

**University of Alberta**

**Red Worn Runners**  
**A Narrative Inquiry into the Stories of Aboriginal Youth and Families**  
**in Urban Settings**

by

**Sean Michael Lessard**

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

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Elementary Education**

©Sean M. Lessard  
Spring 2014  
Edmonton, Alberta

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Libraries to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only. Where the thesis is converted to, or otherwise made available in digital form, the University of Alberta will advise potential users of the thesis of these terms.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis and, except as herein before provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatsoever without the author's prior written permission.

## **Dedication**

I want to take this space to acknowledge and dedicate this work to the good people in my life. As I reflect on this work and the places I have lived and travelled alongside others it is so apparent that the words and stories that fill the pages are far from my own. The words and stories are connected to the experiences alongside others . . . the work that I have been involved in is a co-composition in the truest sense of the word. I think as I reflect back to earlier experiences on multiple landscapes within the rural roots of my youth and my ancestral home in Montreal Lake Cree Nation. The stories that rest within me are connected to these places geographically and through the people that I have come to know within these places. I dedicate this work to the good people in my life that I have been fortunate enough to learn alongside. At this time many people enter my mind as I am thankful for how they have encouraged and continue to encourage me to write and tell those stories that are nested deeply within. I specifically have Laurel on my mind, one of my early teachers who continues to help me think about the details of a life and the important work that takes place as we walk alongside youth. I acknowledge and dedicate this work to other teachers and the Elders that have guided me in this work reminding me to pay attention . . . move slowly and listen closely to the stories that I am hearing. As I reflect on this current work I dedicate this to my dear friends Dr. Jean Clandinin and Dr. Vera Caine. I value how you continue to teach me and how you have created a space for me to imagine alongside you. I dedicate this to the gentle teachings that you continue to share with me. I dedicate this work to our relationship and the

teachings that we have collectively learned as we listened together to the stories of the youth and families that we have come to know. To the good people in my life . . . this dedication would not be complete without acknowledging my wife and best friend Jaleen and to the gifts in my little girls Kamaya and Sedona. I hope you come to know me in different ways through the words that I am writing. I hope the words and stories will be sustaining, filling your spirit in good ways as we imagine what life might look like going forward.

## **Abstract**

Drawing on an earlier narrative inquiry with youth who left school prior to graduating and an experience with creating a responsive summer school program for Aboriginal youth, the present study explored research puzzles into the educational experiences of Aboriginal youth and their families both in and outside of schools. Drawing on a conception of narrative inquiry as both methodology and phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and on concepts of school curriculum making and familial curriculum making (Huber et al. 2011) I designed a study in which I engaged with three aboriginal youth in their early teens and their families over 2 years. My research puzzles, informed and shaped by earlier experiences of working alongside Aboriginal youth, included exploring the worlds of school curriculum making and the worlds of familial curriculum making within the youths' experiences.

The study was nested within a larger study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Caine et al., 2010). As I came to know the youth in an after school art club space, I developed a research relationship alongside three youth and their families. The field texts included research conversation transcripts, artifacts, field notes, and research journals. Three narrative accounts, one for each youth, were co-composed alongside youth and their families. As I inquired into the field texts and the narrative accounts I found resonance within them that connected to "home-places" in their stories. The youths' experiences also included family and relationships that sustained them, as well as intergenerational stories as they learned how to take care of their

stories. I show how school, as experienced by the youth, is one world of curriculum making and that possibilities lie in honouring the experiences that attend to the multiplicity in the youths' lives and their familial curriculum making world.

## Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Red Worn Runners .....	1
It Is Just Starting Now .....	4
Fox Den Berries .....	7
Pow Wow School .....	10
The Indian Stanley Cup .....	13
Thinking About Layers .....	20
Going Back to Place .....	22
Research Puzzle .....	29
Chapter 2: Narrative Inquirer in the Making .....	34
Silent Walking .....	36
The Ethics in my Relations .....	46
Coming to Participants .....	47
Composing Field Texts .....	50
Autobiographical Field Texts .....	52
Moving from Field Texts to Interim Texts .....	53
From Interim Texts to Final Texts .....	54
Chapter 3: Sky .....	59
Community .....	59
Cultural and Familial Curriculum .....	59
Academics .....	59
Learning What Works Best .....	60
School History .....	60
Vision Board .....	60
What Speaks to You as Being Important in Your Life? .....	61
Wise Words .....	61
Prologue .....	63
Who Am I in Relation? .....	66
Sister Stories .....	67
Leading with Spirit .....	69
Coming to the Research Relationship .....	72
The Ethics in a Relationship .....	74
A Story of School .....	76
A Shifting Story of Negotiating the Landscape .....	80
Finding a School Place .....	84
Looking to Find a Place of Comfort .....	85
Shifting Forward .....	86
Re-starting .....	88
Timeline Art .....	89
Grade 9 is Not Easy .....	91
There are Stories and Then There are Stories .....	92
Forward Looking Stories .....	100

Chapter 4: Donovan .....	103
Community.....	103
Academics .....	103
Learning What Works Best .....	103
School History.....	104
Vision Board .....	104
What Speaks to You as Being Important in Life?.....	104
Wise Words.....	104
Prologue .....	106
Learning to Listen to What I Could Not Hear.....	107
Awakening Time .....	112
Donovan and Lane: Co-composing: Finding their Songs Within .....	115
Learning to listen to each other, to hear our stories. ....	118
The drums come calling. ....	119
My friend Francis. ....	121
In-between time. ....	125
More teachings . . . ....	126
Donovan meets Beaver Hill House School. ....	127
Kookum Muriel “She was an Elder to everyone.” .....	133
Remembering school. ....	137
The Spirit of the People. ....	139
When you hear the First Thunder. ....	142
In response to stories. ....	144
Chapter 5: Narrative Account of Lane.....	146
Prologue .....	151
Harvesting time is near. ....	151
Beginning a Research Relationship: In the Midst.....	156
Chief Chitsalot arrives. ....	157
Location: The mall. ....	158
Beginning research conversations. ....	166
Location: The food court at the mall. ....	166
The inner dialogue. ....	169
A hint of blue.....	170
Location: The local donair shop. ....	170
The inner dialogue. ....	172
Another conversation: A drive to avoid a fight. ....	174
Location: Reflections in my vehicle. ....	174
The inner dialogue. ....	175
Images of a home-place.....	177
Location: A school classroom.....	177
The inner dialogue: .....	179
Life in school now. ....	183
The inner dialogue. ....	184
“The U of A is my club”.....	186
The inner dialogue. ....	187

A relationship that sustains.....	189
The inner dialogue. ....	191
Bucas and Pasta. ....	192
The inner dialogue. ....	193
Urban melodies. ....	195
When thinking about place. ....	196
Beginning a drum. ....	201
Coming alongside. ....	205
Are you alright little brother . . .	211
Chapter 6: Resonant Narrative Threads.....	215
Thread 1: Family and relationships that sustain.....	216
Thread 2: Inter-generational stories deeply nested within .....	226
Thread 3: Connectedness with a "home-place" .....	236
Thread 4: Taking Care of Their Stories.....	241
Hopes and Dreams .....	252
Chapter 7: Worlds of Curriculum Making: Familial Curriculum Worlds and School Curriculum Worlds .....	255
A Curriculum of Lives .....	258
From Within a Tradition of Curriculum Scholarship.....	259
Familial Worlds of Curriculum Making and School Worlds of Curriculum Making .....	261
World Travelling Between Worlds of Curriculum Making.....	263
Learning to Travel to Their Worlds Through Travelling to Mine .....	267
Subject Matter .....	269
Teacher .....	272
Milieu .....	277
Learner .....	284
The Importance of Attending to Youth as World Travellers Among Worlds of Curriculum Making .....	289
References.....	295



## List of Figures

Figure 3-1.....	62
Figure 3-2.....	63
Figure 4-1.....	105
Figure 4-2.....	106
Figure 5-1.....	149
Figure 5-2.....	150
Figure 5-3.....	151

## Chapter 1:

### Red Worn Runners<sup>1</sup>

*Sometimes 5, sometimes 18, one time 30, but every day through August the Red Worn Runners have been inspiring me as we shuffle, sprint, and navigate our way down the dusty roads of Enoch Cree Nation<sup>2</sup>, always wearing red—red t-shirts that is. It is a beautiful thing to experience and we always start at the local school in the town site, stretching, slowly getting ready for a run. Sometimes I love this daily ritual, other times I loathe it; it depends how my body is feeling. But we stick together through this, one day at a time. Girls, boys, young people, and older people like myself make this trek daily throughout August. Sometimes we run 4 kilometers in a day and we make sure to always jog by the community health centre and the Band office.*

*It is interesting because now people wave at us when we jog. They used to look at us with mistrust. There was doubt in their glances. They quietly shook their heads as they saw youth move in a different way. I like visiting with the youth about the run and how it feels. They say they love it and now I am starting to believe it, as they log their kilometers and look towards the poster<sup>3</sup> to see how far they are going, to see how far they have been. You should see these kids run. It is beautiful—no training, no fancy gyms—just the town site; bumpy dirt roads*

---

<sup>1</sup> A name the youth came up with for our daily running group during the summer months.

<sup>2</sup> Enoch Cree Nation is a reserve in Treaty 6 territory located west of the city of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. It is a community that I have worked with for the past 10 years in education and sport.

<sup>3</sup> We tracked our kilometres each day on a poster that hung in the classroom. The distance ran, participants, dates, and individual goals were detailed on it.

*with truck imprints embedded in the earth . . . then the sandy gravel of the back roads towards the potato plantation, our target turnaround.*

*Wheat fields and canola fields are on each side. They seem to be our only fans some days and they seem to wave us on. No judgments there. We run and the youth tell me they have never done this before, never seen the fields as I describe them, never seen the beauty in them like I do. I am hoping and thinking they see it now. I am hoping they see something different within themselves.*

*We are all in a line, a long red line, staying as close together as possible. And when the Red Worn Runners take off into the distance, it is magical. It takes me home every time we run; home to the gravel roads and the farms of my youth, to the wheat fields and barley fields, and the beautiful sounds and smells that I cannot imagine in the city. The reserve is a beautiful place when I let myself see it this way, shifting what I see by running through it. I think the kids felt it this past week as an Elder's van pulled us over on kilometer 3 on that sandy dirt road and an older woman shook all the kids' hands out the window. We thought we were going to get scolded, but no . . . she told us to keep it up, to keep running. They were smiling like local celebrities. We all smiled, the closest to fame we will probably ever get . . . it's that internal fame that we should be celebrating anyways.*

*I also think the kids felt it when guest runners from the city started to join us on the run and when we ran past Elder Bob Cardinal's house and a little red fox was watching us on the driveway . . . watching the Red Worn Runners snake*

*through the sandy obstacle course. We talk about families, relationships, and the beauty of creation on the morning jogs. We are simply moving knowledge (Basso, 1996). Clandinin and Connelly (1992) call this the living curriculum. Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin (2011) name it as the familial curriculum. I did not think that the kids would continue but it goes to show you how much I don't know. They continued to show up and even run on their own these days.*

*Now, as September rolls in, I heard that the other day on the reserve a couple of people were running. They told the boys it was because of seeing them. I guess they are local celebrities after all. They laughed when they told me. It is a beautiful thing to watch Joe with his braid flowing freely behind him and Michael leading with his effortless stride . . . they are running straight to the west, running at a pace that I can only consider in my mind. They glide when they move. I wonder what they are thinking when they run. The Red Worn Runners will continue to be on my mind as the leaves get ready to turn and the farmer swaths down the majesty to the left and the flowering yellow to the right. It is indeed a beautiful memory, one I won't soon forget. I hope we keep running. Sometimes 5, sometimes 18, one time 30, today just me. The Red Worn Runners inspired me to shuffle, sprint, and navigate my way down the dusty roads of Enoch Cree Nation, always wearing red—red t-shirts that is.*

### **It Is Just Starting Now**

My research puzzle emerges from, and is situated in, this work that I do with the youth. I realize I need to situate this narrative within other narratives within the formal classes<sup>4</sup> that were a significant part of working with the youth throughout the summer months of July and August. In order to understand the story of the Red Worn Runners, I need to share how colleagues and I imagined this experience together. Together we organized a series of summer school classes for youth within the high school that we worked. It had become a summer routine for us since the beginning of our teaching within this school place to work with youth at the school in the month of July in a summer school accredited course. In the conceptualization and early conversations of what a different type of summer school experience might look like, we imagined and then decided after conversations with youth from the local community to offer the courses in the "home-place" of the youth; that is, in Enoch Cree Nation. Social Studies, Aboriginal Studies, Wellness, and Math were some subjects we taught on a daily basis. I credit this experience, thinking about summer school in a different way, to the ideas and the words of a friend of mine who honours the traditions and history that live within her home community very seriously. One day in our university class, my friend Alvine Mountain Horse<sup>5</sup> shared how ceremony, customs, and her traditions were "just starting now" at home in the summer

---

<sup>4</sup> Referring to Alberta government provincial program of studies.  
<http://www.education.alberta.ca/teachers/program.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> A fellow student, colleague, and friend who continues to teach me about the many traditions of the Blackfoot people.

months, and how important it was to “go home,” “to acknowledge” at this time (Personal communication, June 2011). Her thoughts and the way she described the urgency to get back home shifted my thinking on that day. Her words stayed with me as I thought deeply about what she had shared and the importance of going home to be with her community at this time.

I thought about this statement often and it stayed with me as I wrote and re-wrote about it in relation to how each summer, as a teacher, I moved in the opposite direction of the youth I worked with. I wound down. I slowed down. I stepped away from my work with youth, the school came to a halt in a sense, it moved in a different rhythm (Clandinin et al., 2006), a different direction, it closed down. I think of what my friend Alvine Mountain Horse says and wonder about the possibilities that might emerge from imagining and paying attention to the lives of the youth more closely and acknowledging the experiences that they live during these summer months. I wonder what might happen at a Pow Wow school<sup>6</sup> or a Sun Dance seminar where the experiences of family and community weave their way throughout the learning process. I wonder what might happen if I found ways in a school place to both acknowledge and honour the experiences of the youth within their communities during these important summer moments.

---

<sup>6</sup> Pow Wow school or a Sun Dance seminar are not literal schools. I am referring to the important process of understanding and inquiring into the experiences of youth in and outside of school places. The Pow wow and Sundance are teachings that are sacred and situated in place and it would be not appropriate to teach in these places. These experiences are educative and are sustaining identity-making experiences for many youth.

I slip back in time and think of the seasonal rhythms that have defined much of my life, the summer months situated between the end and the beginning of school and where those times took me. Mostly they took me home to memories of growing up on a farm and the moments of silence and sunshine in a rural setting. I think of the summer months and the ingrained sense of freedom during this time. I think of the uninhibited growth that came through participating alongside others ... such as my father who often taught me. The stories from these places of memory and what is important to me during this time shaped my understanding as I participated in the present alongside the youth and as I continued to make sense of the 'just starting now' within their stories.

I wrote a narrative a while back about a special place on my family farm that I used to frequent growing up. It was an old fox den surrounded by Saskatoon berries. I used to go sit and enjoy the quiet moments of summer, celebrating the peacefulness and simplicity when I was surrounded by nature during the pause of those summer months. I can't help but think of the importance of place over time when I think of the lives of the youth and how the summer months must be sacred in so many different ways for them. I think of the community in which they live and the importance of time and the coming together moments in ceremonies and cultural events. It is the 'just starting now' moments that are important to acknowledge.

The travelling between places, the visiting between families, and of course the dancing and drumming that comes alive every weekend during the summer

months is what I need to continue to pay attention to. As I think about this in the present, I travel back (Greene, 1995)<sup>7</sup> once again to the fox den berries of my youth and to how places over time are important to celebrate and think about—the moments of finding a place and connecting to it that continues to shape my experiences moving forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The summer months when the land came alive for me marked a period of time that took me to different places within my imagination. Even if my memories of the playful moments of summer were just on the family farm, it is what pulls on me in the present when I think of what matters most in relation to the stories of the youth, when I think of the 'just starting now' in their own stories.

I slide back once again and recall . . .

### **Fox Den Berries**

*A mystical time in the company of the trees. I always looked forward to the late days of summer and the early fall as the landscape continued to change. I would eventually be met by purple and red in the form of berries. Saskatoons surrounding ... wild raspberries calling and now I can see more clearly why this was the chosen place. I could reach out from my sitting spot, my resting place ... thinking within, reaching in all four corners ... and in the directional spaces in-*

---

<sup>7</sup> Sources are cited in order to provide a sense of the theoretical resources that grounded my inquiry processes. For example in this case Greene is cited as she helped me to think about my early landscapes as a starting place for inquiry. Throughout the dissertation I cite sources in a similar manner as I am acknowledging concepts, ideas and philosophies that continue to shape my thinking. In this sense I am honouring the theoretical underpinnings of my work.



*between. I could see the purple exhibition of growth. I could eat and wonder ... think in silence and enjoy the beauty of creation. I can now see the magic in these moments ... the freedom of places that is not often considered in the busier moments of adult life—the significance of place and paying attention to the surrounding sights and smells, the movements that fill the eyes, the stillness that creates reflection and meditation ... instilling lasting images are creative moments of youth that I must continue to remember.*

*Time and connectivity were linked to the experiences of place ... movements and freedom. It was about the fox den berries on sunny days in the summer moments of my youth. I recall and enjoy the experiences when thinking back. The trees always changed though. They start to change now in my mind as the winds begin to pick up ... yellow shades and orange hues starting ... not much green anymore as I looked up ... an umbrella of colors visible to the eyes. The sun continued to find a way to dart through and cast different shadows ... uneven shapes ... leaves were missing where they once provided covering. The leaves start to dance differently at this time ... they fall at different moments, coating my sitting spot ... gently sweeping over my imprints. Accompanied by a jacket now, still sitting and thinking ... I continue to go to place ... the trees move different ... the fox den berries start to fall ... shriveled up over time, baked on the branches, reminders of what was once there ... it was a special time. Even the grass, the welcoming grass that protected that place, would dance back and forth now. No*

*longer green, now it became more brown and yellow. It sounded different. It made a crisp call ... a whispering sound. If I listened carefully I could hear it.*

*As I looked out through the trees in these moments I see the dust picking up ... blowing across the tops of the wheat fields to the south. Soon to be harvested for another year, the fields could be seen clearly now ... they still provided protection from the outside world ... a wall of yellow and gold protected the place.*

*Frost comes always ... now it is coating the trees, no longer easy to sit ... the sun doesn't feel the same way ... no longer sitting time ... no longer thinking time in the same place in the same way. Time changes the landscape.*

**The fox den berries are more difficult to find in the city ... not impossible, but difficult. The sightlines change as I get older. I need to continue to look inward and take the time to go back to this place, to move around the earth mounds based on the seasons, and let the sun rays cast their magic, to find the places and moments of reflection that are important to moving forward ... continued growth ... to free the expressions within ... let these feelings come out in different ways. One never knows what might be tucked carefully in the in-between places of memory and imagination (Clandinin, 2013) . . . as I look back and think of the compilation of trees that sat in the middle somewhere between the farmhouse to the north and the wheat fields to the south. The fox den berries in the pausing moments of summer take me home always.**

### **Pow Wow<sup>8</sup> School**

The stories of summer and the moments of going back home in my mind are relevant as my experiences shape who I am in the present and how I attend to the stories of the youth (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These stories of experiences in different places shape who I am and who I am becoming (Greene, 1995). Looking inward and outward, backwards and forwards (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) locates me in relation to the youth and helps me understand how I am beginning to hear their stories on multiple landscapes. As a teaching team, by going to Enoch Cree Nation and teaching within the place of Enoch, we shifted the way in which we participated and moved the experiences to one that would be co-composed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin et al, 2006), paying particular attention to the family and community stories (Huber et al., 2011) that were of importance to the youth. The youth over time allowed us to walk alongside them in relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) during this summer experience. They taught us gently within their "home-place" as they were attentive in their own ways to the evolving relationships and processes that were occurring among us. It was important during the experience to pay attention to the silences and the gaps (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as the things left unsaid also taught us to move slowly and carefully.

---

<sup>8</sup> "Pow Wow" School was the name provided by the youth in their summer school experience. They called school this name affectionately because we started the class by meeting at their community Pow Wow.

As I shift back to the summer and the time spent within the community I remember that we started each day by meeting at the local school on the reserve early in the morning. At times, this meant travelling from house to house picking up those that were missing, reminding the youth that we had work to do, but also showing the youth that we were committed as teachers to be there consistently in relationship. To begin each day we would gather around in a circle on the grass in front of the school and slowly stretch, talking about the *daily plan*, connecting and re-connecting through the shared process, and then we would start by running.

As a group we wanted to do something different, spend time together that was different, not always teaching school within the boundaries of a classroom and a building. We decided to start our days together by running but it really was mostly about the coming together and doing something collectively, learning about the places within the community by travelling to them. We logged our daily journeys and set goals, encouraging each other to participate, to show up for the run, even if our bodies didn't feel like it. The coming together collectively created a space for conversation (Clandinin et al., 2010) <sup>9</sup> where we could talk and connect, where questions were often posed imagining what life might have looked like (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) within Enoch at times in the past.

---

<sup>9</sup> A resonant thread found in the research project entitled, *Composing Lives: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Youth who Left School Early*.

As we jogged, the youth pointed out places that they remembered or told stories of people who lived in certain houses within the town centre and rural back roads of the reserve (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The youth had clear memories of where they had travelled in their younger years, running and playing when life seemed so much simpler. I asked many questions during our morning ritual and it became part of getting to know each other in such a different way than what we were used to. Spending time together in activity outside of school was so much more than the hallway passing-by conversations we engaged in at the public school during the in-between hours of school time. Each day during the summer months I travelled down the road to the reserve from my suburban home. I made my way entering into a new place with a different way of being in relation together (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I believe the summer school experience shifted me. It changed the relationship significantly with the youth as I was asked to travel to their "home-place" and community. As I travelled each day and started to learn alongside them I left parts of me in the urban places and began to let go and teach alongside—learn from the youth who showed me parts of their worlds (Lugones, 1987).

