of relationships shaped by relational agency. This work is slow, requiring an understanding of how we are created in certain worlds and how we might engage in world traveling to those worlds that are different than our own. I acknowledge the importance of this work in disrupting traditional practices around transitions.

### **Social Significance**

The inquiry's social significance is thought about in terms of contributing towards theoretical, i.e., methodological questions and a disciplinary knowledgebase, as well as policy justifications and social action (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

### *Theoretical Significance*

Engaging with Bruce and Kyle over the inquiry contributes towards evolving dialogues on methodological work involving PLWH and histories of incarceration. Specifically, the process of inquiry has provided insights into how to negotiate and create relationships with people coming from different experiences. The inquiry was guided by a relational ethics framework, which emphasizes living in relational ways alongside people who have experienced health and social inequities (Clandinin et al., 2018). By inquiring into who I am and am becoming as a nurse researcher-practitioner on a changing landscape, I was open to the inquiry and relationships that occurred throughout. I acknowledge that I have changed over the inquiry, and it is my hope that the participants' stories to live by may act as a way forward for others wishing to conduct narrative inquiries alongside PLWH and a history of incarceration. The inquiry also contributes towards disciplinary dialogues conceptualizing transitions narratively (Clandinin et al., 2013).

Health, social, and justice systems and services supporting PLWH experiencing transitions are marked by fragmentation and spatial disconnects from one another. Just as there is unsteadiness and uncertainty characterizing transitions as liminal spaces (Heilbrun, 1999), these disconnects and fractures extend towards services and systems of support. Recently released individuals are often driven to downtown Edmonton, dropped off with a bus ticket and their personal belongings, and sent on their way. When conceptualizing individual or structural supports to increase access to and retention in services and relationships, these programs may be informed by a narrative understanding of transitions, specifically Clandinin et al.'s (2013) work

on the five dimensions previously discussed in Chapter 2. They highlight the ideas on imagination and relationships in transitions:

Transitions involve imagination and relationships; the relationships people have with others, their family, friends, or co-workers, allows them to imagine new ways to compose their lives and live in transitions (Clandinin et al., 2013).

Imagination involves assembling a coherent world and looking at things as if otherwise, awakening to the unseen, unheard, and unexpected in our lives (Greene, 1995). Imagination can also help us restore a sense of narrative coherence in our lives (Carr, 1986a). Relational agency and world traveling are closely tied to these ideas. By coming alongside PLWH with histories of incarceration, we expand our worlds and build trusting relationships while increasing our capacity for agency. I have wondered what the checklists and discharge summaries guiding transitions for PLWH around facilities would perhaps look like if PLWH were able to craft them instead of disciplinary professionals – would there be as much of an emphasis on HIV care? what issues of further concern would be highlighted? New ways forward may be conceptualized by reimagining supports, such as transportation services post-release or affordable housing, in the context of a narrative conceptualization of transitions and relational agency.

### ***Policy Justifications and Social Action***

Throughout the inquiry, Kyle's and Bruce's experiences and stories emphasized the importance of building up the supports that will exist when someone re-enters their communities post-release from correctional facilities. The conditions of living for someone upon arrest are the same conditions upon release; social change occurs inside and outside of facilities. Often

enough, family or close social supports will not be there for them to rely upon when they are released (Rozanova et al., 2015). Instead, both men were their primary support, yet they were greatly affected by their conditions of living within certain communities marked by diverse, social groups. When thinking with both men's experiences, the racial disparities facing specific communities in Canada are highlighted; Indigenous peoples face inequities in the SDOH (Kolahdooz et al., 2015; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2016) and disproportionate rates of HIV and incarceration (PHAC, 2022, July 25; Statistics Canada, 2022, April 20), highlighting the need to reform systems and support Indigenous communities. Ultimately, if there is a lack of opportunities for further growth within the community that an individual leaves and then returns to upon release, previous health and social inequities will continue. Health, social, and justice systems and services must understand the significance of long-term engagement with communities. Specifically, social action must prioritize building relationships while sharing decision-making opportunities, fostering self-determination, and increasing agency through solidarity and community mobilization amongst communities disproportionately impacted by HIV (DiCarlo et al., 2022; UNAIDS, 2007, April 10). We may begin working towards these calls to action by world traveling with individuals and engaging in relational agency, but these practices must purposefully extend towards involving communities disproportionately affected by rates of HIV and incarceration. If systems wish to reduce recidivism or achieve the 95-95-95 targets guiding HIV policy (PHAC, 2022, July 25), they must start by building programs based upon the dimensions of relational agency. Bruce's and Kyle's stories and experiences offer a way forward when conceptualizing and thinking about policies and frameworks to address the needs of PLWH and a history of incarceration.

The men's stories remind me about the importance of attention to their experiences, specifically so we can highlight complexities, contradictions, and inconsistencies in policies (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Kyle and Bruce were ordinary men living ordinary lives, and while the literature highlighted the significance of living with HIV in relation to policies guiding transitions (Iroh et al., 2015; Pluznik et al., 2021; Woznica et al., 2021), their experiences disrupted this emphasis. Bruce and Kyle were more than their diagnosis, and while living with HIV impacted their lives, it was not to the extent that their lives revolved around this illness.<sup>24</sup> If organizations and practitioners are to learn more about interventions to support PLWH transitioning around correctional facilities (Moher et al., 2022), we must think outside of the HIV care continuum and begin with individual lives. Peoples' experiences should be included in conversations to reframe health, social, and justice policies. The lives of PLWH resist categorization and a reduction into a diagnosis or set of ideas.