Throughout the summer we travelled often to each other's worlds (Lugones, 1987), to different places over time. Learning in this way was a constant negotiation, a lesson in moving in and "out of ease" (Lugones, 1987, p. 9) as we travelled between worlds in the sense that Lugones writes about worlds. The negotiation as I travelled back and forth would often take me home in my

mind to my reserve, to my farm and the travel in-between these places. I thought of the multiplicity (Greene, 1995) between places and how the youth were in a place of comfort within their community. I thought of how I negotiate spaces in my own life and how, in each world, I move differently, I participate differently. I wondered if the youth felt the same way when they left their homes early each morning and went to an urban school setting and found themselves in constant negotiation, out of ease, perhaps uncomfortable as the game changed and shifted. The “world-travelling” (Lugones, 1987, p. 4) that was taking place reminded me of going back home to play hockey for Montreal Lake Cree Nation and my first Indian Stanley Cup<sup>10</sup>.

### **The Indian Stanley Cup**

*There is a different sense I have when I go back each winter to play hockey for Montreal Lake Cree Nation. Ironically, we are called the Canadians. It was my Chief's favourite team growing up and it causes me to smile when I think of the name and the mixed messages within it. Our jerseys are red, white, and blue and I wear the number 19 proudly each time I put it on. My teammates are young. They are fast, fluid, slick, and talented with the puck, making it dance on their sticks. It is a style that I remember but struggle to maintain in the present. My job now as a player is to score a little, lead, organize, and settle*

---

<sup>10</sup> The *Indian Stanley Cup* an annual hockey tournament where First Nations players from Saskatchewan come *home* to represent their reserves and communities.

*down the young players in developing a little more structure to our game, a little more balance in finding ways to win because in the big tournaments, you need to adjust. Our logo is a stylized M with a Chief's headdress draping over in perfect symmetry. It's fun putting that jersey on. Most of my teammates—my cousins and relatives—have grown up playing on the outdoor ice of the lake, the cleared off patches of ice that make for great hands and quick legs. It is a different style, that lake pond hockey—the outdoor free-for-all style that is amazing to watch . . . there are no limits there.*

*In the past 5 years I have started going home to play for my reserve with more ease and more regularity, recognizing it is one way I can add some positive energy through being a veteran player on a young team. I remember starting out playing for the first time and feeling a little overwhelmed about all the cousins, nephews, and relatives that made up the team. I looked around the dressing room and it was a living photo album of relatives. Unfortunately, many I simply had not come to know. It was confusing keeping all this straight.*

*I went back for the first time because my Chief knew I played hockey and asked me to play in the Indian Stanley Cup, a yearly tournament in Saskatchewan where reserves play against each other. Everything was new on this team. I didn't know many names, but, as I started that first game, I relied on what I felt comfortable doing—playing hockey, as it feels all the same once you are on the ice. It doesn't matter who you are representing in those moments of creating and playing the game. I must admit though, as I looked at my line mates, both of them*

*young nephews, it turned back time for me and caused me to wonder as I thought of our shared family the Kingfishers and the Settees. The shared names stirs something special inside me when I remember back. I do think differently playing for the Montreal Lake Cree Nation Canadians than I do when I play on other teams. I mostly think about my grandfather and mom within the community. I think more deeply about what the community means, how I need to work hard, be healthy, and play with pride for those who gave me an opportunity. I look back in my mind when I play for the Montreal Lake Cree Nation Canadians. I love coming off the ice and visiting with the young community members, giving them a puck to keep, just like players did to me when I was young and watching in the same way.*

*The people within my native community love hockey and the fans come out in droves, packing the arena to watch a little stick and puck. There is something special going on for me when this happens. I used to play at a level that is not sustainable in the present. There must be something about being at ease within that helps me negotiate the difference that gives me a sense of something else. These are the good moments that I remember and perhaps connecting points to a place I have not really known. I did not grow up on the reserve and did not spend a great amount of time visiting or connecting with the community, mostly because I didn't know how, or maybe I just wasn't ready—it was not the right time. I see now that it is available to me to come to know the place of my ancestors, my name, and the place where it comes from. It becomes more important to me to*



*acknowledge this place and honour it, as I get older and understand differently. I just didn't know that my travel to this world would come through the sticks and pucks and the frozen surfaces of my youth in another place. It feels good knowing that I can connect in this way and that I am being welcomed back through the invitation to play.*

As I wrote these words I was in Edmonton, Alberta and I was thinking of the game of hockey; teams getting ready for the season in the urban setting. Over the past 10 years I have developed a small network of friends that I meet through the arenas and our shared frozen pursuits. I play on different teams in the city and at different levels. I like the exercise and need the feeling of skating to help keep me balanced in a busy world. I think about the ice rinks, the teams, and who I am in relation to the teams I play on. What's interesting to me is that on most teams I play on in the city I am known as *Chief*. Sometimes I don't mind that name, at other times it bothers me a bit that I am not just Sean ... just not another player. It turns out that most of the teams I play on are comprised of non-aboriginal players. They came to know me in many different ways, perhaps through my evident pride in wearing my jersey with native motifs and logos that come from different places or my gloves that are etched with lettering of the River Cree Warriors. I know the players can read what is said, and for the most part, it is an opportunity to show them that I can participate in both worlds. I can travel home and represent reserves in different parts of Saskatchewan but I can also play in the urban settings in cities like Edmonton. My relatives from Montreal Lake would not

have the resources or social capital to be invited in to play in Edmonton. I play with lawyers and doctors and academics and enjoy these skates, moving the puck back and forth, trying to set up my fellow teammates for a goal or solid play. “Chief, how are you, how is your family, how is work”? “Have you gone back home lately Chief to play in tournaments this year”? “Chief, I remember this one young native fella ... he sure could play.” Invariably, regardless of the rink, they call me Chief. I also live in this world. I can understand what they are talking about and make small-talk about things of importance to them. You see I read the paper every morning and I can hold my own in these conversations too. I look at the ice as the great equalizer, and when we participate together in this environment we are just playing hockey, getting exercise through the movement. Playing in the city is very different than back home and the Indian Stanley Cup but I still like it. I think of the travel between these worlds in which I live and how it changes me as I travel between worlds, how sometimes I am aware of the changes, other times not.

In a sense world-travelling (Lugones, 1987) is what I am doing when I go back home to participate in the hockey tournaments representing Montreal Lake. I play with the idea of living in the place of Montreal Lake and being a part of a community that has a deep and beautiful history. I speak of the stories and the history of the community and how it is important to remember our names when we are playing. I am the oldest player on the team so I, at times, ask my relatives and my friends to think about who we are representing when we are playing, and

what this might mean. We are co-composing in these moments of reflection. I ask my cousins and relatives to think with me when I go back home to play. This is world-travelling (Lugones, 1987) in a different sense as I go to a place that I like to think of within my mind. I try to think of how life might have been and play with my thoughts in creating this vision. I know that at home on the reserve and on my team in Montreal Lake, I am not considered a Chief. I am a Kingfisher and a Settee on that ice and within the community. I am the grandson of Elders and connected in relation to many Chiefs but I am not a Chief on the ice or within the community. I am a Kingfisher and a Settee in these places, it is my name in this place.

As I make my way from the reserve to the urban places my life continues to shift. I am always in the making (Bateson, 1994; Greene, 1995). I am always on the way (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Who I am within multiple worlds also shifts and the rules of the game become different. I think of the youth from Enoch Cree Nation, the Red Worn Runners, and in these moments they help me remember what I so often forget.

As I travel back to the details and the moments of developing something different with the youth, an educational experience that had the possibility of shifting their stories of school is what I hoped to achieve. The thought of working within the community alongside the youth interested me as I looked over each

student's school profile<sup>11</sup>. Through the conversations with the youth about their plans beyond high school and how I could support their efforts, I recognized a need to try something different. During the regular school year I often took the youth to post-secondary institutions or community events to provide opportunities to imagine what life may look like beyond Grade 12 (Greene, 1995), to help them compose forward looking stories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995). As I looked at the number of high school credits on transcripts and listened to the stories of many of the youth, I found that much work was needed to assist in this process of high school completion and post-secondary planning. Many youth were missing required classes that made it impossible for them to graduate.

The youth pointed out to me long ago and repeatedly that graduating is very important to them and that they do have dreams that are very real which involve attending school beyond Grade 12. Many youth expressed a desire to go to college, university, and prepare for the future by getting a "good job." It was evident to me that many youth had never attended a summer school program in their 2 years of high school and I was puzzled by why this might be. I started to look back and found this to be consistent over the previous 5 years within this high school and also within the larger school district. I found as I looked at the available data that seldom had First Nations' students enrolled and/or attended a summer school session, adding to the complexity of a disproportionate dropout

---

<sup>11</sup> School profile refers to the student information system, demographics and credit count. Note that specific courses are required for graduation /100 credits in total.

rate (Alberta Learning, 2003). School in its current summer model often provides an excellent opportunity to learn and study in shorter summer sessions in the month of July. Many youth in the public school system attend summer school to alleviate their regular school schedule or prepare themselves in the summer session for post-secondary entrance, as the classes are often smaller and more compact.

### **Thinking About Layers**

The information that I gathered showed me that rarely did First Nation students take summer school classes within the high school setting where I worked with them during the regular school schedule. I started to ask more questions, at first to myself, as to why this might be. In some cases, as I continued to have conversations with youth, I learned that sometimes it came down to lack of transportation from the reserve in the summer, and the need to work and be employed by the reserve as a summer work student. Many communities provide a 2- to 4-week summer employment opportunity, which creates opportunities to earn spending money, but also important “school money” for the following year. It made perfect sense to me as I continued to have conversations with the youth and they told me how important \$200 to \$400 was. School money bought them school clothes, a phone, or a laptop and they needed this school money. Lugones (1987) writes of “being at ease in the world” and the attributes that might make this possible (p. 9). The school money is an important

consideration as I think of “being a fluent speaker” within the urban school setting or being “happy” and how this may lead to ease within the world of school (p. 9). Technology such as laptops and cell phones are the norm, and in some ways markers of belonging, identifiers within the school place. As I think back to my school experiences, I think of school clothes and how each year I prepared for school by going shopping. I cannot imagine how it would feel to be without school money and how the youth continue to remind me of what is important in their lives.

The layers are complex and are not often considered by those in schools or are simply missed in the process. It is not that school is not important or that graduating is not a priority, but it is evident that I must pay careful attention to the life and the stories that exist within the community. The difference between 3 and 5 credits in a school sense may be the difference between graduating and not graduating, going to college or not going to college. It is not as clearly defined by what the numbers might tell me, by seeing only “small” and attending to only patterns and trends (Greene, 1995). Greene also writes of seeing big, of seeing the particularities of a life. Bateson (1994) reminds me of something similar when she writes

concentration is too precious to belittle. I know that if I look very narrowly and hard at anything I am likely to see something new—like the life between the grass stems that only becomes visible after moments of staring. Softening that concentration is also important—I’ve heard that

the best way to catch the movements of falling stars is at the edge of vision. (pp. 103–104)

I am thinking about these words and how they connect to what I might be missing in just looking at life from a school perspective, trying to figure out what fits, how to sort, and why things are not working within the current system. It is becoming increasingly evident to me that school and life outside of school intersect and that I cannot separate the two (Bateson, 1994). It is important for me to continue to find ways to pay more attention to what might be going on within the lives of youth and their families.

The back and forth between the worlds of home and the worlds of school is what I need to continue to think about, paying closer attention to the negotiation of the spaces, the attributes connected to being at ease in a world (Lugones, 1987). It may mean that I need to listen more carefully to what the youth and the families are sharing with me. Their words are powerful as are their silences.

### **Going Back to Place**

As I go back to the Red Worn Runners, I think of how important it became to do something different within schooling in order to shift the story that has existed for the youth in a community by making it possible to attend summer sessions and still receive opportunities for the school money through their community work program. By providing an opportunity to take summer school to meet graduation requirements, but to also do school in a very different way we

quickly found 45 youth who were interested. Instrumental to the process and setup of these classes was the ability to work and identify teachers who were willing to try teaching beyond the 4-hour sessions, 5 days a week, in a traditional summer school setting.<sup>12</sup> Flexibility and creativity were the prerequisites. Classes and information-sharing networks were quickly created through email and text messaging. Simple reminders and a space for conversation<sup>13</sup> between the teachers and students was established. In many ways students drove the process of how school needed to look for them to be successful. We learned a great deal along the way about what was important to them, what interested them, and how they looked at learning and school. *Mini-retreats* were a part of the plan for schooling where students sometimes engaged in full-day sessions within the community. Through experiences, students learned how math or social or art can be thought of differently when we learn in places outside of school. We soon learned to look at the curriculum in different ways and to re-imagine what the possibilities can be when exploring other ways of meeting the mandated provincial indicators and outcomes.

It became easier to write and think about some concepts that were prevalent in text books by going to places and writing about them, thinking about them, and having conversations that so often are pushed out of the regular school

---

<sup>12</sup> Summer school traditionally is held in the month of July, 5 days a week in 4-hour time slots. The informal policy states that if students miss two classes they are ineligible to pass and are removed because they will not meet curricular outcomes or time requirements.

<sup>13</sup> Conversational spaces: a resonant thread from the early school leavers' project (a space in schools to share, to open the dialogue in the relationship, the youth spoke of "having no safe places to talk or share when life became difficult").



lessons because of time constraints. The shared experiences throughout the summer months reminded me of Friere in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) when he speaks of the "words of place", and the learning that can take place in the shades of the mango trees. It also reminds me of Lugones (1987) and her understanding of "language" or being "a fluent speaker in the world" as attributes of being at ease (p. 12).

What I discovered that summer was that by going to places physically, that by moving the experience to a place of comfort where the youth became my teacher within the reserve, within their community, they became the sources of knowledge integral to the process of learning. They showed me what was important to them and how their lives looked in their community. I learned quickly that life was very different for each youth and each family. There was not a single story of the First Nation youth within this community. I learned from the youth who they wanted to invite in to help us make sense of the stories within their "home-place"—sometimes the knowledge keepers were grandmothers, parents, uncles, traditional language speakers, and Elders. It varied depending on what we were learning and how we were collectively in relation to the person. By walking alongside the youth within the community our relationships shifted dramatically (Greene, 1995) and shaped the way we worked together within the formal or mandated curriculum. When the lived curriculum (Aoki, 2005) became more important, there were many shifts. The most significant shift occurred between teacher and student.

So often in the discourse of schooling, the word relationship is discounted as being soft or less rigorous. The summer months and the commitment of the youth showed me otherwise. The *work* did not seem like work when the terms of the relationship shifted and I came alongside. I had to *just let go*, let the youth show me what counted for knowledge within their lives and within the context of community. I bought each student a journal and asked them to jot down reflective notes during the days or images so they could remember what was happening regarding some of the events that occurred over the summer. Their family stories often emerged through the pages of the journals that we wrote in daily. As I read the stories and saw the images that the youth recorded, I found out so much more about how they connected to the experiences and how often a forward looking story (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) of life beyond high school was present through the worn pages of their journals.

The more I came to know, the more differences I saw between the youth, their stories, and their stories of family and community that are not often considered in the dimly lit hallways of the public high school where we usually came to know each other. The *Red Worn Runners* is my way of honouring the youth who joined me on this journey. I understand more now about the youth and their families. I came to see that there seems to be this invisible line that defines the borderline of city and reserve despite being so physically close together.

There are certain scripts<sup>14</sup> about these kids that ride the bus each day from this place called a reserve. It is easy to story a group and not see the difference if I do not pay close enough attention to the details of lives. Lugones (1987) comes to mind once again as she writes about arrogant perceptions when seeing others' worlds. When we see arrogantly, we do not see the lives of the youth. I believe that as a teacher, sometimes I saw the youth from this community arrogantly, that is, as Lugones (1987) describes, I failed "to identify" with them or failed "to love" them by not "travelling to their worlds" so I could see "through their eyes" what their lives looked like (p. 12). Perhaps I felt like I knew or understood the lived stories of the youth who came from that reserve place and I awakened to how easy it is to move towards the monolithic, the single story, and in that way, failed to attend to lives in the making (Clandinin et al., 2006). I am learning in this process. Part of the learning comes from looking inward and stepping out of my worlds of ease by travelling to another person's world, even when it takes careful time, like the pause of the summer moments. These ideas have guided this narrative inquiry as I worked with the youth in the summer and in this doctoral study.

The summer with the Red Worn Runners was about coming together, moving slowly, attending carefully, and trying something different in schooling by following the youth and letting them show me what was important to them

---

<sup>14</sup> A resonant thread found in the research project entitled, *Composing Lives: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of youth who Left School Early* (Clandinin et al., 2010).

within their home communities. I reflect and consider the many directions we moved in throughout the summer to so many different places, on reserve, off reserve, to the conversations we had with many community members that enriched the formal curriculum and provided us all something to think about. I often repeated that “when you write the mandated final exams and diploma exams, you need to experience difference to be able to write to it.” Many community members, relatives, and Elders from this place spoke with the youth sharing their experiences ... sharing their stories. Most of the students had never shared with them in this way or asked questions about the community and the stories that live within their "home-place".

The stories from community members of the past and experiences through telling and re-telling (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1998; Clandinin, Davies, Hogan, & Kennard, 1993) were powerful to consider as we thought about their words and experiences in relation to the textbook summaries. The words seemed to come alive when we heard stories about Elders, Chiefs and the formation of the community where the youth live and ride a bus to a public school each day. We shared stories of the history within a place and learning from the past to understand who we are becoming in the present (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). We travelled back and forth and in-between places throughout the summer together. We co-created a different space for thinking by travelling to each other's worlds through our emerging relationships. A liminal space (Heilbrun, 1999), that is, a storyless space that became storied in our relationships

as we created ways of building a new world, a world of school alongside a world of community. Our co-composed stories, shaped out of fragments of stories of possible selves, allowed us to become otherwise and to refashion who we were in this new world we were creating. The summer months created a new space between us where I could move in a different rhythm and negotiate relationships outside the institutional spaces of school.

As I reflect, I know I need to continue to be more attentive to the lives of the youth within their communities. As we sat together through the summer, we discovered that many of our greatest resources were grandmothers, grandfathers, Kookums and Mooshums, cousins, and parents. By asking family members to help us understand some of the history within their "home-place" we were co-creating a curriculum of lives (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). Our summer school experience was emerging, rapidly shifting, and continuing to grow and take on new meaning. The youth and the teachers involved could now speak to this shift in subject matter to an experience that included their family and community members as they co-composed the curriculum that was being taught each day (Huber et al., 2006). The Red Worn Runners helped me to think about this as we ran to places this summer that none of us imagined quite possible before we started. The Red Worn Runners and the process of starting the day differently—through exercise, conversation, and the relational—taught me this. I believe we all started seeing schooling and what it could be differently, even if it

started by running down a sandy road and sharing memories through the movement.

### **Research Puzzle**

As I reflect back on the opening story about my experiences with the Red Worn Runners and my inquiry into the story, I came to a deeper understanding of the research puzzle that drew me into this work alongside the youth and their families. I see, through my autobiographical narrative inquiry, that I have learned to inhabit and feel at ease in two worlds—worlds that have shifted and changed over the years (Lugones, 1987). As a child in my early landscape, I lived in a world of my home on the farm and in a world at school. In each world I was constructed differently and I felt more or less at ease, in Lugones' (1987) sense, in both worlds. I also knew that there was another world, the world in which I was a Kingfisher and Settee in the world of Montreal Lake and my Woodland Cree ancestry. These tensions lived in my embodied knowing of another place with different stories (Clandinin & Connelly 1986).

As I came to teach and understand the ways that youth of Aboriginal heritage were constructed in the large urban high school in which I worked, I realized how difficult it was for the youth to live in both worlds. I particularly wondered at how they lived their lives in summers on the reserve when they did not have to travel between worlds, travelling that was both the hard travelling of

the move from place to place but also travelling in the sense of travelling from world to world (Lugones, 1987).

As I inquired into the experiences of the youth, I glimpsed into their lives during the months of summer as we lived in the Red Worn Runner story alongside each other. I came to know something more of the familial worlds (Huber et al., 2006) in which they lived. As I moved the summer school experience from the city to the reserve I believe it shifted how the youth experienced living in the two worlds. By moving the school curriculum making from their school worlds to being alongside their familial curriculum making worlds, much changed for me and, I believe, for them. I was awakened to the complexity of co-composing a curriculum of lives (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011); co-composing that included the curriculum making (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) that children and families and others engage in their familial curriculum making worlds as well as the curriculum making that children and teachers do in their school curriculum making worlds (Huber et al., 2011). So much more started to become visible to me as I became part of the Red Worn Runners as we ran down the paths and roads of the reserve throughout the summer months. Elders, parents and community members came alongside to help the youth and I in this co-composing of a curriculum of lives (Huber et al., 2005). This experience drastically shifted the relationship with both the youth and their families and to a larger extent the community. No longer could I continue to participate in the same way as I had in

the past as a high school teacher from the city who taught youth from the nearby reserve.

It is only now, through the hard work of inquiry and paying close attention to the three dimensional narrative inquiry space within my own experiences but also the experiences of the youth that I have come to know differently in the summer experience. I am awakening to what I do not yet know or understand. I continue to wonder about the spaces in between the familial and school curriculum making worlds (Huber et al., 2011) and the tensions that Aboriginal youth experience as they travel between those two worlds each day (Lugones, 1987). I wonder how their families experience world travelling (Lugones, 1987) between those two worlds as they watch their children experience the tensions of knowing themselves differently in each world. I think about how I experience the tensions as I move between the world of an urban setting to the world within my "home-community" on the reserve. I recognize some of the differences and the negotiation of each place as I continue to travel between these two worlds in my life.

I wonder how at ease the youth feel with these different constructions of themselves. I wonder what helps them feel at ease in these two worlds. I wonder how their families shape their experiences within these worlds. Are the youth alone as they travel between the worlds ... have they learned to negotiate the travel? I wonder about where the "conversational spaces" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) are for the youth and their families to tell stories, and to inquire into these



stories that they live and tell as they live in and travel between two worlds. I wonder what I might learn if I come alongside youth and their families and heard stories of their familial curriculum making, of their school curriculum making, and of their travel between (Huber et al., 2011). I wonder how arrogant perceptions shape the experiences of the youth and their families, as they arrive in the school curriculum-making world each day (Lugones, 1987). I wonder how the youth are perceived by arrogant perceivers, perceivers who create a particular view of who they are and who they might become.

I wonder where I might learn of their loving perception, spaces where they are able to be playful, in Lugones' (1987) words to be free to play the fool, to not be certain, to try out and to try on who they might become. I now see that I was doing this myself as I ran down those roads with them in the summer. The youth and I allowed ourselves to be "otherwise", all of us allowed ourselves to be not quite at ease but open to possibility (Greene, 1995, p. 16). I wonder if that was why the Elders stopped to speak, why the people in the community came alongside and encouraged us during our daily run. Did they too see that, rather than arrogant perception, we were playfully engaging in loving perception as we created a Pow Wow school, a curriculum-making space that lived between the school curriculum-making world and the familial curriculum-making world (Huber et al., 2011).