### **Closing Thoughts**

The inquiry has changed me, and I relive my stories in different ways and with newfound insights. Coming from my experiences as a nurse and young researcher-practitioner, Bruce and Kyle have taught me that I must be purposeful when building relationships, and that I must attend to the wholeness and individuality of a life. In thinking with their stories shared with me

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<sup>24</sup> Living with HIV is dynamic and marked by changes in one's relationship with their diagnosis across their lifespan (Harris & Alderson, 2006; Harris & Larsen, 2007; Harris & Larsen, 2008; Hawkins et al., 2009; Mill et al., 2007; Weir et al., 2003). Kyle and Bruce shared that the period immediately after diagnosis was the most challenging for them, but the impacts of their diagnosis on their lives waned over time, resurfacing to affect intimate relationships.



and the ones we created together, I reflect on the words of Richard Wagamese (2013), an Ojibway scholar:

From our very first breath, we are in relationship. With that indrawn draft of air, we become joined to everything that ever was, is and ever will be. When we exhale, we forge that relationship by virtue of the act of living. Our breath commingles with all breath, and we are a part of everything. That's the simple fact of things. We are born into a state of relationship, and our ceremonies and rituals are guides to lead us deeper into that relationship with all things. Big lesson? Relationships never end; they just change. In believing that lies the freedom to carry compassion, empathy, love, kindness and respect into and through whatever changes. We are made more by that practice. (p. 44)

Being a part of this inquiry re-enforces the importance of engaging in relational work that underpins my personal and professional practices. Attending to my work inside and outside of facilities from a narrative conceptualization of transitions provides a starting point to come alongside the lives of people who may be different from me; for each way of seeing I was exposed to, I continued to learn (Bateson, 1994). These teachings are grounded in the relationships I shared with Bruce, Kyle, and others throughout the inquiry. To see differently and world travel alongside Bruce and Kyle has opened how I come to think about lives that extend across the walls of facilities.

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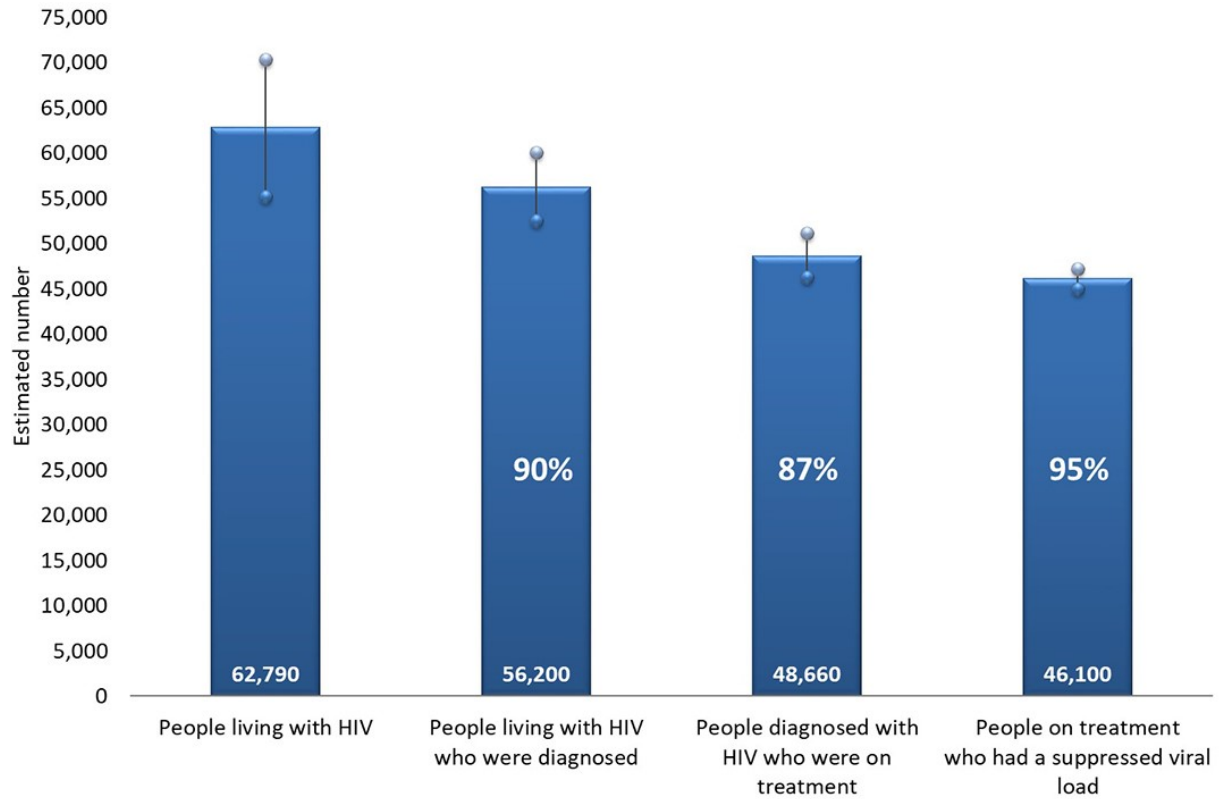
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## Appendix A

### Canada's 90-90-90 HIV Targets



From: Public Health Agency of Canada. (2022). *Estimates of HIV incidence, prevalence and Canada's progress on meeting the 90-90-90 HIV targets, 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/estimates-hiv-incidence-prevalence-canada-meeting-90-90-90-targets-2020.html>