All of these wonders shaped my research puzzle as I walked alongside three youths and their families, into the lived experiences in their homes and

communities and their experiences in the school curriculum making and of their experiences of world travelling between those two worlds (Lugones, 1987).

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Narrative Inquirer in the Making**

Narrative Inquiry is both a research methodology and a way of understanding experience under study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As Clandinin and Connelly (2006) write,

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 375)

Thinking narratively has become part of how I think of the stories shared in relation over time, stories that are told of experiences in both in and out of school places alongside youth and their families on multiple landscapes. In this sense narrative inquiry is the phenomenon as I think of these storied experiences. I think of the walking alongside youth and their families and how, through the inquiry process, our stories become more alive. We learn by telling our stories in the relational spaces of narrative inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry is also a methodology that provides an ethical space for me to inquire into my own experiences but to carefully attend to, and inquire into, the experiences I share with others. As I write this, the words of my dear friend Elder Isabelle Kootenay<sup>15</sup> remind me to listen closely to the stories and to honour the lives as I move forward with this work. It is Elder Isabelle Kootenay who reminds me of the relational ethics, which guide my living as a person and as a narrative inquirer.

I often ask Elder Isabelle Kootenay for guidance before I speak at events. The “what should I say to them” is always on my mind as I prepare to speak with an audience. I am thankful that Elder Isabelle Kootenay is in my life as her words ground me as I think about the experiences I share of the youth that I have come to know through my work as a teacher in different places and through my research with the youth who left school early and the youth in this doctoral study. Through time and relationship with her I recognize that the answers to my questions for her will not come directly. The answers to my questions will not come in a list or a neatly prepared outline. As I come to know Elder Isabelle Kootenay I see that the answers most often become visible through sideways stories<sup>16</sup>.

---

<sup>15</sup> A Stony Elder who continues to be a gentle teacher in my own familial curriculum making world.

<sup>16</sup> Sideways stories comes out of the conversations with Elders that I am in relation with, they encourage me to pay attention, reflect deeply, and try to look past what I might initially hear or see. “Looking/Listening sideways to the stories means to try and see beyond what might be noticed and look for the lessons from what might not be aware in the present (i.e., the silences can tell a story or the teachings that come at a later time when you reflect. It is not a direct answer to my query) There is great resonance with narrative inquiry as a methodology and phenomenon. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe the process as a “kind of inquiry that necessitates ongoing reflection, what we have called ‘wakefulness’ ” (p. 184).

## **Silent Walking**

*Isabelle begins in a quiet tone, a soft voice ... she speaks of how she gets stressed out in the city, driving, the noise, the fast-paced action that she does not like to experience. I know this about her, as she often asks me to pick her up on the west side of the city to help her get to meetings or events that we are participating in. She continues to tell the story of the fast-paced world, the noise, and the horns honking in traffic. She shifts the story as she now starts to share how she likes to travel back home to Alexis First Nation—to her reserve, her community, her home place west of the city. She describes the peaceful contrast of going home on the highway, the quietness as she approaches her house on the reserve, a little house, a retreat. It's like a cabin in the woods with flowers, different colored flowers gently welcoming her back home. She now explains to me how behind her house there is a little stream that runs through the forest floor, how her medicine wheel lays directly in front of her house. It is a place of prayer each day, a seasonal marker that helps her reflect. Passed down through teachings from a place, her ancestors' stories live through the teachings of the medicine wheel. It places her, locates her, helps her as she reflects about the busy moments of a life, the city and urban landscapes that can distract. She now takes me to this place through her stories and the shared spaces in between, to the trees behind her house and how she likes to go there. She starts by walking out and standing amongst the spruce and poplar trees. She starts to share her*

*experience by sharing with me, by asking me, “Do you ever go to a place where you can hear your own heart beat Sean? Do you ever slow down through silence . . . go for a ‘silent walk’ within yourself... listening to the beat of your own heart?” My immediate answer is, “no ... I don’t do that ... it sounds so weird.” She says, “Sean, listen when you speaking with teachers ... when you are teaching them about the youth and the community . . . ask them to go for a ‘silent walk’ every once in awhile.” “Ask them to go for a ‘silent walk’ in their minds and think about the youth . . . get a picture in their minds about how this might look, what is important to them . . . do some thinking about what life might be like for them . . . think about the children carefully, because if you can learn to ‘silently walk’ with them you will begin to understand what is important” (Personal communication, 2010).*

And just like that, the story is over, but the thinking and the teachings shared stay with me. These are the stories of relational ethics, that is, the stories that shape the ethical ways to engage in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is the coming alongside in relationship and moving slowly as the landscape is co-negotiated. The knowing that is shared, the importance of listening, attending, mutuality are what guide the relational process of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The story of silent walking I share often with beginning teachers—the looking inside process helps me to learn and think about the lives of youth and what that really means. The stories from Elders like Isabelle Kootenay with whom I am in relation and the coming alongside in the

process of narrative inquiry is what locates me. It is what speaks to me as I think about the research, the methodology, and finding an ethical place that grounds my work in the relational.

I cannot help but think of my journey to narrative inquiry and how it continues to shape my understanding of experience as lived and told (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a narrative inquirer in the making I think of the inquiry process and how it is grounded in experience, both mine and the experiences of those with whom I am in relation. Narrative inquiry as methodology and phenomenon is a reminder for me to move in relation with the stories that I am hearing in ethical ways (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Relational ethics lives at the heart of narrative inquiry and permeates the whole of inquiry.

My Master's study led me to this doctoral research alongside others and continues to be a source of reflection as I move forward in the larger study, *A Narrative Inquiry into the Stories of Aboriginal Youth and Families in an Urban School Setting*, in which my doctoral research is nested. In the process of coming alongside youth in my Master's research, I began to hear the youth tell their stories. But at the same time I was beginning to tell mine. I was beginning to better understand the concepts and the language that shaped my inquiry process alongside the youth. Working within the three dimensional narrative inquiry space with the dimensions of temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), we, the youth and I, learned to tell stories of our lives. When I went away from those sharing spaces to read and reread the field texts (Clandinin

& Connelly, 2000), I began to inquire into the stories within the three dimensional inquiry space. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as well as other scholars that draw on their work helped me, as a researcher, to further understand and reflect on the inquiry process when they explain,

As we worked within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we learned to see ourselves as always in the midst located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social. But we see ourselves in the midst in another sense as well; that is, we see ourselves as in the middle of a nested set of stories—ours and theirs. (p. 63)

The first part of this quotation turns my attention to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space: temporality, sociality, and place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The second part draws my attention to the relational aspect of narrative inquiry and how, as I engage with participants, there is a co-construction of our stories. The first dimension, temporality, involves attending to a life by looking at the past, present, and future within the stories. As a narrative inquirer I attend carefully to the stories of the youth and families as they shared their lives with me. Through the relational inquiry process we co-compose the stories we have shared. The stories include places and people stretched out over and across time. The stories include early memories of places they have lived and travelled but also stories that are forward looking and filled with possibilities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).



As I reflect on my time spent living in the midst and hearing the youth's and their families' stories, it helps me travel home to my own school days and early beginnings and to reflect on them intimately (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Temporally, I think back to the world within the rural places of my home growing up and my birth place on a reserve in central Saskatchewan. I think of my life in the present, trying to do my best to walk in both worlds and negotiate the multiplicity within each world. I think of the people within my stories, in particular the stories of my own girls, who are living alongside me and preparing to tell stories of their own. My life composing is ongoing and fluid. It shapes who I am becoming. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me of the importance of temporality in the inquiry process. Attending to the temporality within experience helps me further understand the youth within the research process, in particular the movement within their lives. The movement in this case is connected to my understanding of identity within the stories that I am hearing. The lives of the youth are not fixed, static, or frozen in time. Their lives are temporal in that the experiences in the lives they are making move backwards and forwards in time as they continue to negotiate who they are becoming. The lives the youth are composing are ongoing negotiations with multiple plot lines and possibilities.

The second dimension in the narrative inquiry space is sociality. Sociality is described as both the personal and social conditions. As a narrative inquirer I continue to be aware of the personal and social conditions and the ever changing

landscape that shapes this part of the inquiry process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain the personal conditions as “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions and moral dispositions of both the inquirer and study participants. By social conditions we mean the existential conditions, the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise that form the individual’s context” (p. 50).

Thinking about the sociality dimension in this way reminds me that my past experiences and ways of understanding and seeing the world come from the many places in which I have lived and of which I have been a part. As I reflect on my experiences of growing up in relation to the stories of the youth, I recognize the differences but feel a resonance with the bumping places (Huber & Clandinin, 2002) between worlds. My story of being adopted and growing up on a farm in a non-aboriginal family, the environments and surroundings of my past as well as who I am in the present, shapes the person that I am becoming. As I grow older I have become more comfortable in learning about the history of my family and the story that lives within me about culture and being comfortable in my own skin. I continue to learn from those around me and recognize the process of becoming more clearly.

The stories that I am coming to know as I reflect on my own experiences are much different contextually than the stories I learned in my Masters research when listening to a female aboriginal youth who had left school early. Going

back to my Master's study and the story of Skye Song Maker<sup>17</sup> has helped me to attend to the lives of youth differently and pay closer attention to my current practices and construction of culture in the classrooms where I work. I think about who I am in relation to the youth and how our stories are contextual in that I try to understand the important details of environment and the forces and factors that may shape our relationship. I turn back to a conversation that stays with me in my Master's research to make this part of the inquiry process more visible.

*As I sat with her family on this special evening, we shared thoughts and stories of the past. Skye spoke of the different ways in a big city. She said that it was different than where she came from. She talked about reserves that are close to the city and how they can change people. She shared with me a story about some boys from the nearby reserve who also attended the same high school as her.*

*She talked of the past and changed her expression as she spoke. She said that these boys would make fun of her for holding hands during a round dance and for participating in cultural ceremonies. She told me this story for the first time on this evening. She said they laughed about this and said it was stupid. As time went on she quit talking about it, and eventually quit doing it. She put her outfits away.*

*Her story amazed me. She said to me, life changes you in the city and that she should have never quit dancing ... but "Lessard I will get back to it. I am*

---

<sup>17</sup> Skye is a participant in my Master's research.

*getting a new outfit made". When I think of the time spent and all the conversations with her that I have had, I think of this story and how she held onto it. I wondered why she waited until now to tell me? I wondered what other stories I didn't get to know?*

Skye's stories of school and her knowledge of places she has both lived and travelled within are different than mine, much different as she moved in and out of the reserve school system as family events and the work they did to support the family required it. Her experiences alongside my experiences are contextual. Even as I worked on my doctoral research, I continue to inquire into them and recognize more threads between the stories that we have shared. Skye's experience, as a young person immersed in cultural teachings, was of moving to the city and a large urban high school. There were places filled with tension and bumping places as she constantly negotiated who she was becoming. Her stories of what she knew in one world and how that shaped her as she moved to this different world was not smooth as the distinct knowledge that she had from one world was often not considered as good knowledge in the other world ... in this case it was mocked and laughed at as being different.

Her experiences of family, culture, the drums, and the songs that come from a place shape how I am learning to listen in the present to the stories of youth and families. Our experiences are vastly different despite both being aboriginal people. Attending in these ways makes the details of each individual life significant. The shared stories of Skye Song Maker stay with me many years

later and continue to resonate with me as I think of her and her familial stories within new inquiry spaces. Her stories and the experience of coming alongside each other in the research has been an awakening for me (Greene, 1995). It continues to be a teaching.

The third dimension within the narrative inquiry space is place. It is the “specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of place, or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). Place is the physical location where stories are both lived and told but also includes the places that we have travelled to and in-between within our experiences. The sharing of stories and learning to listen to them is shaped by place. Caine reminds me of the physical places within stories, “There is a geography that lives in all our stories, how we hear them and how we understand them” (Personal conversation, 2010). The geography Caine describes includes the personal cartography and the stories that have been shared in the context of community and relationship. Place within this definition also includes the rhythm and teachings that live within these places. Through the inquiry process in my Master's work I continued to become more awake to the details situated in place and how stories live on certain landscapes. Basso (1996) speaks of this when he says "wisdom sits in places" but also Indigenous writers such as Marmon Silko (1981), King (2003), and Young (2003) when they write of the stories connected to places and the landscapes that they have known in their lives. These stories are living stories and are connected to the deep history with the land that they know,

and the stories that are taught in this way and passed down to them and carried forward in new and meaningful ways. The stories these writers know are etched deeply within them (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986) and are also carried forward in the stories they know within themselves. The multiple meanings of place are more visible to me when I think of Skye Song Maker and her relationship with her community and the protocols she knows that are situated in place. She is a young Stony woman, now she is a mother with stories she knows and lives of dancing, drumming and singing alongside her family. Her family carries songs from other place and time, and they share them alongside each other inter-generationally ... the songs are connected to the “places of wisdom” (Basso, 1996) that they have come to know. The stories they know as a family are sustaining stories situated in place. The inquiry process in my research acknowledges these stories as well, and how they shape the conversational relationship between us. I continue to learn to listen to the stories of places shared and the people and the stories within these places that shape who they are becoming.

The sharing of stories occurs in many physical places which shape the inquiry process. The physical place shapes the conversational space between the researcher and participants based on past experiences and the relationships that encourage or discourage or shape sharing. The youth I came to know through the research were shaped by place in that we travelled together to different locations to share our stories, but also in that we travelled with our memories to locations where we had lived in the past, and that shaped the way we heard and told our

stories in the present (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Reflecting on the importance of place within experience and the multiple meanings within its definition helps me inquire into the stories that are shared on various landscapes but also the places that we have travelled to as we share our stories.

### **The Ethics<sup>18</sup> in my Relations**

I continue to learn from the youth and the families that I have worked with as a community worker and teacher. Many of the families I have worked with have taught me to go *sideways* when asking questions. What this means is that I do not ask the questions directly. I take time, am patient, and engage in discussions, recognizing that the answers to the questions will eventually emerge. Conversations cannot be rushed and it is impossible to consider the sharing of stories if I do not understand the place and its ability to create or limit conversation. I have learned that questions to answers sometimes take time to find themselves and that there are often reasons that some questions are not answered. Narrative inquiry as a relational research methodology reminds me of past teachings and the importance of process, relationships, time, and place.

Working alongside Elders with whom I am in relation shapes my work and guides the ethics in my relations through the stories and teachings that they

---

<sup>18</sup> The ethics in relations is central to narrative inquiry as both methodology and phenomenon. As part of the narrative inquiry process it is these ontological commitments that are situated in the relational that guides my work as I honour and take care of the experiences shared in my doctoral study. Philosophically the ethics weaves its way throughout my work as I am guided by it as a narrative inquirer. The larger study including my doctoral research was approved through the University of Alberta Ethics and Research Board.

have shared with me but also as I shared my work and writing with them. In this way of co-constructing my research process it helps shape a space within me to attend carefully to the lives and experiences of the youth, families and the Elders with whom I am in relation. The research process alongside youth and their families as part of the ethical stance of being a narrative inquirer is central and a dominant thread that weaves its way throughout my work.

Thinking narratively creates a space to work with people in a way that attends to the details of a life and honors the stories that continue to shape the life. Through the use of narrative inquiry as both methodology and phenomenon I rely heavily on my “personal practical knowledge” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25), shaped in part by working with youth in various capacities, by the stories of places, the stories of multiplicity, and world travelling that are so much a part of who I am becoming. Quite simply, narrative inquiry provides me a chance to listen carefully, attend to lives in motion and to continue to shift who I am as a researcher to a place of collaboration, where I am much more comfortable within myself.

### **Coming to Participants**

The research team received a grant entitled *A Narrative Inquiry into the Stories of Aboriginal Youth and their Families in an Urban school Setting* from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in April 2010. The research team prepared the proposal by seeking out advice from aboriginal



service providers, Elders, and leaders within the community who represented provincial and national interests. The study is, in many ways, an extension of The Early School Leavers study that I was a part of in my Master's research where we learned alongside 19 youth who had left school before graduating. The stories shared and the team's awakening to the lives of youth who have left school before graduating has, in many ways, led us to this new inquiry space. As a research team we worked with junior high youth in an after school urban school setting attending closely to their stories of living in and out of school. We proposed that within the process of coming to know the youth that they might eventually take us home to the stories of their families in different places. The process of taking us home to other places within their lives included the people in their lives and the places where they travel both physically and metaphorically. The process of coming alongside in relation occurred over the course of 2 years of meeting together at an urban junior high school after school classroom place named the U of A arts club space. The after school club space was a sustained weekly meeting space where youth had a snack, created, conversed, or observed in their own unique and distinct ways. Some youth moved in this space with ease leading, singing, dancing and creating alongside other researchers while other youth attended and participated in their own ways and with their own rhythms. In this research space we came to know many youth, some youth stayed with us while others moved on to other physical places but remained connected through notes, emails and conversations. The U of A arts club space was a connecting space

where we built relationships and explored alongside the youth their experiences of life in and outside of school.

The guidance from Elders<sup>19</sup> that we have been in relation with since the proposal process were also integral parts of this narrative inquiry and shaped the relational ethics of working alongside aboriginal youth and their families. At times in the U of A arts club space Elders with whom we are in relation visited the club space and helped us as a group think about the larger research puzzle. Sharing circles and various forms of expressive mediums helped in the creation of a conversational space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) where youth connected and formed relationships with the research team which included the Elders. Through the arts and connecting space that was co-created alongside youth they had the option to participate in research conversations that lead to more sustained inquiry and collaborative processes that included the stories of their families and community places. For my doctoral study meeting youth within the U of A arts club space created a starting point for conversational relationships alongside youth and through this process a more sustained inquiry alongside 3 youth and their families. Over 2 years I was able to walk alongside Sky, Donovan and Lane as we inquired into their experiences both in and outside of school places. These 3 participants and I met at different points in the research project and our inquiry

---

<sup>19</sup> Familial stories and Elder guidance was imperative for this process as I walked alongside the youth and families with whom I worked.

process moved between schools and shifting home-places as we continued the process of walking alongside one another in relational inquiry.

### **Composing Field Texts**

As a narrative inquirer, the composing of field texts was situated within the starting place of the school setting in an after school arts club space. The conversational relationships emerged as I attended on a bi-weekly basis to connect, and participate in the activities with youth. The starting points, my narrative beginnings within the space, are important considerations within my own field texts—my making sense of what might be happening. The creative exploration through various art forms and expressions within the inquiry space provided opportunities to move the relationships in different directions. Connecting through the co-creation of painting, drawing, mask making, traditional and contemporary art projects were some of the projects in which the youth participated. The space to create alongside youth was important as it provided opportunities for each youth to consider the research through the activity. Many of the projects that the youth created became field texts and created spaces for further inquiry alongside the researchers. For Donovan one of the research participants in my doctoral study the drum was an example of an artifact, and a field text that we continued to inquire into throughout the research process.

Through improvisation and creative activity alongside the youth many conversations took place and a certain rhythm unfolded where youth and researchers connected each week. The U of A arts club space was not about creating young artists. It was, rather, a space where relationships were built and where the youth and the research team began to learn how to participate alongside one another in a relational inquiry. That being said what we did find through this process is that many youth who had not experienced certain types of mediums or projects through printmaking or photography soon became more connected to the U of A art club space. The relationships were foremost as the youth worked alongside the researchers who spent careful time introducing them to new forms of expression providing a space to explore their gifts and inner creativity.

The composing of field texts with youth and families depended on my sustained commitment to attending the space, building relationships within, and having the youth who chose to work with me show me what was important to them in their lives both in school and out of school. Over time and through evolving relationships I invited the youth and their families to come alongside me in different places—at times in their homes, their communities, or in other places such as a coffee shop or restaurant—where we shared our experiences. Through my doctoral research I worked with three youth and their families in various capacities depending on what was taking place in the lives of both the youth and their families. The field texts we negotiated and inquired into included photographs and/or other memory box items but it was mostly composed of the

conversations shared between the youth and me, the family members and me, and the youth, the family members, and me.

### **Autobiographical Field Texts**

The stories and my own autobiographical experiences as a life writing process are how I make sense and write out what puzzles me, what speaks to me in the relational research that I am participating in. The importance of beginning with the difficult inquiry into my own experiences is what locates me and situates me as I consider who I am in relation to each participant but also the existential conditions that shape my inquiry. Prior to beginning the research, I thought often of the inquiry process, what might happen, and which youth I would work with. I wondered about their stories and who I am in relation to their stories. Later as I came alongside the youth, they helped me through the careful process of inquiry to inquire into the experiences that are within my own memories of places, and people over time. Many experiences I had not considered, but through this process of working alongside youth my memories of life in school and outside of school emerged. Reflecting back or turning inward through my writing helps me slow down and consider what might be happening in the relationship but also calls me to attend to the research process as it continues to shift between researcher and participants. The process of writing and inquiring into my own stories helps me stay awake (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to what I might be missing in the research conversations. As a narrative inquirer, I continue to write

and re-write the stories that rest within me and that become more visible through the experiences of living alongside youth, families, co-researchers, and the Elders that I am in relation with. A coffee shop or perhaps the smells and sights as I go for a walk to help me think of the research puzzles at times take me back home in my memory to earlier experiences. The writing that provokes the reminders of the past are careful considerations of what might be happening in the present and how I am attending to the stories I am hearing. The youth that I came to know often reminded me of growing up within the multiplicity and the world travelling (Lugones, 1987) that I continue to negotiate. Lopez (1990) helps me to understand this more clearly: “Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other’s memory. This is how people care for themselves” (p. 60).

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

The process of moving from field texts to interim texts was a challenge within the research as I continued to reflect carefully and pay attention to how I was attending to the field texts and how I may be attending to a life through what I write and bring forward in the process. It is not my intention in my doctoral research to tell a good story or to write a compelling narrative that is “smoothed over” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 25) to fit the needs of my research puzzle. The movement from field texts to interim research texts involved stories that have been shared with me and that I have considered carefully throughout the inquiry

process. The opportunity to sit alongside a team of researchers and dialogue about the experiences alongside youth has largely influenced my research process as this helped me to unpack the experiences that are unfolding and created new wonders throughout the inquiry. The field texts were considered and brought forward with particular attention to the metaphoric three dimensional inquiry space as I listened to voice recordings, read the transcripts, and reflected on various artifacts from the participants. Inquiring into the personal-social contexts, temporality and place within the details of the field texts was integral to the research process. Throughout the research I continued to reflect on who I was in relation to the research and the participants. As part of the ethical considerations of narrative inquiry I did not want to lead the inquiry to a place that I thought was important to my research exclusively or that was important to me personally or socially while silencing the participants' experiences. The opportunity to co-compose field texts and research texts with my participants guided me in the process of taking care of their stories and honouring our shared experiences as we told and retold the stories of our lives.

### **From Interim Texts to Final Texts**

Through the process of engaging in narrative inquiry I wove the stories of participants, their families, the Elders with whom I am in relation, alongside my own narrative experiences. The narratives are not one act or piece separate from one another. They are part of a weaving process (Bateson, 1994). As part of the

process of moving towards a final research text, it was important to consider each negotiated account in relation to the other narrative accounts and in relation to the concepts, ideas and literature of others. I was interested in resonance and if there were threads that emerged between and across the accounts. I read and continued to think with the three dimensional narrative inquiry space as I carefully pondered what I was learning both individually and collectively through the narrative accounts. There were words and stories from each narrative account alongside the youth that were connected and that moved out across and in-between the pages despite the process of writing over 2 years. The stories of teachers not in schools and inter-generational wisdom informed and engaged our experiences of identity making in our lives. Resonant threads also appeared in the careful moments of taking care of our stories and learning to hold onto the experiences that are nested deeply within. The stories within the narrative accounts resonated with each participant's memories of experiences from community and stories of teachings that they came to know from teachers and places that they have travelled. The stories of home-places and experiences within communities resonated as we all considered these places as important in our lives. I heard often in our research conversations of the places of early memories whether it was climbing trees on the reserve or spending time alongside loved ones in the memories that are situated in places that we have travelled. In narrative inquiry, I honour each individual's experience and also attend to the resonances, to the collective voices that teach me so much . . . that are reaching out across the pages



... and asking me in their own ways for response as I move forward with this work. The resonant threads fill my ears with songs of the drum calling in the youths' stories as I have clear images on my mind of the words that emerge and become more visible through the collective telling and re-telling.

The interim texts were negotiated alongside the youth and their families throughout the research. There were stories of experiences that were difficult to share and there were stories that I felt ethically I could not share as they might potentially do harm to my participants if I shared them. Some stories were meant to be shared in the relational spaces and as I considered them closely, attending to the life and the relationship, they were best left in the conversational spaces we co-created at that time rather than written down into texts.

The considerations within each account were contextual and relationally based on what we co-created over time. I reflected often as I composed the words of the ongoing movements between rural and urban places and the geography that rests within both the participants' stories and mine. I tried carefully to create a space with my narrative accounts to help to transport readers visually to the places the youth shared of home, community and the places they imagined in their forward looking stories.

As I wrote of the experiences shared I paid attention to, and wrote, with the metaphoric three dimensional space in mind. As I wrote, I attempted to form pictures in my mind of the youth and, with those pictures of the youth in mind, I composed a narrative account. I wanted to give a sense of who the youth are and

the multiplicity within their lives. I wrote narratively as Elder Isabelle Kootenay reminded me when she shared stories with me of closing my eyes and going on a silent walk within myself as I began to share stories of the youth. I wrote with this ethic, and as I negotiated narrative accounts with participants, it was powerful to participate in the sharing process as I worked with them to create images with our words of who they are and who they are becoming.

As I looked back at my Master's research and recall the sharing of the interim and final research texts and the narratives co-composed, I thought of Skye Song Maker. I wrote and re-wrote and shared the stories negotiating along the way, paying attention to the family stories, their wishes that her name not be changed within the narrative, because her name comes from a place of ceremony. Her name was gifted to her when she was born it holds meaning...it has a story. I learned in the process to stay awake to what is important and to listen to what is important to a family, to the stories that I shared, recognizing that stories can be shared in many ways once they go out in the world (King, 2005). I remember sitting and eating with Skye's family and starting to read what we had created together. As I shared they watched me. Skye's mother spoke, "This is a good story of our family Sean ... this is a real good story ... not a bad story and we thank you for that" (Personal communication, 2010). Skye Song Maker and her family continue to help me in the present to stay awake and not take for granted the experiences that are shared in the relational process of narrative inquiry. It is through their shared stories that they stay with me and continue to weave their

way into how I listen and honour the stories of youth and families in my doctoral research. I thank them for that.

Through the inquiry into our stories and the telling and re-telling of our stories, I started to compose tentative narrative accounts to be shared in further conversations. This relational process provided an opportunity for even greater sharing. Now I find myself in the present fondly recalling the shared cups of tea and the conversational relationships with the youth that emerged and wonder what might be happening currently in their lives. I am looking forward to future research and the opportunity to walk alongside youth and their families in this life writing process that I have come to know as narrative inquiry. In what follows I share three narrative accounts of the three youth I walked alongside. I then share a chapter that attends to the resonant threads that echo across the three accounts. Finally I speak to the learnings that I draw forward from the work with the youth and their families, returning to the concepts around curriculum making that I introduced in Chapter 1.

### **Chapter 3:**

#### **Sky**

Grade 8–9, Current School Beaver Hills House

#### **Community**

Alberta First Nation (currently living in a large city in Western Canada)

#### **Cultural and Familial Curriculum**

Kookum speaks Cree fluently.

“I am learning how to speak slowly, it is part of my culture”

“I think it’s important to understand culture and language”

#### **Academics**

“I hate when teachers say you should be doing this”

“Math/Science/Art, I like all subjects”

“art eases my mind”

“be free when you draw”

“I like when you are free to do what you want to do in life”

“I hate teachers who force me”

“I would like to learn Spanish”

“Success leads to wealth with education”

### **Learning What Works Best**

“don’t go too fast, go at a steady pace”

“no distractions, not the same work, I want it explained more clearly”

“learning about other things is what I like”

“different styles . ... sometimes I can’t explain when I write, multiple choice helps me remember”

### **School History**

daycare @ Band school on First Nation

Kindergarten- Beach Town School

Mid-Grade 5, left moved to Grove School in the city

Grade 6–7 moved to Maple West Junior High School

Grade 7–8 moved to Eastside Junior High School

Grade 9 Beaver Hills House School

“I think I was better moving from school to school, in each process I have seen different things.”

“I am learning to adapt.”

### **Vision Board**

“I am going to university”

“in high school I will understand better”

“it is too soon for me to decide what I will do”

“me and my friends are important”

“I want to be an academic student so people take me seriously”

“I want to become something instead of just hiding in the shadows”

“I know I will be successful”

“my goal at the age of 13 was to babysit . ... save money for things”

high school---Bold Eagle program

“follow my sisters’ steps”

### **What Speaks to You as Being Important in Your Life?**

“Beading, I want to continue to learn”

“my family is important”

“when the music starts I dance my heart out, I can feel it ... I try everything to make my parents proud ... it eases me”

### **Wise Words**

“I want to learn from my mom and grandma Louisa”

“understand that it takes perseverance ... life can knock you down”

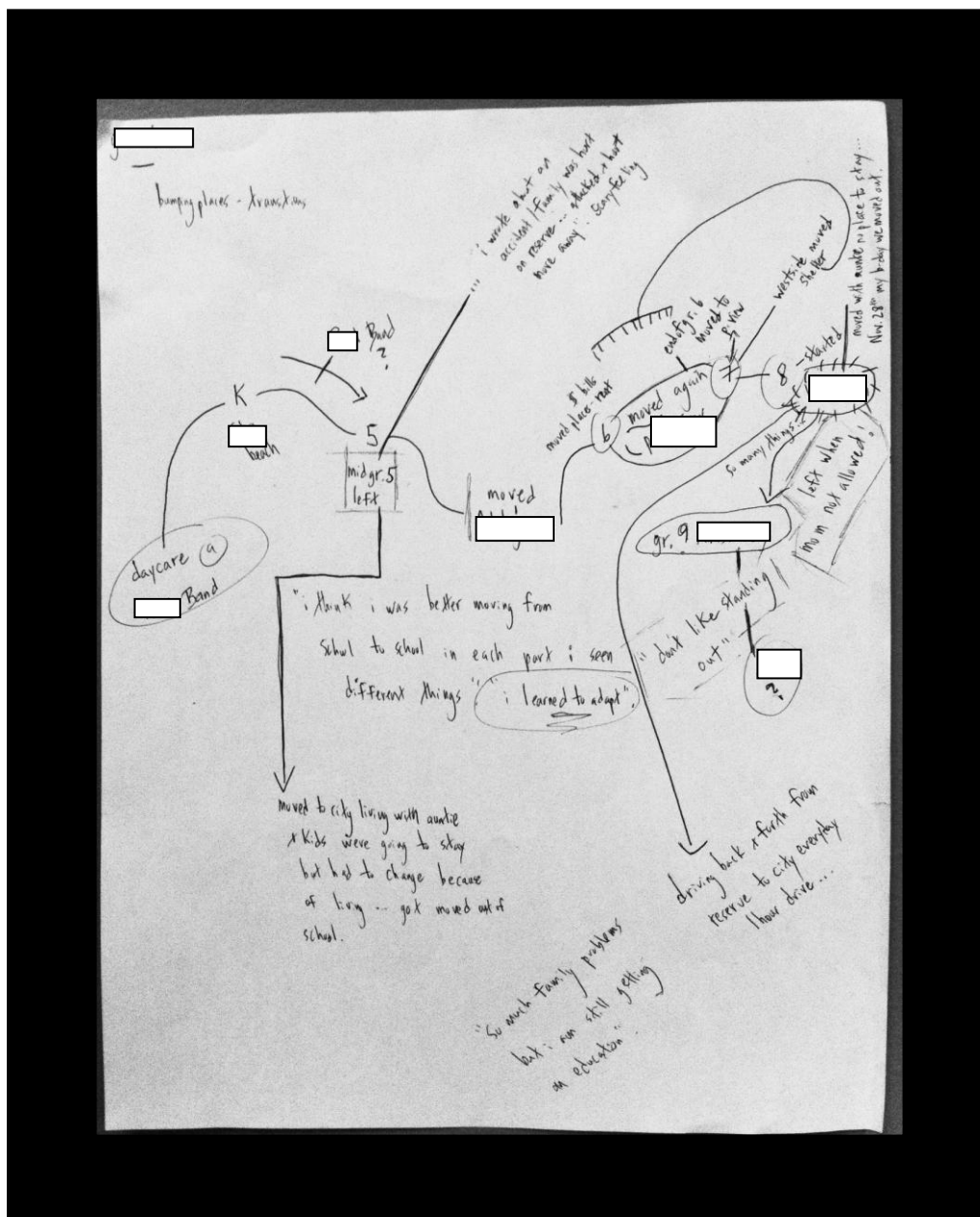


Figure 3-1.

## Prologue

The fire was burning hot on that day. The logs were prepared to shelter the rocks. There was a plan. The formation and the preparation of the wood ... how it was stacked . . . the number of logs . . . the way they were resting on each other, all of this had a purpose. “Split the wood this way,” Elder Bob Cardinal would say. “You need certain logs . . . it has to look like this.” The fire was burning hot on that day in preparation for a ceremony. Members of the community were coming to participate in a cleansing ceremony. The wood, the stones, the fire had to be prepared a certain way.



My friend and I were tasked with the preparation. Helping Elder Bob Cardinal was never a burden. Being out on the land cleared my mind. The smell of the smoke and the trees surrounding helped me escape the busyness of my urban life. It was peaceful here. The odd time in the shelter of the trees a deer could be spotted. On special days moose would feed on the vegetation near the marsh. Wild flowers were plentiful in this place and the whites of the poplar dotted the landscape. There was a certain comfort in hearing the calls and the sounds of the land. This place of ceremony had become special to me.

I recall the fire was burning hot on that day and the time to get ready for the ceremony was fast approaching. As the flames dissipated and the embers started to glow, the logs and the structured formation were no longer visible. In the grey-white of ashes the shapes of rocks emerged, heated stones that were to be used in the ceremony. I moved forward towards the glowing embers and reached out for the stones with a pitch fork, gently resting them between the iron tines. I recall the heat on my face. It was simmering—pushing me back. I was struggling to move close enough to gather the stones. I reached out one at a time and picked them up, sheltering my face from the heat. The stones wobbled back and forth on the pitchfork as I walked in a straight line to place them in the lodge. I walked between the fire pit and the lodge in a straight line, trying my best to conserve energy and streamline the process. As I made my way back and forth under the watchful eye of Elder Bob Cardinal he eventually called me over. “Sean, each time you go pick up one of the stones I want you to walk around the fire, towards

the left in a circle and then place the stones softly in the lodge.” I recall looking at him and responding by saying, “I am trying to hurry to get the other jobs done before the people get here.” Elder Bob Cardinal’s response was accompanied by a smile,

I see you are going straight back and forth but by being in a hurry you forget about why I asked you to help me in the first place. Don’t rush the process and worry about the end result. Take your time and walk around the fire thinking about why I asked you to help me out. (Summer 2010)

His response was grounding. It was good to think with his words this way, to slow down and reflect on the process, not just the end result of the task at hand. It is in these moments of reflective teaching on the land that I continue to learn about myself. It is good wisdom. I was being asked to help an Elder with a ceremony, not just gathering stones and cutting wood. It was a privilege that I was not quite recognizing, helping others through the process of preparing. It is patient work. Elder Bob Cardinal always leaves me with more to think about during our visits. Our conversations stay with me and I think of them often. I am learning to slow down and enjoy the process within myself, not just the final task or an end result.

It is with this story in mind that I begin to think more clearly about the research relationship with Sky. Her stories teach me. They are similar in that good wisdom that comes from a place. At times in my teaching life I am reminded to slow down like Elder Bob Cardinal would say. I want to slow down

and reflect on what Sky told me. I want to attend more closely to her stories and what she shared with me. She taught me in her own way by helping me to understand small pieces of who she was becoming. The wisdom in what she taught me came through in my struggle to frame her life or to look for an end result. My preoccupation with the rhetoric of transitions and graduation trends when working with youth, at times, became a dominant thread. By looking at her life through the lens of school and through the language of policy I learned that I missed much. It was only by slowing down, resisting, stepping away, and building on relationship that I was able to begin to understand the more intimate details of her life. The lines within the stories and the words became more alive when I listened carefully in this way. Our shared stories gradually became more hopeful as she continued to negotiate both her life and school stories. In a school sense the end points will come over time. The process and the stories along the way were what I looked forward to the most those days.

### **Who Am I in Relation?**

When I started thinking about the stories of youth, I was reminded that it was good to reflect and to think about who I was in relation to the stories that I heard. I thought about the multiple worlds that I was composing—moving somewhere between teacher, student, researcher, and father. I thought about the youth and their families and many of the stories that I was just coming to know. It was in this work and through the conversations that I began to understand more

about myself and realized how much I did not know. The complexities in the lives of both the youth and the families in this research continued to teach me and help me stay attentive to thinking about lives. I thought of the stories of school and life as I prepared for research conversations with one of my participants. Looking back at the experiences of school alongside youth and families conjured up images in my mind and helped me recall moments of my own school and life stories.

The participant that I was preparing for and thinking about on that cool winter morning was a female student named Sky who I had known for the previous 4 years. It was through her older sisters and her family that I came to know her. As I prepared for our initial research conversation I thought of her family. It was important for me to locate myself within the research conversations and learn to listen to her stories that she was composing, not just the stories her family might be composing of her. Through the research process I acknowledged the good stories and memories that I came to appreciate through her family. They taught me a great deal in my previous role as a high school teacher and continued to teach me as I thought about both life and school.

### **Sister Stories**

*The stories shared about three sisters came from different places over time. Our lives were intertwined in the educational spaces of school where I had learned of them through quick snapshots of their lives. I felt I must acknowledge*

*the time spent, the past experiences that were finding their way into the telling. I came to know the two older sisters from my time as a high school teacher in an urban school. I prepared to sit in conversation with the third sister as she navigated her way through her Grade 8 school year.*

*The third sister shared with me her experiences of life on and off the reserve and of the in-between-ness of these different places. She told me stories of life in the city and the importance of family as she tried to negotiate school in the present. She told me those stories of dreams and visions, the passion for the dance that took her to that freedom place within herself. The dance she spoke about was the pow wow movements and the stories the dance shared. It was about the summers on the road, travelling between places, performing across time and place as she danced across the geographic markers. It was growing time that I heard in those stories. It was healing. It was a sharing time with her family on that familiar pow wow trail. She told me stories of reaching for goals, changing the outlook, and challenging those people and systems that “do not think I will make it.” The third sister spoke of her fondness of learning ... different languages, subjects, maths, and sciences which she seemed to like the best. The stories shared most often looked back to the place of acknowledgment, to a place of endearment and thankfulness for her family, her sisters’ stories. She spoke fondly about the path takers, her older sisters who were showing her ways to negotiate a school system, a life system.*

*I found myself wandering away in my thoughts as I wrote this, imagining often as the third sister shared these stories. I tried to fit the puzzles together ... thinking of how I came to know each sister in different ways. I sat and wrote, smiling when thinking of how they were showing each other ways to negotiate the landscape. As the oldest sisters prepared for life beyond high school—perhaps college or university—Sky entered a space where no one in her family had been. It was a shifting story as it continued to unfold and pass on through in its own way between the sisters. They shared with each other what each grade was like, and with this sharing they began a process of composing forward looking stories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995).*

*Through the stories of life, including life in schools, the experiences continued to shift. As the second sister prepared for her last semester in Grade 12, her dreams of college remained intact. The stories that evoked imagery of different places and imagining life beyond high school remained strong in our conversations. I was hopeful that the three sisters would continue to share with each other their dreams of different places, of travel and freedom. It was this imagining otherwise (Greene, 1995) that sustained and shifted the stories, moving them to unexpected and exciting places.*

### **Leading with Spirit**

Through my work with Sky's older sisters at the high school level I slowly began to develop a relationship with Sky's family. It was through this beginning

relationship that I first came to know Sky as I recalled moments from years prior and my job at a local high school. I was a teacher working alongside First Nation and Métis youth.

One memory stood out as I thought about the early moments with Sky's family. The youth and I at the high school had developed a leadership group and we decided to commemorate a successful school year. We invited students, teachers, and parents to a celebration. The youth wanted to create a space within their school to help others understand the formation of their leadership group. Some students danced, some sang. Different forms of expression, both traditional and contemporary, were celebrated on this day. I recall the memories when I think back: guitar, both acoustic and electric, were present. There was music and songs: raps, some hip-hop re-incarnations, and then, suddenly, a shift to something different, to something beautiful. The hand drum played by my friend Lyle Tootoosis led us all in a special way. It filled the gymnasium with a different energy and spirit. It was here, through this honour song calling and the gentle softness surrounding, that he shared his songs and the people who were gathered came to see a different way of being in relation together. This is the day where I first met Sky—in the gymnasium of a school where I had worked with youth for 6 years. It was the first time in this place that we celebrated in this way, through dance and expression that was both safe and purposeful. This memory still lingers within me and leaves me filled with happiness as youth celebrated important parts of their life. As I thought of this I had a sense that great teachings

were passed on through the movements of two young elementary-aged girls: one was Sky, the other her little sister.

Sky's older sisters, part of our leadership group, invited Sky and her younger sister to dance on this day of celebration. The youth called it a "festival of Indigenous culture"<sup>20</sup>, a name provided by an Elder who worked with us at our school. I can still remember the details when I think of these early moments of relationship and how I had come to know a family within a school space. The drum was playing, I know that song now, and I can still hear it when I think back to these early moments. Two little girls began their dancing and their movements to the beat, to the sound of the drum and the songs as my friend shared. The jingle followed and the ease in movement, dancing in a different way together, showed us all in that high school gymnasium a way of living and celebrating that came from a place of early teachings. The girls captivated an audience comprised of people who had not experienced the songs and the dance in this way before. The celebration together and the movements were unknown to them in this way. The little girls stay in my mind as I remember them now. They help me to think about their lives and how many families are living their lives in different ways; lives that are beautiful. The teachings were special and the gesture was different as the older girls created a space where they could teach gently in their own ways and invite their younger sisters to share and celebrate. Through the movement

---

<sup>20</sup> "The "Festival of Indigenous Culture" was a name that was encouraged by an Elder we work closely with at the high school. It was a starting point for learning that could be built upon as we moved to a place in our teachings alongside him.



and the beauty of their footsteps they glided across the gymnasium floor to the beat of the drum and the sounds familiar to them from another place and time.

In these moments of preparation for research conversations about school in the present, it is these images that I want to hold close and to remember through my writing. The girls and their family showed me the first time I met them what part of their lives was most important to them. The imagery; the song; the memories; that gentle playing of the drum as I recall the whites, the purples, and golds; jingles moving in perfect symmetry swishing from side to side creating a sound that captivated my imagination and holds my memories in the present.

### **Coming to the Research Relationship**

I had known Sky and her family for a few years and I was excited because I asked her to be a participant in my doctoral research. The plan was to have Sky come to a research-based arts club space once a week and meet with me so we could have conversations about her experiences in school. I recall our first meeting, walking up to her classroom, acknowledging the teacher, and waving in response to Sky as she greeted me with her welcoming gesture. In the early stages of the project, Sky helped by discussing potential names for the club and by having her mom provide advice. Sky and her mother helped us think, as a

research group, about the importance of names, language, place, and protocol<sup>21</sup> in the early beginnings of the project.

I was looking forward to having research conversations with Sky. It was my hope to also spend more time with both her mom and dad, perhaps even her Kookum<sup>22</sup> if the research conversations took me there. I was curious and I had many questions, mostly about her family's passion for education. The stories that I had come to know of Sky through her family were about her gifts in academics and her goals for the future. She was storied at a young age as "the smart sister" or "the smart daughter" and through these stories my own lens was sometimes filtered. I think of the importance of listening carefully to the stories of both the youth and families and letting their stories be shared through the openness in relationship. The stories I had heard of Sky at times made it difficult for me to move beyond the focus on educational success as defined by grades, marks, and a post-secondary trajectory. I was challenged as I tried to understand the multiplicity within the experiences of both life and school for Sky and her family (Clandinin et al. 2006).

---

<sup>21</sup> Protocol in this case was how we might, as a research group, think about who we are in relation to Treaty 6 territory and some of the teachings that might be shared and considered in this process of working alongside both youth and their families.

<sup>22</sup> Kookum is the Cree word for grandmother.

### **The Ethics<sup>23</sup> in a Relationship**

I recall my first research conversation with Sky's mom, Sage. I wanted to share my intentions with her as well as what this project looked like and how it related to my work within the university. I brought protocol to Sage in the form of tobacco and I asked if I could work alongside Sky and her family in understanding their stories of school in an urban setting. I knew from previous conversations and coming to know the family over time the importance of ceremony and protocol within their lives. We had initially tried to meet 2 months earlier, but she was unavailable as there was too much going on in her life at that time. Her family had moved back to the reserve, approximately an hour away, and it was difficult for her to make it to our meeting in the city. She had no cell phone minutes, so she was not able to communicate with me when her plans changed. During our research conversation, we often laughed when thinking of the image of me on that first day as I sat in that restaurant in an extra large booth by myself with coffee cups and cutlery surrounding. We laughed imagining what this might have looked like to other people in the busy restaurant who were waiting for an open table. It was the beginning and a memory marker that eased both of us in this new type of research conversation.

---

<sup>23</sup> The ethics in relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) is an ontological commitment as a narrative inquirer. It is ongoing throughout the inquiry process as I negotiate relationship at various points. In this case I understood through relationship that I should respectfully ask to come alongside with protocol in the form of tobacco as I recognized the responsibility and a shared belief system in what this means between me as researcher and a family that I have come to know both in and outside of school.

Sage agreed to work with me and shared many early experiences of her family. Her son and daughters, intergenerational stories of her family, were acknowledged in early conversations. She looked backwards and forwards (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), shared memories of her children growing up and some of their earliest school stories. Her opening words stay with me, “Education was kind of took out of us, and residential school was a major part of this for my parents” (Sage, personal communication, July, 2012). Sage explained how she left school before graduating and that “school was not thought of as important in my family.” She reminded me that despite these early struggles, later in life she returned to school and received a diploma in hotel management. The stories of her son and her first experiences in school as a parent resonated with me as they helped me understand more of her stories related to school. “My son struggled in school with reading, and he is still trying to find his way back. ... It was always a struggle, we didn’t know what to do.” During this first research conversation, as I listened I wondered if these early experiences of struggle and challenge had shaped Sage and her family stories of school in the present. I wondered about the intergenerational stories of school and how the experiences of school shared by her parents shaped both Sage and her children in the present.

As Sage shared these early memories of school, she smiled and moved the conversation in a different direction, telling me that she missed her daughters who were attending a military camp and had been “gone from the family for a month.” Sage explained, “Something was missing. It is the first time the girls have been

gone from home and we all miss them, it is not the same on the pow wow trail without them.” The pow wow trail within her stories was often present as it represented time when her family travelled together throughout the summer months to participate in pow wows within communities. It was a tradition that celebrated her family’s cultural beliefs that were nested within inter-generational teachings. Sage was taught as a young person what dancing meant through the songs, dance, and the regalia that were created for her—it all had a story to accompany it. The stories, situated in place and time, were passed on through her six children who have participated in pow wow since a young age. Through the pow wow regalia that she made for them, Sage continued to create and teach her children in the present. She told me stories of spending time teaching her kids about beading, sewing, and the meaning and stories that their regalia carried. The regalia is art and story combined as colours and designs. These create beautiful imagery that she shares with me through the pictures of her children dancing in various locations during the summer months.

### **A Story of School**

Sage’s voice was quiet when she shared her stories. She was a strong and proud mother, a leader in both her family and community. She was a woman that believed in the importance of cultural and family traditions. I asked her where she got her strength from and she replied, “its 80% educational values, 20% family values or some type of mixture like that.”

In our conversation she told me stories of “going into debt” or “having to work many jobs just to have her kids study in the city. The rent is expensive in the city but it is worth it,” she explained. “It was hard leaving the reserve for the city school.” Many people from the reserve who questioned her decisions now approach her for advice on how she managed this. She said, “I coached the girls. ... I helped them to understand that it is different and that people will treat them differently in the city, it is not easy being different.”

She used the term “rezzed out” when explaining her thoughts to me. She smiled, and said that “you are ‘rezzed out’ when you come to the city. You cannot be like that, you have to be proud but act a little different in the city.” I wondered about this term as she shared this with me, and I had many questions about why people had to change and give up some parts of themselves to attend a school.

Sage continued to share with me as she explained how she recently moved back to live on the reserve because of costs, “but we will travel back and forth every day an hour to see the kids succeed in school. It is important to our family.” I wondered about these words that she shared with me and reflected on how many of these stories are not the stories told in schools and other places, of young people and families from a reserve attending an urban school. At this point in our conversation, Sage shared stories of what initially brought her family to the city schools.

“My oldest daughter Katarrina received marks that were low, barely passing. I questioned her. I asked her what was happening.” Sage did not like seeing her daughter struggling in school, and she thought about what might happen with her daughter in the future, so she decided to try the city school. “It was not that my daughter wasn’t smart. She wasn’t focused on school at the reserve, so we moved.” As Sage shared this experience with me I recalled the first time meeting her oldest daughter Katarrina. She first started at a public school when they moved to the city, and then they changed schools mid-year to the school where I worked. I met her family in the parking lot on her first day at the school. We were introduced by another teacher.

Sage continued, “there is no reason the girls can’t be doctors or teachers or whatever they want.” I agreed. I think of her daughter Katarrina as I write this in the present, and how I first came to know her. She had talent in beading, culture, sport, and dancing she was also gifted in academics. I observed her over the years taking care of young ones or pouring tea for guests and the Elders, always welcoming them into the school space. I remember when she would tell the boys to get up and help ... she was leading in so many ways.

Sage explained to me some of the differences in her children and how she tried as a mother, to “find out who they are.” She repeated to me that, without the girls that summer, “something was missing.” It was the first year that they had not travelled together on the pow wow circuit throughout western Canada and the United States. Nearly every summer they took part in this familial tradition. Sage

said, “it is a way of getting to know each other better.” The girls had danced throughout North America. The summer time was important for her family, and it was a part of their seasonal rhythm. The dancing and travel between places was a tradition that they look forward to celebrating alongside each other.

Sage told me many stories of her children dancing at different pow wows and meeting Elders and community members in each place. The richness in those experiences was evident as she shared with me. She explained how the dancing “brings her family together” and it was the “spending time together” that was most important. “I used to dance but I retired,” she said as she smiled,

it became too hard with six kids ... it is important to dance but I didn’t want to force my kids. ... I knew that they would tell me when they were ready. ... Kat told me when she was 9 that she was ready, and then I began to sew and I have made my daughters outfits ever since ... they all dance.

(Sage, personal communication, July, 2012)

While I have known Sage for a number of years, I had not known her in this way. The stories shared continue to shape me in the present. Sage is a humble and respectful person. I witnessed her inner strength while observing her advocacy for her daughters and their educational goals. I was reminded of moments of negotiation, when the system and the gatekeepers in schools said no you can’t do it that way. I was reminded once again when Sage told me about the time when the city school said her daughter could not take three sciences in one semester. Sage said, “Yes we are, sure we can, and we will do it ... thank-you.”



### **A Shifting Story of Negotiating the Landscape**

Shifting back to the school year and our beginning research relationship, I watched Sky experience unexpected changes in both schooling and life. Her plans shifted in response to her family needing to suddenly move back to the reserve for work. Our research conversations during this time were more difficult because of her daily commute from the reserve to the city. We had to adjust and I had to find ways to connect with her and her family beyond the place of school. In response to their life shifting, Sky and her family travelled each day to school from the reserve, which was located over an hour away. The decision to keep Sky in the urban school she was attending was a family decision. They felt more comfortable and consistency and the routine of school were cited as most important. As I write in the present I think about this decision and how much effort it must have been for her family, especially during the cold winter months, to travel each day. The family decisions also involved the lives of her siblings who attended various city schools. School, as Sky explained to me throughout our research conversations, was important to her life ... “it is where my friends are.” It was a place where she excelled and a place where she felt at ease.

As the school year progressed the relationship between the school that Sky attended and her family started to slowly deteriorate. Despite numerous efforts to communicate with the school regarding the complex situation her family was going through, Sky was frequently marked late or absent for school. As per school policy multiple lates led to a marked absence. This policy became a place

of tension for both Sky and her family as they tried to negotiate both school and life at this time. It was difficult for me to write this, yet important as it locates my research and speaks to the complexity in lives and in particular the in- and out-of-school places (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) for youth and families. Efforts were made to inform the school of the unique situation in Sky's life but those messages seemed to be met with hesitation from those in the school. I wonder about the hesitation and the stories that those in the school were composing of both Sky and her family around a plot line of a student being late. I wonder if the experience of life shifting shared by both Sky and her family was difficult to understand from a school perspective. I wonder where the space is to listen to the stories of youth and families as they try to maintain both life and school routines during unexpected circumstances.

It is important to note that "being on time" was something that was emphasized in both life and school for Sky's family. Throughout numerous research conversations Sky and her mother both spoke of the importance of "managing time" and "being prepared for education." It was a teaching that Sky's mom modelled in her life for her children. Sage shared with me how her mother stressed these teachings . . . and how it was "important in how I was raised." In many ways it was a teaching that she was sharing and passing on through to her children in the present.

As I reflect on Sky's school experience, I think of the layers within the stories and how important it was for me to pay attention and to remain awake

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), as her family worked extremely hard and spent money that they did not always have to drive each day back and forth to the city to participate in public schooling. They wanted to limit the amount of change in their children's lives, and they placed a great value on the education that they were receiving in a public city school. As I think of my own teaching experiences I wonder if I would have been attentive to this, if I would have remained awake to the shifts in lives that students have to negotiate (Clandinin et al., 2006). As I write what my response might have been to both Sky and her family, I wonder if I would have listened carefully to these stories so I could better understand them.

Sky's mom explained during our conversations about her increasing frustrations and how she did not agree with reports back that indicated lates or absences for Sky. It was as if Sage was asking, not only me, but a school system to look at their story differently, or to try and understand just how hard it was to make it to school each day. She was asking me to pay attention and to see what was going on within her family at this time. I often felt caught in between the place of schools, advocacy, and research as I listened to Sky and her family share their frustrations. I tried to explain to school administrators and advocate within the school the efforts that were being made by this family to participate in school.

As a researcher, it was hard for me to listen to this story and not respond with frustration, wondering what might happen if this was taking place in my family life, with my daughters as they tried to negotiate school. I wondered about policies and I wondered what might happen in this scenario as Sage expressed her

frustration, suggesting that she would have no choice but to “pull her daughter out of school.”

One afternoon I received a message from Sage that the comments and reports had become too much as she arrived at the school and asked to have her daughter called down to the office. She had a meeting booked that they both needed to attend. The school staff member told her she would have to wait until after class was over. As she explained to me months later, at that moment Sage “had enough” and “spoke out.” She asked once again to “see my daughter immediately” as they had an appointment. The conversation became somewhat heated and Sage responded, commenting on prior thoughts and actions that she perceived as discriminatory and unfair by the school. She told me “I spoke from my heart.” She called the current administration “racist” in their actions towards her family. As I reflect on this 2 years later and look back at my field notes, once again I have several wonders and can still feel the words and the emotion expressed as I listened alongside both Sky and her mother during this difficult experience. As a result, the school administration issued a no trespassing order to Sky’s mother. She was no longer allowed on school property. I have so many different feelings ... hard feelings ... difficult feelings, and wonders as I write about this experience.

### **Finding a School Place**

The relationship between the family and the school administrators remained filled with tension. Despite the tension Sage reluctantly continued to bring her daughter to school each day so she would finish the year with the least amount of change. The damage had been done and when the school year finished, the family requested a transfer to another school. The request to change schools came with difficulties as Sky and her mom tried attending schools within the west end of the city but were turned down for various reasons such as school population and catchment areas defined by the school board. The search for a school finally led her family to reluctantly enrol in an Aboriginal cultural enrichment program. The decision to enroll Sky at this school was weighed carefully as her parents were most interested in school programs that were more inclined to academic and honours courses. They explained to me that culture was a part of their life, and that they “learn these teachings at home” and within their family, and that “school was for learning.” I wondered about these statements and where learning occurs and what the best kinds of teachings are. Do they really occur only in schools? Do they really only occur in schools with honours and advanced placement standings?

As the research plan adjusted it meant that I needed to attend carefully to the lives of both Sky and her family. I needed to follow, letting her show me the way, as she moved to this new school environment paying close attention to the

shift in school landscapes and what her Grade 9 year might look like in this new place.

Shifting forward, Sky attended Beaver Hills school where culture and ceremony were part of the education experience. Sky's mom, despite her initial hesitation, thought perhaps this school could be a place where they "would understand" and where Sky could "fit in better." We met often in this new school over the course of the year. At times we connected in the cafeteria or designated office spaces. I looked forward to meeting Sky and hearing about her new experiences within this school. It was a new beginning in a different place and through this experience of walking alongside her I continued to learn about what it meant to undergo transitions.

Together we found ourselves in an in-between space where we were trying to figure out this new school landscape. It was a new beginning in a different place that shifted our relationship once again. She was in a school place where she knew some but not many students. Her routine and school rhythm was different in this place. What she had become used to, and was preparing for, had now shifted in both life stories that included school stories. Through this negotiation we began to learn more about each other.

### **Looking to Find a Place of Comfort**

We often talked about the process of adjustment to a school where there were many kinships and prior community relationships from the surrounding

reserves. The stories from within the reserve community, at times, entered conversations in school. This happened often for Sky throughout the school year. In this new school environment it was sometimes difficult to find a space where her identity was tied to her individual experiences. Instead the family or community narratives sometimes became the dominant thread in the stories about who she was and was becoming. Sky struggled when stories of her family and relatives from the reserve found their way into the conversations at school. She expressed her frustration repeatedly when teachers and staff grouped her in with other students from the same community. She wanted to be free to develop her stories of who she was becoming. I wondered if this was a reason why Sky and her parents had been reluctant to go to a school where kinships and cousins were so closely interconnected. I wondered about the importance of identity for Sky and how she valued her individual space within a school community.

### **Shifting Forward**

One week I was called to the school unexpectedly as an incident occurred where Sky was in a fight at school. My life as a researcher and school service provider intersected in this moment, as Sky asked that I sit beside her in this meeting as her advocate. I could hardly believe that the little girl that I had come to know was involved in a fight. It was not what I expected. I would rather not have been there at that moment as I tried to situate myself between the life of a researcher and a school board employee. But in the ethics within our relationship

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the family, and, most importantly, Sky wanted me to be there to support her. She had never been in trouble at a school before. Her mannerisms were different than what I was used to. She sat slumped over in her chair, her eye was black and bruised, silence filled the air. She gave only one- or two-word answers and offered little in the way of expression. She was dejected, there was a sadness in her that I had not recognized. I wondered if I was paying attention to the details and complexities in her life. I wondered if I was hearing what she was trying to say in the moments leading up to her fighting. I sat through a 1-hour meeting and listened to administrators and school counsellors make suggestions. I watched as they deliberated back and forth with little input from Sky or her family. They were deciding what they should do.

As I write about that day in the present, I travel back (Lugones, 1987) to the difficulties and emotions within the experience. It amazed me how the stories on Facebook and text messages led to the stories going out in the community— young people pushing for a response. Finally, in some moments maybe it seemed like the only thing to do was to fight. The situation had snowballed and spun wildly out of control through words. I found it hard to believe that this young girl that I had come to know was fighting in school. It was hard for me to make sense of this as I did not see this in her. Perhaps I was seeing what I wanted to see and not the person hurting inside all along. Her words stay with me: “Lessard, enough is enough. I couldn’t take it anymore so I fought back for the first time.”



**Re-starting**

I checked in with Sky. A week had passed since I last spoke with her. We made a plan to get back to the conversations. It was great seeing her. Her black eye was finally fading and that gentle old smile I knew was starting to emerge. I went to her drawing class and watched her sketch and design, creating with freedom. She is gifted. I had a great conversation with her teacher thanking her for allowing me to say “hi” to all the students and encourage them on this beautiful day. It felt good to just be present and re-start the conversational relationship by spending time. No words were necessary.

Sky and I continued to have research conversations as she shared with me her future plans for high school. It was the time of year where decisions were made and high school choices were confirmed. It was good to sit with Sky and listen to her stories as she shared them with me. I thought with her about life, school, and the future ... there were so many unknowns. She shared with me her experiences in Beaver Hills School and how it was an adjustment. She told me that she “liked some parts” but “missed her old friends.” She spoke of her plans for the future, and that she hoped that her mom would allow her to enroll in the high school her sisters attended. We had a great conversation and she continued to help me understand a little more about her life. Her stories of family and culture were becoming more alive. She shared differently as the space continued to shift between us.

### **Timeline Art<sup>24</sup>**

I looked back at a timeline that we created together at the beginning of our research conversations. We used the timeline as a way to think about both school and life. It was a process that helped us when we were sharing our stories. It was through the dialogue and the writing out of memories that both Sky and I recalled new untold stories. The starting point was the junior high where we had research conversations. Her timeline wove its way in many different directions and became visible mostly through the stories of school. It was neatly designed in some ways, moving from school to school backwards with relative ease, forward as she explained her places of school to me in the future. The stories were composed and told with the good stories in mind; the safe stories of school where the pathways were relatively defined.

Over time, as we developed her timeline together, it took new directions, new movements, as her life shifted suddenly. The “academic aboriginal” student was no longer as evident or prominent in conversations or within the timeline she was creating. Her sense of identity, her stories to live by, in school as the academic student and leader became difficult to sustain.

The stories of family within her life were less visible than those we shared in early moments of conversation. New lines emerged with stories that accompanied them as our relationship continued to shift. In school, Sky learned

---

<sup>24</sup> Reference to the annal included at the beginning of the narrative account. Sky and I would map out her story of school and life on paper. We would use the “time line” as an artifact to inquire into her experiences paying particular attention the 3 dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

to stay silent in fear that some stories might emerge. The stories of her life outside of school, which at times was difficult, became more present through the relational inquiry. It was through the telling and re-telling, the listening and re-listening (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) that new plot lines took root. The once straight lines had extensions and places for new inquiry and new wonders. Her stories of family started to weave their way throughout our conversations as she learned to share them with me.

She told me, “so much happened because of so many other parts of my life. We were driving back and forth from the reserve to the city every day, it’s a 1-hour drive, Lessard.” I circled this point on the timeline, the school where the research started.

“I remember the exact day,” she said quietly. I asked, “how could you possibly remember that? How do you know exactly when you moved?” She looked down and replied, “because it was on my birthday that we were out of places to live. So much family problems but I am still getting an education, Lessard.”

I had so many things to think about within this shared space and through the conversational relationship (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) we developed over time.

The ongoing transitions that were part of a larger life script were now becoming more visible to me as we shared. The points, marks, and lines on her timeline were not always smooth. At times they took on features of wildness, a

certain amount of chaos crossed the page, jutting off in various directions. No longer were the stories as smooth. It was through the space of the research conversations that our relationship continued to shift. Sky was slowly beginning to help me understand parts of her life. She took care of her family and her stories of family in our conversations. Some stories were difficult to share.

She took me back to school in our conversation, “they were not understanding how hard we worked to come to school when I was having family problems.” When I started research conversations with Sky she shared that, “In this year we lived in four different places but I still came to school . . . always.”

### **Grade 9 is Not Easy**

Sky was a student with whom I spent a year in conversation. As I moved with her to a new school, a school where cultural teachings were part of the dialogue, I struggled as I watched her navigate this new environment. I moved over to the new school with her and had the opportunity to have conversations about the all important Grade 9 year as we were in the midst of it together. That year was mixed with emotion and uneven results, as she had significant struggles with teachers on more than one occasion. She was sent home, suspended for fighting, and removed from the school leadership team. This new pattern had never been a part of her school story. It was not the story I had in mind. Initially, I was quite excited for her to start in this new school, to add a new element, and perhaps even lead informally in a positive way within the school. I believe now

my thought process was flawed as I needed to continue to think of the layers in her life and look beyond the simple transition that suggested that, with supports, her school story would remain smooth and intact. Her passion for academics and programming seemed to me like a simple process of learning in another place, a sustaining story. School and life outside of school places intersect and the challenges in this new school environment were too many to count.

### **There are Stories and Then There are Stories**

I can't predict the direction or the flow of a conversation, even when I try. That might be the most beautiful thing that comes from sharing a story.

I met with Sky, planning to read some of the narratives that we had been working on. A request from Sky to have her younger sister join us in the conversation shifted my intended plan. I was reluctant at first—I wasn't sure if it might change the dialogue and limit the sharing between us. Sky said to me simply, "Sean, it will be fine."

We sat in the school cafeteria; no one was around at that time. It was cavernous in that second floor seating area. I ordered a little take-out food to ease the formalities so we could try our best to make sense of some of the stories we had been sharing.

I started off slowly reading my opening, the starting point in our conversation. A prologue. A beginning. With words I tried my best to honour the girls' family and the stories shared over the past year. Both girls listened

intently as I read. They nodded from time to time, perhaps even smiling in response to the words that I was sharing. I glanced over my computer every once in awhile to try and imagine what they might be thinking, trying to get some reassurance to keep on going with the story. I wondered about their reaction and looked for it in the non-verbal cues that could guide me. They seemed to be listening so I continued to read. We had never really interacted in this way, sharing these stories that we know of each other in this way. It felt odd at first—no longer laughter, the seriousness in my voice and tone was noted by the sisters.

I read quietly at first but soon those awkward feelings and nervous enunciations began to subside. It became more clear between us. I read in that cafeteria on that sharing day, and the girls both looked up as I asked them with sincerity, maybe even a little doubt “am I close . ... is this what I am hearing?” The response made me dance inside, I was blushing ... without letting them know it. “It is good Sean. ... We didn’t know you liked writing ... our mom told us you wrote but we really like that story.” The conversational space (Clandinin et al., 2010) started to shift for me that day; the stories shared took a life of their own. The images started to form in my mind much more clearly than previous attempts. I imagined with them for the first time, as they shared stories of their lives. I felt like I was travelling to their worlds (Lugones, 1987) that day.

There are stories and then there are stories. The combination of sharing and reading back between the three of us was special to me. I left our sharing space filled with ideas and wanting to know so much more. I walked away from

the table with thoughts and good energy to keep on writing, to tell that story, share their words that they shared with me. I would not have known if Sky's little sister hadn't sat with us that day and gently helped with our stories. She was a Grade 7 girl sitting alongside her older sister and helping us in a back and forth kind of way (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Her older sister brought her to the conversation because she knew all along that her sister could help me with "my homework ... the stories." She filled in the blanks and remembered her own stories and the stories of her older sisters—pictures of places; memories of her father and mother; grandparents, some still with us, some passed on. Her presence helped to create a feeling of ease (Lugones, 1987), it was calm winds, opening up a different space between the three of us. Her quiet humour and remembering back style made the lives become so much more visible to me. The relationships between the sisters was wonderful to be a part of and not quite what I expected as it didn't fit my initial plan. I had a script but understand now that sometimes predetermined scripts may inhibit sharing spaces.

It was good to sit together and listen between them, writing small snippets, little words and scribbles that might cue me later and help me remember how special a conversation can be. It was remarkable to me how two junior high girls could carry me in conversation, transport me in that "world-travelling" (Lugones, 1987, p. 3) sort of sense. Those stories, those good stories they shared, painted images in my mind of my own growing up places filled with small and big images of a different time. Stories and memories initially thought to be far removed were

brought back now because the three of us sat together in a moment in time and read together. We were sharing a little about what I thought I might know. It turns out that I didn't really know much at all.

### **Do you Remember When?**

*2 girls . . .*

*3 girls . . .*

*Cousins running, swinging, dancing in and outside between the chores . . . the jobs, first Mom would say "remember the jobs" . . . but as soon as we did our work we would run . . . straight for the outside places.*

*To the hills, to the forest we would say.*

*To the place where mysterious takes over.*

*A place, that forest on the reserve . . . where we learned to play together.*

*You know the games kids play*

*tag and chase,*

*forts and pine cone fights.*

*You remember right?*

*Me, my sisters, and my cousins, we would run through those trees*

*right past the cougars,*

*over the bears,*

*as high as the birds,*

*we would crawl past the coyotes, the wolves,*



*careful not to wake the tigers and lions*

*that our imagination would tell us live beyond those trees, over the hills on that forest on the reserve.*

*We felt safe playing in our tree park . . . where the slides were branches and our swings were the tree-to-tree travelling between. High up in the protection of those trees we felt safe, looking out and over, we could see everything through the coats of green.*

*We played there nearly every day and when we played we made games.*

*I remember seeing a bear cave this one time and then we—my cousin and I—went back and it was no longer there. I think it disappeared into that imagination place.*

*Hey, you ever have a fort when you were a kid, well we had 3 of them all in that forest on the reserve.*

*You know the one . . . real close to our house, you remember the one.*

*It would take something special to get to our forts*

*2 trees fallen over the creek . . . or was it a moat.*

*Well anyways you needed to cross it carefully to make your way to our forts . . . you had to balance carefully, each step one foot in front of the other slowly . . . very slowly*

*Our tree place where we built forts when we were kids . . . where adults can't enter, they wouldn't be able to find it, even if they tried.*

*It was when we were little but we remember.*

*We remember those places.*

*We would use the supplies from home to make it more realistic, to make it seem like a house.*

*We didn't have hammers and nails and all those fancy things to make it a real strong fort but we used what was around us, bushes and old trees and we would clear out space so we could all play.*

*In the forts we would be together with our cousins running through that forest maze together always,  
it was how we played.*

*With our imaginations we could do anything because we always felt safe there in that forest on the reserve.*

*"You know the type of place you remember don't you, what it's like, you did that when you were a kid right?" I did . . .*

*"Yes I did," I reply.*

*It's as if they snapped me out of my dreaming in that moment . . . their visuals carrying me away. My response is as follows . . .*

*"Yes I learned the best games out in those places . . . are you talking about where the wind and the outdoors meet . . . the trees and the grass . . . the plants and the play . . . sunshine to moonlight . . . those kind of days where outside is the only place to be."*

*YES it is a place where you go for a swim in a creek on a hot sunny day.*

*Where we swam in that dirty old creek we would never swim now . . . we are too grown up . . . that water might have been so dirty but we didn't care back then . . . we didn't think that way.*

*We didn't think about the fear in our minds of those giant beavers that lived there. What if they attack . . . after all we were swimming in their place . . . in their area . . . they might have got real mad at us for making a mess . . . making too much noise and taking all the trees for that old fort we built.*

*That is how we used to think and play out there in that forest on the reserve. We would use our imaginations always.*

*It's peaceful out there up in those trees, all those animals . . . beaver attacks and all it was a good place to grow up.*

*It was a good place because you could see the stars so different there.*

*It's way better to see the sky out there than in the city.*

*I can't even name the stars when I am in the city but out there on the reserve at our house I can see so much more.*

*I know those stars by their names . . . and the names that we gave them.*

*I can see them, almost touch them as my sisters and I would sit back sometimes in the darkness and look straight up . . . letting those big old stars rain down on us from up above.*

*We could touch that painted sky at night. At night, only at night you can also hear all those noises that are different . . . you can hear the frogs and the toads*

*singing their favourite songs . . . back and forth throughout that night sky . . . the darkness, the songs would travel to us.*

*When we were kids we would try to find those frogs, chasing them, trying to collect them . . . sometimes we would try experiments, it was so fun playing with frogs but I don't see them too much in the city these days . . . the kids here would probably think that was gross.*

*It was a good life there.*

*It was our home in that forest on the reserve, you remember where right . . .*

*I think about that place from time to time she says, it had no name but it was our place, where me and my cousins could be together . . . running through those trees so fast, we had our paths, secret places that we would hide from each other, we knew it so well, that place.*

*In the trees we would climb then we would fall backwards, tumble down to the leaves below, letting ourselves fall back down to the earth, the golden yellows, spectacular oranges, those are the things I remember from that place, the forest on the reserve it is where we grew up. (A narrative I wrote based on personal communication, June, 2012)*

### **Forward Looking Stories<sup>25</sup>**

I continue to reflect on 2 years of conversations with Sky and through the reflection I have so much more to think with. As I have stepped away from the research site and sit with my field notes and reflections through conversations that I previously had, I see the experiences differently now. I listened more closely, paid attention as I am “out of the parade” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17) and mostly with my thoughts and my computer these days. I continued to have research conversations with Sky as she explained to me different pieces of her previous Grade 8 experience where her life shifted to something different and unexpected. She was a person who likes routine. As I came to know, she valued her education and school in particular as it provided her the structure that she enjoyed. She spoke of friends at school and her interests continuing to grow ... as she was an explorer of not only culture but also language and subject matter that was unfamiliar to me. Her curiosity was so much a part of who she was ... her creativity and ease with which she tried and took risk in learning was remarkable. She loved to study every science because it fascinated her. She enjoyed learning new languages because she wanted to “see the world.” Her energy for learning returned in her Grade 10 year. Her sharing spirit was present in how she shared her stories. They became more alive as she shared them with me.

---

<sup>25</sup> Forward looking stories is a way I am thinking about experience temporally. I wrote this piece inspired by the work of Lindeman Nelson’s conceptualization of forward looking stories and how Clandinin and Connelly (2002) continue to shape my view of experience by looking inward, outward, backwards and forwards throughout the inquiry process.

She told me more about the stories as she looked back at her Grade 8 year explaining to me, in the moment, the “heartbreak” of her family and the “difficulties when parents move” in different directions. At the point when it was happening she, “couldn’t share ... it was too hard.” Her stories and how she shared them with me was one of fondness of her father who “taught her” so much. She asked me, “if I knew this had happened?” My response was honest in that “I did not know ... I only knew that something was different” within her. She told her story now, almost 2 years later, after her mom had been banned from the school. She told me, “the reason why my mom was so mad was because we had no place to live ... we were homeless and it was my birthday. My appointment was counselling. We were going to be living in a shelter.” The words were deeper than I expected when she shared them with me. Our relationship was different and there was a greater space to share between us. I was no longer working at the school board. I was living in a different city and doing a different job. The shared space between us had new openings and it helped us share those stories that were sometimes difficult stories to tell. For now, when we shared we laughed and smiled and reflected on the present—not ignoring the past but we were both freer to look forward together, imagining some new stories.

I return again to the beginning story and my memories of the land when I think of my time spent together with Sky. I thought of Elder Bob Cardinal as he was on my mind. I thought of the rocks, the fire, the wood, and the taking care of each part of the process when preparing for ceremony. I thought of the moments

of reflection and the silence out on the land. It was in the preparation and the taking care of process where I continued to learn. The teachings did not really become visible at the time when I was in the moment. It was much later when they started to make sense, when I was more open to learning about what took place. It was when I put the tools down and when I pulled the memories back and thought about the experiences that my deepest learning occurred. The memories and images became more present for me when I reflected in this way. It was with these same thoughts that I thought of Sky and how she and her family continued to teach me. It was when I moved away from knowing (Lugones, 1987) . . . letting the stories rest for awhile so new experiences could be shared between us. It was through these stories of experience that Sky helped me understand what was most important. It was not the end result but the journey along the way. It was not the check box systems or markers that defined.

The dance . . . the drums . . . the songs . . . the wood . . . the fire . . . the stories—they became more alive when I listened carefully and paid attention to the details by learning the importance of taking care of them.

**Chapter 4:****Donovan**

Grade 7-8 current school Beaver Hills House School

**Community**

Cree Nation

Cultural and Familial Curriculum

“it is very important to me”

“I am losing family and gaining family”

“I have to be with my family”

**Academics**

“Art is my favourite class”

“I like Physical Education class”

“I get to be with my sisters at school”

“School gets tough as you go higher”

“I would want a school with two gyms”

**Learning What Works Best**

“when I am not distracted I learn best”

“I like to listen to my music”

“I was good in math last year”



“I like gym and math and activities”

### **School History**

“I was at the reserve school-kindergarten”

“I then went to school in a small town”

“I went to 2 city schools”

“I then went to 3 more city schools”

“School tried holding me back so I just skipped a grade”

### **Vision Board**

“I want to be a police officer or a security officer someday”

“I want a good job”

“I want to help people”

“I want to stop people from doing bad stuff”

### **What Speaks to You as Being Important in Life?**

“My mom is most important”

“My mom always encourages me”

“I want to do what my mom asks me to do”

### **Wise Words**

“Be kind”

“I want to stay on a good path”

“I have good things in my life”

“I never used to listen. . . . I regret it now . . . I listen to my Elders now”

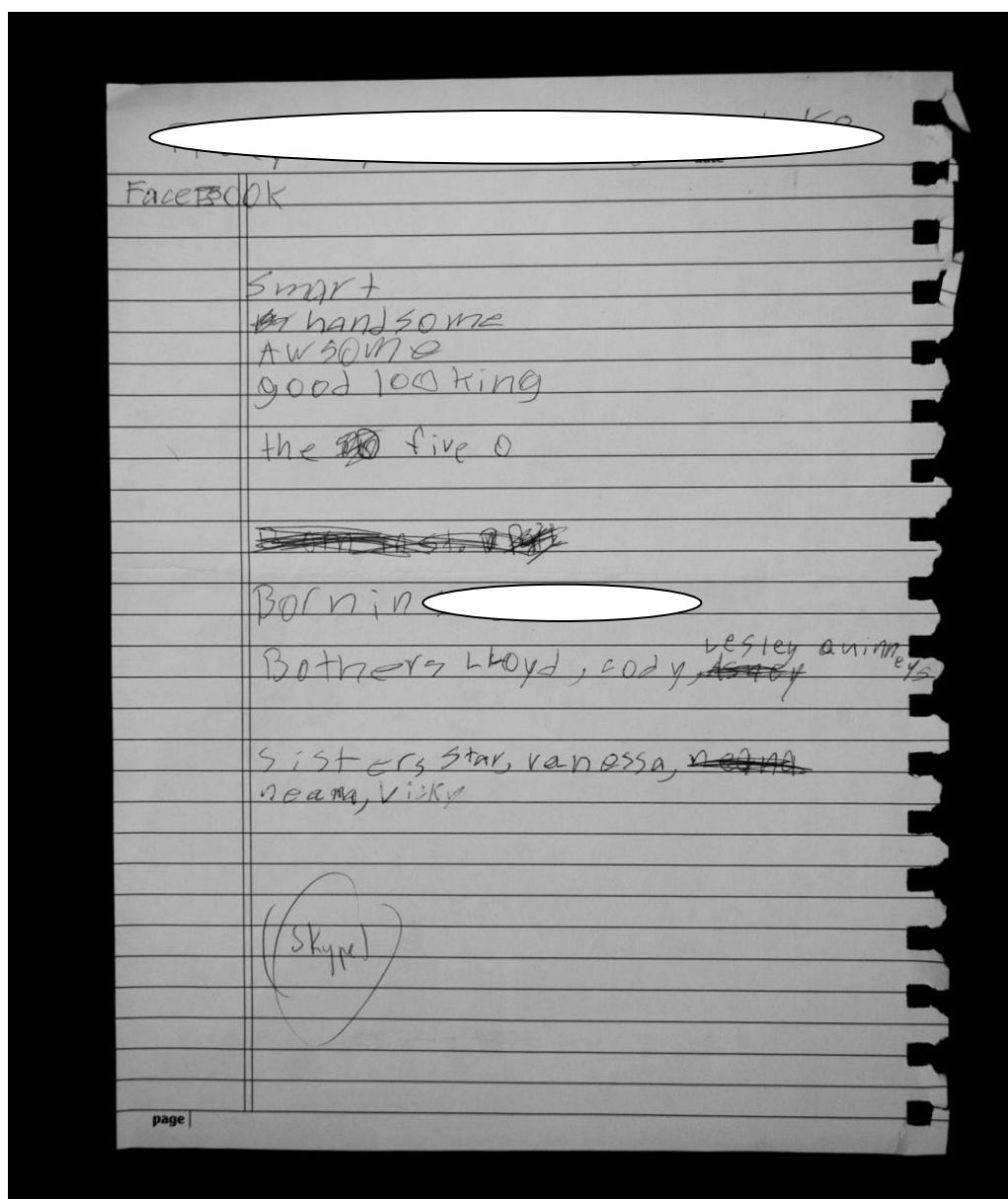


Figure 4-1.

# Prologue

# Prologue

“Play that Drum softly,” she says, “Sean this is what I was taught.” These are the words of Elder Isabelle Kootenay who has walked alongside me through the interwoven composing of my life in and out of schools, including this research process. Elder Isabelle Kootenay is a co-researcher. She knows many of the youth within the research project. When she spends time with them, she often asks them to think of the medicine wheel as she teaches them gently about who they are and who they are becoming. Her words and her teachings weave their

way through the stories of Donovan and help me see how the idea of gentle teaching and playing the drum softly as a way of teaching can help me think of Donovan and our shared stories over the past 2 years of coming alongside. “Play that drum softly,” she says, is how I am thinking of this right now.

### **Learning to Listen to What I Could Not Hear**

I first met Donovan at the U of A art club, a Wednesday afternoon meeting space for 2 years in an urban junior high school. I remember him as young man who filled the room with his smile. His humour and laughter were gifts. He had a gentle presence. As I reflect on memories and read my field notes in the present, I see him in my mind as he flashes a smile, and I recall him sharing his stories of “taking care” of his newborn baby niece. I learned early on how important his family members were to him. He showed me many photographs as he let me into his world. ... flipping through his phone, in another way telling me stories that he was a proud uncle, brother, grandson, and son.

As I write these words my memories flash backwards and forwards as I think of the stories and experiences we have shared over time. I think of Donovan and his drum, one that he created alongside an Elder, and how it is played with a certain rhythm in different places. I think of how the drum is played differently depending on how one is taught and in relation to the spaces that the drum occupies. The drum is part of a process when I think of it in this way. It is animate and living. It is more than an instrument as it teaches in its own way and

it is meant to be taken care of in both a physical and metaphoric sense. I see Donovan through the memories of our early beginnings and I fondly recall his presence, but I also see him as he is carrying songs and teachings through his drum.

I slip back in time and recall being told by the other researchers that Donovan first came to the U of A art club, perhaps somewhat reluctantly, following closely behind his older sister. The stories that were shared were that Donovan was often led by his older sister and that she was always looking out for her little brother, like big sisters sometimes do. Stories of Donovan were often composed through those early interactions as a boy on the margins, on the periphery. It was as if he was connected but disconnected as he remained at a distance to many of us. I was uncertain, as I recall, where our relationship would take us, uncertain if it would develop at all.

As I came to know Donovan we connected with brief verbal exchanges, a high five or a pat on the back that later led to a good meal and conversation. We met at the club space as we came to understand and trust one another with more certainty. Our relationship developed over careful time and through the symmetry between friends as I came to know Donovan through his friend Lane and Lane through his friend Donovan.

Long before I had these conversations with Donovan, Donovan would be accompanied alongside his best friend Lane at the U of A art club. It was Donovan who often encouraged Lane when Lane first came to the U of A art club

to “stay just a little longer” until he finally did and found his own space within the group. As I look back at these interactions it was Donovan who was leading in his own way and had recognized that the U of A art club was a space where he could enter feeling both comfortable and safe. It was safe enough that he first followed his sister and, through his experiences in the club, he began to lead others like Lane in his own way.

These stories of early moments of relationship were stories that Lane and Donovan later told me in our conversations as they described coming to know each other and the U of A art club. As they told their stories it was with fondness and a sense of a *home-place* that they had found and created alongside each other. Through the sharing of earlier memories of the club and their evolving relationship they help me travel to my own memories of the U of A art club space. When I came to the club, I noticed Donovan’s sister and Lane but I did not listen carefully enough to hear the gentle drumming, the beat that was present within Donovan.

I think of Donovan in the present as now I understand him differently. How, after the 2 years of research conversations I recognize more clearly who he was in that space and in the space between us. The gentle drumming is what I am reminded of when thinking of Donovan, and how the way he moved and interacted was with quiet presence, a gentle rhythm or beat that would guide ... like that drum call Elder Isabelle Kootenay speaks of. It is a spirit or a way of living that is gentle and that is difficult to recognize if I am not listening carefully.

Now, as I turn and gaze backward to my notes and memories, I see it differently. Donovan's quiet leadership, leading in a gentle way, is how he moves in relation. In those early moments in the club space, I didn't really recognize who was leading whom. I now see that the stories that I first told were not the stories I came to know when I began to hear, for the first time, Donovan playing that drum ever so softly. The boys—Donovan and Lane—found each other but what often seemed most evident during those first moments of observation is less clear to me now. I see the stories of a boy described as distant and quiet and as being led by others as miscast. I can see the lines more clearly when thinking of Donovan. No longer are they dotted representations of what I thought I knew. They are more pronounced with details and edges, that provide more clarity when I am looking and trying to make sense of what I could not see and could not understand.

Lane, Donovan, and I began to build our relationships within the collective of the three of us meeting over supertime conversations throughout the city. As I sit in the present I am transported back to those early moments of coming alongside in relationship. While I am trying to write of Donovan today, I know that Lane is present. It was Lane that I was first encouraged to develop a research relationship alongside. Now I see that without Donovan, Lane may not have come to the U of A club. It was Donovan who quietly remained present. I was "in the midst" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of stories and what has become the most important to me now was what I could not see and could not hear—

Donovan gently playing his drum, calling to me in different ways. Donovan walked alongside Lane and I through meals and conversation .. his voice and stories always present but I could not truly hear his stories until much later ... until he was ready to share in his own way, or perhaps he was waiting for me to listen more closely, to be more attentive. I see now that he was telling and living stories in his own way all along.

In our conversations outside the art club space, the three of us sipped tea, ate pizza, and laughed often over a 2-year span, sharing stories of life and school. I see now that this separation between life and school seemed so pronounced and I know now that their world in school was separate from their worlds outside school. Donovan's stories were often overshadowed at the beginning, lost in the spotlight of his good friend whose words were spoken eloquently and creatively on his behalf. I realize that his older sister also used to be the one who spoke as Donovan quietly entered in those shadow places behind her, behind Lane. He would remain quiet with words unspoken, not shared. Now, as I sit back, removed from the experiences and reading my notes, looking at the images and the artifacts, I realize that he was sharing his story gently in many ways but I was not always paying attention to the details and particularities that now became evident. It is only now that I begin to realize what I missed when I could not hear his drum ... the one he holds deep within himself playing so gently ... so softly.



### **Awakening Time**

At the U of A art club Donovan slowly began to let me into his worlds and began to share stories with me of life in and out of school places (Clandinin et al., 2006). His laughter and his humour prevailed as he came up with little sayings and welcomed me with gentle barbs and jokes as we began to see each other more often outside the club space. He called out to restaurant owners, “Hey, Big Brother’s buying today” or “My dad’s got all the money, he better buy lunch today.” In his stories he named me Big Brother or Dad and he shared with me, and with various restaurant owners, telling them and me with a smile on his face as he patted me on the back or tapped me on the arm in friendship.

Donovan and his friend Lane often took me home to my memories of early work, my early beginnings working alongside youth at the age of 17. Those moments in-between were where I learned best as the time spent after school and in the freedom of weekends was where youth taught me. It was rarely in schools that I would come to know the stories of young people. It was in the movement or improvisation where we would play sports, go on field trips and outings to see different things where the strongest relationships were created. The time spent alongside Donovan and his friend Lane outside of school places created a space to share our stories in a safe way. The back and forth in our relationship was part of the rhythm that we had co-composed together. Their loyalty and the strength in their actions and words continue to stay with me as I recall a memory of a time I was speaking at their school and they remained outside the room where I was

presenting for over an hour just so they could say “hi.” I recall now, many months later, opening that door and them coming to greet me to my surprise and all I could say is, “How are you boys? Why didn’t you come in and see me speak?” Their simple reply: “we didn’t want to bug you so we just waited until you were done.” In moments like these I recognized the relationship and the ethics (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in doing what I said I would do by coming alongside and honouring not only their words that they shared but also the consistency in being present. The stories of Donovan and Lane and the gift of sharing alongside each other over time is a thread that continues to shape who I am becoming and it provides me the opportunity to think and remember the many times where the boys showed their ability to stay with it ... to stay with me ... to come alongside in relation, even if the past and their experience with this was not always a good story.

Relationships as a thread wove strongly throughout the stories that Donovan shared with me. He is closely connected to his siblings despite separate living arrangements within the city. Donovan lives with his aunt for the time being but, as he explained to me, this “changes depending on what is happening with my family.” He told me about work, and family, and sometimes about space being scarce in his living arrangements. Through time I became more aware of the details of a life shared by a Grade 7 boy from a reserve outside the city. He told of travels between these worlds of reserve life and urban life and the many places in between. Travel included different places, houses, and living

arrangements, depending on what was happening within his family life. Homes and schools were places on his map<sup>26</sup> without a real sense of permanence when he explained where he has been or where he might be going. Things remained temporary or for now when describing the people, the schools, his homes.

Donovan sketched out moments of his life on a piece of paper when I asked him to create a timeline. He drew his timeline of the “important things” he said. He noted schools, his family members scattered throughout a province, and trips to different places ... even when those trips were the times spent between the reserve and the city.

The points on his memory map that he could remember were based on events . . . deaths, births, and celebrations mostly. Within those sketch book drawings, gaps and silences were present which pointed to family members who were not a part of his life. He said, “my dad has never been there for me. I wish that he was. My mom is on the reserve, I see her sometimes. . . . just not now. My big brother, I can’t see him now but soon I will.” And at these times we moved to another place in conversation, acknowledging the sadness and the feelings but looking together for the good things that were also present. I realize now as I write this that I am hearing Elder Isabelle Kootenay reminding me to move gently ... move slowly as we compose a life together by sharing our stories

---

<sup>26</sup> When referring to Donovan's "map" it is part of the process of inquiring into his experiences through the use of a time line. On the time line that we co-compose through research conversations we map places of school, home, and the people within these experiences through words, numbers, and sometimes images.

and sometimes those stories of relationships are difficult stories to share. It is through our sharing, through relationship that ours would continue to shift.

### **Donovan and Lane: Co-composing: Finding their Songs Within**

One sustaining relationship in Donovan's life in school was his relationship with his best friend Lane. Another was his relationship with his older sister who lived in another home but attended the same school. Donovan explained his relationship with his friend to me: "If it wasn't for Lane I would have a hard time going to school." When his friend Lane explained their relationship to me, he said, "Donovan looks out for me, he always helps me." They met each other in a gym. They tell the story in different ways ... all I know as a researcher is that they found each other in the chaos of a Grade 7 Physical Education class. In the pandemonium of a game of dodge ball, they managed to find time for a conversation and introduce themselves and form one of those Grade 7 friendships that I too recall. It was one of those friendships that I hope sustains over the years as they learn to negotiate the tough places in school and life together . . . with family and without family but trying to figure it out. They each said to me that the other was the reason they came to school.

From the time of meeting in school and developing a relationship outside of school that often involved time spent over the weekends, Donovan and Lane become almost inseparable. It would look different if one of them attended the U of A arts club space without the other. They were closely connected. In school,

at breaks, phoning each other, texting and prompting each other to come to school was relational, not with the worry of missed assignments but with the longing for each other's company as they tried to make sense of their Grade 7 school year together. As I look back at these moments and think about who they were in the midst of school, I begin to recognize how visible ... how attentive they were to each other's stories. The stories of Donovan and Lane, their intricacies and the way they shared their gifts, the way they sang their songs, the way they found their rhythms in life in and out of school was so different yet connected. They were connected in the way that despite the beauty and gifts in their stories, they remained largely invisible to the world of school that surrounded them. They were not known in their school for their songs, stories, or strength in both humour and friendship. They remained largely unknown in both the hallways and classroom spaces they occupied, they existed on the surface ... it was somewhat temporary. It was as if they could come and go, enter and leave, flicker on and off ... their footprints would be mostly unnoticed ... their voices would not be missed because the people within the school never really listened to who they were or heard what their gifts might be because no one knew where the sounds were coming from. I feel in this moment of clarity in writing that the boys became visible to each other, that they co-created a world for themselves. It seems so real when I imagine them meeting each other in the midst of chaos and noise in that physical education class. Like so much of what they do, they managed to find a space to share ... to connect ... and sustain that was different.

They quite simply learned to play a different song within the place of school. Within that place of school they began to understand each other's lives by being alongside each other and co-composing a different rhythm . . . a different beat . . . a different song.

As I look back it becomes evident to me that they both understood each other in many ways and perhaps part of becoming visible to each other was living in those places, travelling to each other's worlds (Lugones, 1987) and having a certain resonance when life got difficult. It was a part of the story that did not define the relationship. It was words left unsaid, an understanding that life at home involved complexities, and the lives they lived in other worlds involved many negotiations and rhythms that were familiar to each of them, that were visible to each of them in the world they were co-creating together. I wonder, when I reflect, if the resonance in each other's stories helped them negotiate the relationship and open up the spaces where they could begin to share in different ways what sustained each other. In the places travelled together they learned to take care of each other's stories.

I have a photograph, a visual, an artifact, taken after one of our many conversations in those early moments of relationship. The boys' arms are stretched out around each other, they sit in a restaurant booth smiling, laughing, and I captured a moment in time. . . . a starting point for me as I try to tell the story of a young boy named Donovan and his friend Lane. It is through time and relation and the spaces in between that we negotiated that I am beginning to

notice ... to see what I could not see at first. I find comfort in looking back at the pictures, the images of the boys, their stories, our stories intertwined are visible to me in so many new ways. The images of our time together encompass many of my thoughts and hopes for the future as I see them in my mind and imagine them in both school and life. The words begin to dance for me, they come alive when I think of their hopes and dreams. The boys' stories shone so bright when they shared them with me. Now those same stories become alive for me as I think of them and the "world-travelling" (Lugones, 1987, p. 68) that has gone on between us in those moments of telling, sharing, and listening to each other's stories. As we engaged in this relational work together, what once was not seen will ever remain visible within our stories.

### **Learning to listen to each other, to hear our stories.**

We met often over 2 years, many times weekly, even bi-weekly. Most of our recorded conversations were filled with laughter and sharing. Moments of seriousness, stories of loss and sadness were washed away in a hopefulness that was experienced through the sounds of laughter and "imagining otherwise" (Greene, 1995). It was at times individual laughter, other times it was a collective boom of emotion that filled not only my sound clips but also my memory markers that take me back to places that were at the edge of my memory—the soda pop fizzing, swishing as I heard Donovan taking sips, even when I play it back once again. We met in different places for our research conversations, paying attention

to the shifting stories as we negotiated the constant movement and tensions of Donovan's Grade 7 school year. When I go back over my field notes and listen to the audio clips, Donovan rarely spoke of school. He told stories of family, travel, culture, golf, adventures, his future. Our conversations at the beginning were on the surface as we learned together to build trust and share in different ways where school was not the dominant thread. The safe sharing with small stories stayed with us for many months and it slowly shifted as Donovan let me understand more of his life in his multiple worlds (Lugones, 1987). He filled in gaps and no longer were silences prolonged ... the awkwardness finally left and we turned in a different way when the drums came calling one day.

### **The drums come calling.**

In conversations, Donovan expressed his desire to learn more about drum culture and protocol. He said, "I want to make a drum" when I asked what he wanted to do in the art club. I explained that we needed to think carefully about this because it wasn't "just about making a drum." Donovan and I would need to spend time with an Elder to learn more about Donovan's request. "It is just not about making a drum. It is a process that we need to go through," I said to him. He understood as he remembered back to his home community and his early beginnings, what family members had taught him. "I just forgot some parts," he said. As we discussed the drum and what he wanted to do, our relationship once again started to shift.



We planned a visit to another school where an Elder worked. We had a relationship with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack and when it was time to sit and visit with him, Trudy (another researcher) and I arranged a “field trip” for some teachings on drum protocols. My old friend—a sage and wisdom keeper—Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, teaches in gentle ways. I knew it was good to sit and visit with him ... where we could all learn in a safe way about the new journey we would be taking together. Elder Francis Whiskeyjack works with youth and has been instrumental in many lives, including my own. I felt good in my heart about bringing Lane and Donovan to ask questions and learn about drum protocol in a good way. Elder Francis Whiskeyjack takes care of youth’s stories and helps them think deeply about what they are asking. We bought tobacco as a form of protocol and prepared to meet my friend Elder Francis Whiskeyjack. Donovan and I talked first about the questions he had and why we were bringing tobacco to ask Elder Francis Whiskeyjack for guidance with our questions. We talked about process and slowing down on this day and learning what this experience could teach us.

Donovan and Elder Francis Whiskeyjack shared the same community roots despite not previously knowing each other. They were Cree brothers, tribal brothers . . . an intergenerational narrative situated in place was possible.

### **My friend Francis.**

I have been privileged to work alongside Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, not only in school places but in the life moments of sharing time and laughter between cups of tea and the stories that accompany those places. We share a story of working with youth, coming alongside their school and life experiences . . . not separated . . . intricately woven. It is rare when laughter is not heard between us . . . it is often our starting place as well as our middle and ending places. Our relationship has continued to grow and our friendship strengthened through the work we do together. Elder Francis Whiskeyjack's image remains strong in my mind and fills me with good feelings of a different place and a different time. I knew through relationship that Elder Francis Whiskeyjack would help us. He would help us understand the drum and teach us gently as I introduced him to both Donovan and Lane. The boys wanted to learn. They came into this situation with good intentions and they were serious in their request for more teachings accompanied with protocol<sup>27</sup>.

I had not seen the boys act so seriously as when they stepped out of the cab that brought them from their homes to the school where Elder Francis Whiskeyjack worked. I greeted them at the front doors of the school. I greeted

---

<sup>27</sup> Protocol in this case and in this relationship with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack came in the form of tobacco, which he asks us to bring to start the conversation and to build a relationship. It is a symbol in many ways helping us to think about what it is we are asking and to come with this from a good place. He asks us to bring tobacco wrapped in print cloth, which he will then use in his own way and within his own ceremony and teachings. It is a sign of respect for what we are asking in this situation and honours this process of coming to understand. Protocol is different depending on place, relation, and context.

Trudy, my fellow researcher, and thanked her for getting the boys organized as I prepared for our teachings with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack. I had made tea and sat with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack throughout the morning, giving him some background knowledge of the U of A art club and some of the stories of the boys and our relationship together. He looked forward to meeting them. In the school and community Elder Francis Whiskejack always welcomed others who came from great distances to hear his stories. I have been alongside many before this time and through this process have observed what possibilities might come out of it. With an open mind and an open heart I was hoping the boys might start the conversation.

We walked into the school and Elder Francis Whiskeyjack welcomed the boys at the entrance with a smile and a feeling of openness. We walked together touring the school. Getting to know the place was important in coming to know each other. Elder Francis Whiskeyjack helped us to feel comfortable. He joked, created conversation with the boys, and smiled when Donovan told him where he was from. Elder Francis Whiskeyjack brought the boys to different classrooms, introduced them to other youth, teachers, and the administrators. It was as if the school belonged to them in this moment. It was an open space for learning by shifting how both the boys had previously understood schools. During our tour we walked into the Principal's office for the first time. They walked in as welcomed and honoured guests, not as youth to be disciplined or corrected, but as people in relationship. We talked about this day long after and how this

experience was different for them. Donovan smiled as he told the story of that day and how “he knew many kids from pow wows, community events, and sports who attended the school” and how “it felt good to be there for a visit.”

We had now prepared to spend time and have a conversation with Elder Whiskeyjack about the drum and the importance of what drumming might mean. Elder Francis Whiskeyjack led us into his space, his cultural teaching room, where we entered with protocol and took our shoes off. The room was a former administrator’s office and was intentionally changed into a space of teaching and healing.

No longer did the big oak desk fill the room, nor did the wall hangings of degrees and awards granted dominate the space. There were no titles here, just relationships beginning. The big bookshelves with books of things removed from the realities of lives in a school had been dismantled to create this space. It was a purposeful response to shifting knowledge landscapes.

This space had become a healing space, a conversational space (Clandinin et al. 2006) in a school where people could connect in different ways. I watched the boys as they walked in the room and surveyed the area. They looked at the lack of seating, they looked at each other, they looked at me. There were no chairs here ... just our little group together with the hides of various animals welcoming us, inviting us to sit on the floor, to sit on the hides and think about the living and who we were in relation on this day. It was different here.

It is with the ethics of relation on my mind that I tell some of the details of this story, not the process and the teachings, but of what happened when we entered a space together in relation. Together we were trying to learn about thinking differently together. As we sat on the bear rugs and looked to the middle of the room where a buffalo skull rested with offerings surrounding it, we were, in those moments, being invited to think alongside each other. It was a space where we could look at the four walls around us and see the coloured prints connecting us to the variant directions.

We could now begin to think and feel in different ways alongside each other. The boys and I talked about this experience often and what they noticed and didn't notice ... if it was what they expected. I always get the same resounding "NO." "We thought we were going to an office to talk about school." Soon after they entered the space, the boys offered protocol and thanked Elder Francis Whiskeyjack for his time and for his teachings. We sat around the circle on this day long ago and we entered a space that shifted all our stories as we became part of each other's stories, part of our memories in a place of shifting stories. We entered into that connecting space in schools that is so often miscast or not present in the time between school starting and ending. It is a space that disrupts our knowing by not knowing. We were unfamiliar with the space and the direction of the teachings. By dismissing how we had previously been taught we were able to weave a new thread through the stories of beginning and coming alongside each other in relation through teachings. This conversational

relationship with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack took us all to a place that was different and moved us in a direction that none of quite expected. We sat together on that day for an hour sharing stories. Elder Francis Whiskeyjack told stories that he had been told as a young man and shared his experiences over time and places, asking the boys to think alongside but never telling them. He was sharing with them gently. On that day he did not give the boys an answer to their question about drumming. That in itself was the best teaching. We did not get that checkbox answer of “yes, you can.” However, what we did get was an invitation to come again. I could see by the smiles on the boys’ faces that this was the best answer of all.

### **In-between time.**

Donovan shared with me how difficult it was to keep the commitments Elder Francis Whiskeyjack asked of him when learning about drumming. “It is hard Sean,” he said. He had been put in situations where fighting, alcohol, and drugs were prevalent. He said, “I feel pressure, but I will stay strong.” Donovan was thinking in such different ways than the boy that I first met who struggled to find who he was in those moments of Grade 7 coming to know time . . . this is the life that he wanted to compose for himself. He wanted to learn about the drums and he started a journey that resisted the fighting as he happily told me that he “walked away from a fight” or that he “didn’t smoke” when asked. He recognized within himself the teachings that were being asked of him by Elder

Francis Whiskeyjack. He often said, “I need to learn about respect for the drum.” The teachings and the questions that Elder Francis Whiskeyjack asked Donovan were creating a space within him to reflect on who he was becoming and what the process of building a drum involved. It was not about learning how to build a drum but learning how to take care of it once you built it alongside an Elder’s teachings. Donovan was well aware of what was being asked. In those moments he remembered earlier teachings within his own community, within his own family stories of culture that are situated in place. The early teachings that were nested deep within him (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) were becoming more alive and more present as he was thinking about what they meant.

### **More teachings . . .**

Weeks later, the invitation to come back and spend time with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack was too much to resist. The boys talked about their visit and shared stories with other youth. They eagerly awaited their opportunity to reconnect with their new friend for more teachings. The cab pulled up and once again Donovan and Lane exited and greeted me at the door. “We have been here before,” was the feeling that I got from them . . . a certain comfort was present within them. They were met with handshakes and a welcome from the school administrators. “It is great to see you again boys,” was all they needed. Around the corner Elder Francis Whiskeyjack appeared. He met them with his trademark smile, a handshake, and a hug. Silence came upon the conversation. He looked at

the boys, smiled, and I remember his words: “Well I guess you boys are ready to make a drum.” I recognized that special feeling and once again a smile came across my face. In the present I am removed from this experience but it stays with me ... deep within it reverberates, it sustains me and casts an image of Donovan and Lane and Elder Francis Whiskeyjack as we moved to a place within our stories that would always be different. Thank you for teaching me my friends.

### **Donovan meets Beaver Hill House School.**

During the summer between Grades 7 and 8 Donovan decided that because of travel and his older sister’s determination to change schools that he too must follow. As I reflect on it much later, I believe that part of the shift occurred during those first moments of meeting Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, making his own drum, and developing relationships in a space where he was welcomed. The shift to a new school which his older sisters was attending was with little hesitation as he knew more about the new school because of our visits with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack. Through conversation Donovan said “it is only two buses” and “I know other kids that go there.” Changing schools did not concern him. It was what he needed to do to be with his family. It was where he wanted to be to continue to learn about the drum that he had created. I wondered at this time about “transition” and I worried that he would experience another change . . . another new beginning at a school. However, this transition concerned me less than times past because I knew the teachers in the building, and they would not



only take care of Donovan but also his older sister. The idea, the word transition, was also shifting for me at this time as I continued to learn from Donovan that transition involved much more than changing of schools. Donovan taught me this with his stories of life and movement between places. As I listened to Donovan explain his decision to change schools I heard in his words how much he looked forward to learning from Elder Francis Whiskeyjack who helped him create his drum.

The drum was increasingly important to Donovan and to who he was becoming. Through his travels during the summer his drum often travelled with him. He was learning to “take care of his drum” like Elder Francis Whiskeyjack had asked him through teachings. The songs that were within him and the drum beat that was always present, nested deeply within him, became more prominent as they emerged throughout those summer months. I think of Elder Francis Whiskeyjack in this moment as I write and think of what he might say. When I spend time with him at celebrations, watching the young children dance to the beat of the drums, when they hear the drums in the background and the songs calling in a different way they begin to move with freedom, with no hesitation, he begins to smile. When he sees this he often says to me “Sean it is always in them . . . it is their spirit moving to the beat of the drum, it is in their hearts even when they are young.” He has repeated these words to me often as we attended events together and as he reflected on moments of past teachings. I saw within Elder Francis Whiskeyjack how it moved his spirit to see this as he also used to dance.

He used to be a champion pow wow dancer and this can be seen in his movement as he often opens the grand entries and the celebrations that we attend. His footwork is meticulous. His movement is effortless. He glides to the beat of the drums ... it is a poetic shuffle. He is also filled with spirit in these moments as he lets the sound of the drum take him on that journey with openness and good intentions. He travels backwards and forwards in those moments of experiences and teachings, to the multiple worlds that he lives within. I think of this image in my mind when I think of Donovan and who he was becoming, of how the creative processes of making a drum alongside Elder Francis Whiskeyjack had shifted who he was becoming. It was not just a “build a drum and then all is good” story; it was the process and the becoming visible within yourself by looking inwards, by being alongside others and by letting that introspection eventually turn outward and take Donovan, Lane, Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, and me to unimagined places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is in this “world travelling” sense (Lugones, 1987) that we are always moving together. It was here that we had to become more attentive and more visible to the stories and the spirit that we had inside us all along. Now the sounds became clearer, more pronounced. No longer faint and in the distance, the sounds became difficult to ignore because those songs, the drum beats, were shaping who we were becoming together.

Beaver Hills’ House was a school with a cultural narrative. The dominant thread in this school was the life of the students who came from many communities. The curriculum lived out within the school created spaces for

acknowledging the gifts within youth (Huber et.al., 2011). It was a place where drumming, beading, language, and ceremony were present and welcomed. The smell of sweetgrass and sage linger in the air as I think of this place and how it gently greeted me each time I walked through the doors. It was different in that place. As I observed Donovan from a distance in this new school, I began to see shifts within him and his ideas of what school could be. I saw a smile on his face as he shared stories with me about what he did at school and who he was within it. Despite Donovan taking two buses each morning, he rarely missed a day of school and when he did he contacted his teachers to let them know where he was. When I walked into the school I saw that he had a place to be a part of, where the acknowledgement of who he was becoming was alive. I could see it in the way he carried himself in relationship. He told me these same things when he said “I even do sports now in this school ... I play basketball. I am part of a team.”

I saw Donovan at Beaver Hills’ House School and there was a calmness within him as he had found a place where possibilities existed. The staff called him “Little Francis” in honour of the Elder that he spent so much time with. They said, “we often see Donovan right beside Francis.” This, to me, was special and I saw it as I went for a visit to attend the morning song that took place each day at this school. Donovan, and other students that work with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, drummed alongside the staff in a morning song each day when they sang for all the creatures and the animate things in this world to wake up and be thanked as gifts of creation. It was a powerful part of the day that Donovan was

involved in. He said, “it sets me up for the day. I just close my eyes and I know the words.” It was his routine, a part of his rhythm, to start by singing with his heart and reflecting on all the good things. It was a shift that I was happy to observe as his drum played softly together with others and he finally had an opportunity to celebrate that voice that was always there; it had just not been as visible to me and perhaps even to Donovan in the art club space. A calm and introspective time comes over me when I reflect as I can not only hear the drum calling but also hear the distinct words and voices of a morning song taking me home to my own stories.

As I reflect on this shift and the relationship that we developed over 2 years it brings me happiness as I find it difficult to write without smiling because I know for now he is safe and in a good place of learning and living. The drum, a simple question—“can I make one?” , a conversation, and relationship that has moved to places unexpected is what I feel has happened. I recently went for a visit to Beaver Hills’ House School to see Donovan and I also was able to spend time with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack. We walked together through the school sharing stories and laughing about past experiences together. Elder Francis Whiskeyjack explained to me how well Donovan was doing and how committed he was to drumming and learning with him. Donovan simply told me, “I told you so.”

Before I left to move to a different city, Donovan and I sat in a room at his new school Beaver Hills’ House. We shared stories with each other and we

talked about the experiences he was having in this new school place. “I hardly miss a day of school Sean. I want to play solo for morning song,” he told me. I recorded this conversation and I reflect on an amazing gift that is difficult to capture with my written words. Our conversation moved to the words of the drum songs that he learned at Beaver Hills’ House School and how he looks forward to his own songs one day. He shared, “When I close my eyes and I am singing beside Mr. Whiskeyjack, the words just come. I can remember them when I play my drum with him.” With these words I asked Donovan if he could share with me “what this sounds like, what are the words that you are learning?” He began to sing quietly, softly, as he shared his songs with me, his stories. When I feel distance from his words and experiences shared over the course of 2 years, when I find it difficult to remember and transport myself back to those experiences, I put my headphones on and listen to our conversations and then listen to his song. It played for a brief moment as he closed his eyes and sang it on that day from within his heart. It helps me, in the present, to remember who he is, who he is becoming (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). His words and his songs sustain me and help me stay connected to our shared stories. “Hey Haw Hey Haw Hey Haw Hey Haw,” he chants gently, softly, and I can see him drumming in my mind, playing softly in his new school alongside Elder Francis Whiskeyjack. “Hey Haw Hey Haw Hey Haw Hey Haw,” is what he is singing from deep within his heart ... no words to describe ... just that feeling of going to a different place in relationship that helps me to remember a young man who continues to teach me.

**Kookum Muriel “She was an Elder to everyone.”**

I grew through my relationship with Donovan and this relationship that we forged together continues to shift my story. As I listen to our shared stories, certain stories speak to me, they call to me in different ways. As we sat and had a meal together in the months before I left and started a new job in a new city, a sense of leaving lingered. I had within me a shifting tide of uncertainty that entered my mind ... it was unsettled, a transition and movement that is unknown to me. Perhaps it is more recognized in my co-researcher Donovan who told the most beautiful stories and through his stories I recall my own knowing of this place. The space we shared opened up between us as we told stories filled with laughter and, at times, sadness as the thread of relationships and loss reverberated deeply between us. I can feel it in different ways as I listen to it in these moments spread over time and space. Perhaps the process of inquiring into the stories has kept me away from some of these more difficult conversations that live within me. The resonance in stories opens spaces and takes me on a storied journey that, at times, I am unprepared for because I did not know where the conversation would take us until time settled much later. I re-visit these moments now with a different lens and a sense of what might have been happening as we wove our stories together. We were sharing in good ways between food and the laughter that helps even the most difficult of stories gently heal, even if for just a moment,

with a Grade 8 Cree boy that comes from a place that reminds me of places that I have travelled (Lugones, 1987).

He wanted to tell me this story of his Kookum as I inquired into the places he had attended school as we looked back over time with our time line art. We looked together at the sketching down of marks on a piece of paper and the places he had travelled in school and life. We visited about the people who were a part of his story. I would explain it as what mattered to him. Looking back at our timeline art and seeing where the waves and extensions on a piece of paper took us in a “world travelling” sense (Lugones, 1987) was most often our starting point in conversations. On this day he started to re-visit his school on the reserve and within that memory marker we both travelled down the road to his Kookum’s house—to her stories, to the stories that Donovan carried with him in the present.

During our conversation Donovan began to speak about his home community, his reserve. I asked him who he enjoyed visiting within this place. Donovan shared stories of his cousins and family members and then he moved to silence. He said “I used to always go visit my Kookum Muriel.” After listening to his quiet words when sharing, I asked him “Has your Kookum passed?” With his head now looking down and the smile no longer present he shared with me part of her story.

Yes, she was a good woman, she was kind to everyone, she was an Elder to everyone. She passed away in 2010. I still think of her. I went and visited my brother after when my Kookum died. I tried being strong ... but

when I got to my brother's I just felt it ... and then I started to cry. She was my dad's mother. Muriel was her name. (Donovan, personal communication, December, 2012)

The conversation shifted rapidly as I recall. It was filled with silence on the voice recorder and I am transported back to those moments of conversation within a restaurant. At that moment in conversation as I say on the sound memo "we don't have to talk about this Donovan ... it's okay" I can hear the silence and the difficulty in hearing him. His words struggle to come out shortly after and I remember clearly. He started to tell me about walking a long distance to visit her. "Across the lake is where she lived" is how he said it. "She had a big house and she made a farm so I would play with the animals—the chickens and the horses. I would go there by myself, just walking." I see him in my mind walking down the rural roads of his community. That sense of taking care of the animals was what he enjoyed sharing with me at this time. The feeling of spending time that was free with his Kookum was what he helped me recall within my own stories. He continued his sharing moment laughing as he told me his stories of "chasing chickens" and the time his horse "head butted" him. We both laughed at these stories, as I once again recalled the good moments of improvisation and playfulness of growing up on a farm. I asked Donovan ... "Favourite all-time memory of your Kookum." Donovan shared a story of the time his Kookum played chess with him and how she taught him board games. "She would speak



to me in Cree, teaching me all my numbers and the animals but now I forget. But the best memory of her is that she would just spend time with me.”

His teaching words speak to me as a father, and I think of my family in this moment of reflection time. Through these conversations I now understand more deeply why the relationship between us moved to such different places. I wondered about the times Donovan called me “Big Brother” or “Dad” when we ordered a meal together. I wondered about the shifting relationship and the importance of being there and showing up consistently to share memories, stories, and laughter between us. I thought of these moments when Donovan told me the most important memories were “when she would just spend time with me.” At moments during those conversations it was difficult to articulate what was happening ... impossible in many ways because it happened through the shared space of relationship over time. As I now reflect on the places we have been and the people who have travelled with us in those places of becoming I can hear Donovan’s voice more clearly and it is a gift when I can hear it. He reminded me of what was important when he said, “when I close my eyes and I feel happy and wonder if Kookum Muriel is looking out for me. I have had a lot of loss in my life.” I can see the ethics in relationship that runs deeply in the person that he is becoming, in what he carries with him as a grandson (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It took almost 2 years for Donovan to share these stories with me. It took longer for me to begin to understand who I was in relation to them. It was because of his stories that I began to re-think and re-imagine some of my own

stories. Donovan said it best though and I thank him for this: “she was kind to everyone ... she was an Elder to everyone.”

### **Remembering school.**

Over the span of 2 years, the conversations between Donovan and I shifted rapidly. At the beginning in the place of his Grade 7 junior high we shared stories on the surface, never really going to those deeper places, or simply covering them over with humour and laughter (Clandinin et al., 2006). I listened and re-listened to the audio clips of our conversations and I was reminded of places that we had been and the stories that we shared. During our last meal together, before I left for a new city, we had a moving conversation when we reviewed the timeline that he had created and I asked him to share memories from the places of schools that he has attended.

As I looked at his starting place of school on the reserve and noticed the movement and then a gap he once again told me he “skipped Grade 2.” I asked him to explain this to me in more detail. When re-visiting this, I thought that it may have been a result of the numerous transitions taking place in his life. He had always explained this gap in his school story as “moving around because of jobs.” Today he spoke more about his early beginnings in school. “The reason why I skipped Grade 2 is because I failed Grade 1. I didn’t know plus and minus, what the hell that is.” As he explained to me I understood more clearly the

jumping between grades. I asked him if he could tell me about this experience in school. Donovan explained,

I felt bad ... I like being usually happy in school but I remember being so scared to tell my mom that I failed. It sucked because I had friends. It was difficult. I remember telling my mom I failed and she said ... it's okay, you will do better. (December 2012)

On his timeline Donovan showed me how during the next school year he had moved numerous times between the reserve and the city with his family. He explained "my mom helped me in school because she told the city school that I was ready for Grade 3 and so when that school started I was in Grade 3 and that is how I skipped Grade 2." I looked at him during this conversation. We both began to laugh and I told him how smart he was ... and how smart his mom was, and that it made much more sense for me to understand how a person could skip a grade. His mom always knew what was best for Donovan.

When Donovan and I looked at his timeline together he brought to light many more details as he let me walk in his worlds with him (Lugones, 1987). He had distinct memories from the schools he attended, sometimes "three schools in one year" he said and essentially a new school every year was what he experienced. I asked him what he thought the main reason was for going to different schools and he said "my mom. ... she needs jobs and there was nine of us kids sometimes so we would go where we live by. I like where I am going to school now, there are people who look out for me ... my last school it's like they

gave up on me.” The calm within him was evident as he shared and I thought about his life within Beaver Hills’ House School. It was a great place for him to be for now. Donovan learned over time to keep certain stories to himself. They were silent within him because they were stories of experiences that had caused pain and that he remembered vividly. The school story of failing and being scared to tell an adult was difficult and the relief that he had when he was able to tell his mom resonated with me. Her words of wisdom brought a smile to my face, “It’s okay, you will do better”. “It’s okay, you will do better”.

### **The Spirit of the People.**

The Spirit of the People is a blanket gifted to me on my last day of school at Beaver Hills’ House with a school board where I worked as a teacher for 10 years. It was an unexpected gift, one that I will continue to treasure. It is a memory marker for me going forward. An eagle feather and a blanket gifted by Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, Donovan, and students that I had come to know in this place were part of my next journey. Elder Francis Whiskeyjack explaining “The Spirit of the People” at Beaver Hills’ House School evoked strong feelings within me. I thought of the Spirit of the People and what that might mean in the moments of relation. Coming from Elder Francis Whiskeyjack and Donovan, it felt fitting to be honoured with these words to live by that represented how I felt about them and how they continued to shape me (Clandinin et al., 2006).

That spirit, that song within that sometimes plays softly, sometimes calls loudly, depending on how I am listening for it or what might be going on in those moments of a life, is what I think about when I think of the Spirit of the People. The stillness, the pause, the reflection are important as I slow down in this writing and try to understand that Spirit of the People within my own words and experiences.

I felt the warmth as the blanket surrounded me. It captured my emotions as I was embraced with friendship on that day. The drums were on my mind and the images were clearly present within. I can still feel that good blanket wrapped around me with my friends on each side and Elder Francis Whiskeyjack explaining his teachings. The Spirit of the People is a feeling I will not forget, that I will continue to look for within my own stories. It is comfort time, taking me home time, wrapping me with the reds and yellows. And in the solace of good words and good feelings in relation it is the spirit between us that gives me strength in the present, when I meet special people like Donovan and Elder Francis Whiskeyjack who I had the privilege to walk alongside. The small moments defined by time cannot measure the feeling or the teachings that I have received through the relationships and the stories that we have shared. It is the Spirit of the People that reminds me of how I want to live when I gaze backwards to those moments. The stories of the people, the songs, the Spirit of the People will continue to guide me as I learn to take care of the stories that Donovan, Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, and I have shared.

As I write these words, I have now been in a new city for 2 months and I can carefully reflect on 2 years of relationship with Donovan. I am at the start, the beginning of a new journey as Elder Francis Whiskeyjack would say. I find myself at a prairie university as a professor working with aspiring teachers and these stories that are removed by distance are present in the gifts that I have received. I see them in the blanket that I have brought with me to my new office and carefully display. It carries stories that sustain me. It is that same Spirit of the People that Elder Francis Whiskeyjack spoke about that I try and carry into this new place that I am living within. The gifts—the blanket, the eagle feather, the stories of the lives—stir my emotions in the present. I often think of Donovan as I try to compose a life being away and looking back over the experiences that we have shared together. I have Donovan and Elder Francis Whiskeyjack to thank as they teach me what Spirit of the People actually means. It is through their way of living that I am continuing to learn as they helped shape the day where I was honoured by the people, the students, and the school that I was a part of for a small moment in time in my life. Their way of gently walking, drumming softly, just living is the Spirit of the People that I think of and the meaning that is held within the blanket that was gifted to me on that special day.

I can still hear that drum when I close my eyes and look back, as they wrapped that blanket around me on that last day. It is as Donovan teaches me “Hey Haw Hey Haw Hey Haw Hey Haw.” “Hey Haw Hey Haw Hey Haw Hey Haw.” The best gift is seeing through the sound of those songs that are playing

gently, that are playing softly on my mind in the present. It is what I would call the Spirit of the People.

**When you hear the First Thunder.**

“When I hear the rain, I know what that means. It reminds me of my name. Sometimes I forget what it means just for a little bit. My name is First Thunder. I was named in a ceremony on the reserve when I was little.” These words echo throughout as I listened to them closely on my voice audio today. Recorded months earlier, I have thought about these words often, these wonderful words that dance through my mind and fill my heart with happiness. I heard them again—his words, his voice—and I let them take me to those faraway places in my own mind. I let the words rest within me. I let them teach me and carry me, thinking of who I am in relation to the stories shared through the silence that comes when walking in the outdoor spaces. Donovan and his stories resonate with me and help me travel home in my mind, even though some of those places remain difficult places which to travel to.

Finally, the sun was shining again today in this cold prairie winter setting. A touch of seasons changing time was in the air. I could feel it. The sun was casting its rays beautifully, filling the air with expression as I walked through the downtown corridor. The softness of snow falling added to the majesty around me. The words of First Thunder I played over on my phone ... walking ... enjoying the pureness in simplicity. I was thinking with the words. I was letting

them come to life in the outdoor spaces that help me think ... clearing my mind with openness and possibility. Donovan let me into his world gently in this conversation where we co-created a space for sharing shortly before I moved away to my new life in a new city. He let me know who he was in a different way. He taught me. First Thunder told me about recalling the story of getting his “Indian Name”<sup>28</sup> and what it meant to him. It underscored the narrative thread of relationships and a family story that guided his life making. It was a story that shaped who he was becoming, and with that becoming he was guiding me along the way in my own life negotiation.

Donovan explained to me “when I hear the rain fall” that “I should think about him.” Those words stop me. “I know I will,” was my recorded response. “I know when I hear the rain fall I will think of you” and now in the present retelling, that good sadness overcomes me. When thinking about a life and the young person that a research project brought me to, I feel overwhelmed and gifted. It was a gift when he said, “when I hear the rain fall” to me. I have an image in my mind of a young boy and how he thought with those words and his connection to his family, and the places he moved within, both geographically and metaphorically. He said to me with quiet strength, “I was told that when I hear the rain and the First Thunder I should take some food and tobacco and bury it beside a tree to give back and remember my name.” First Thunder told me his

---

<sup>28</sup> “Indian Name” a descriptor used by both Donovan and his Aunt when explaining the process of receiving the gift of a name at a ceremony within his community. The name First Thunder has special meaning not only to Donovan, but also to those within his family and community as they continue to heal from the loss of their family member.



story with a small whisper of words and intermittent silences, and the pause that slowed down the conversation allowing time for reflection as he thought when he told me. This young man left me with such gifts and he shared with me why, in that moment, he believed he was honoured with the name First Thunder. He spoke of his older sister. ... and the stories told of her:

She would have been the tenth. We would have had 10 of us in our family but she passed away when she was 2 days old. It makes me sad when I think of her, she would be the third oldest. I know about her because my mom always tells me about her. Her name was Brittany. I really wanted to meet her ... my mom always tells me stories about her. That is why I have the name First Thunder.

I am the youngest.

They want me to remember.

### **In response to stories.**

First Thunder, I thank you for your stories. I thank you for teaching me gently along the way and letting me walk alongside these stories over time. As I sit with these stories, far removed from the first place where we shared these good stories together, I cannot wait until the seasons change and the winter begins to rest for another year. I cannot wait until the sun celebrates again with the warmth that shifts the skies. It is the place where the sun stirs the clouds and conjures up the sweeping wind that I will be looking for. It is the springtime clarity. I will be

waiting “to hear the rain fall” once again. In that moment of cleansing time I will be looking up and I will be waiting to hear your voice tell me those good stories again. I will be listening for the First Thunder and with that I will be reminded of those words that you told me not so long ago. Your stories stay with me and they connect me to the elements in ways I have not thought of before. Keep telling those good stories of healing, of celebration, of hope and I will be waiting “to hear that rain fall” once again.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **Narrative Account of Lane**

#### **Lane Gopher**

Current school grade 7 Eastside Grade 8 Beaver Hills House

#### **Community**

“A type of people a group of people”

First Nation in western Canada and a large city in western Canada

“It is where my family is from and where I was born and raised.”

“I miss it sometimes. I get back to their sometimes.”

#### **Academics**

“I like Language Arts and Science the best in school”

“Art and Guitar. . .Foods class”

“I like the people at the school that I am in.”

#### **Learning what works best**

“I learn from my mistakes it is how it is when I work jobs”

“hands on training helps me learn best”

“I learn from what I do”

**School History**

“I started off on the reserve and then to a school on the south side of the city.”

“I went back to the reserve then back to the city on the south side for a couple years.”

“I then went to another school in elementary and then to a junior high on the west side then to the school I am at now.”

“I also moved to a school in another city when I was young.”

**Vision Board**

“I want to graduate maybe go to university and study.”

“I also want to get my tickets and learn how to drive heavy equipment.”

“Maybe work in the field. I also want to continue to work at the carnival.”

“I like the carnival because it is hard work that I put into it. I make a lot of new friends and I connect with people.”

**What speaks to you as being important?**

“I don't feel as being important right now. I don't want to be in the spotlight.”

“I am in the system right now because it is so much drama in my life.”

“I want to be a normal every day person. My brother, my sister are most important for me. I have to help myself right now. I need to get myself back on the right track. It is turning out good right now. I have a place to stay. There is good people at my group home.”

**Wise Words**

“I want to live my own life.”

“It is hard to get out once you get in.”

“Try to listen when it is difficult.”

“I want to survive the days.”

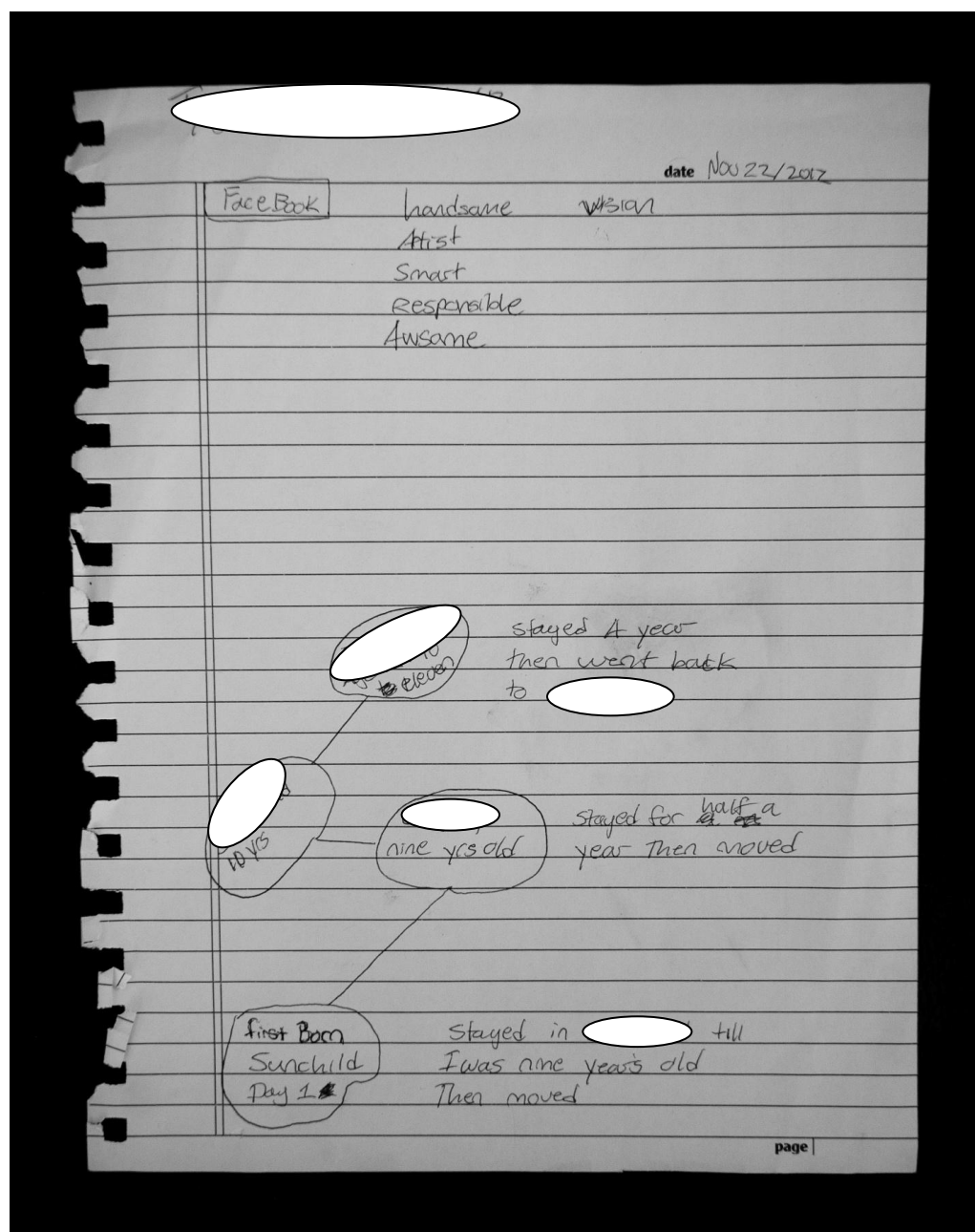


Figure 5-1.

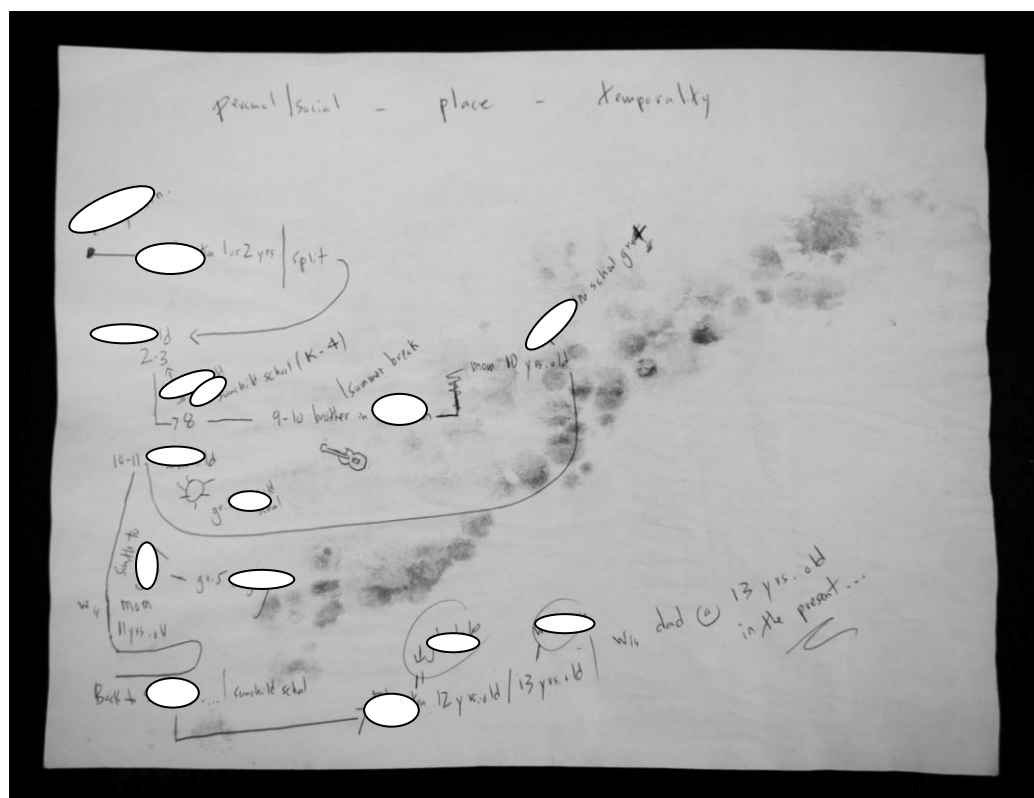


Figure 5-2.

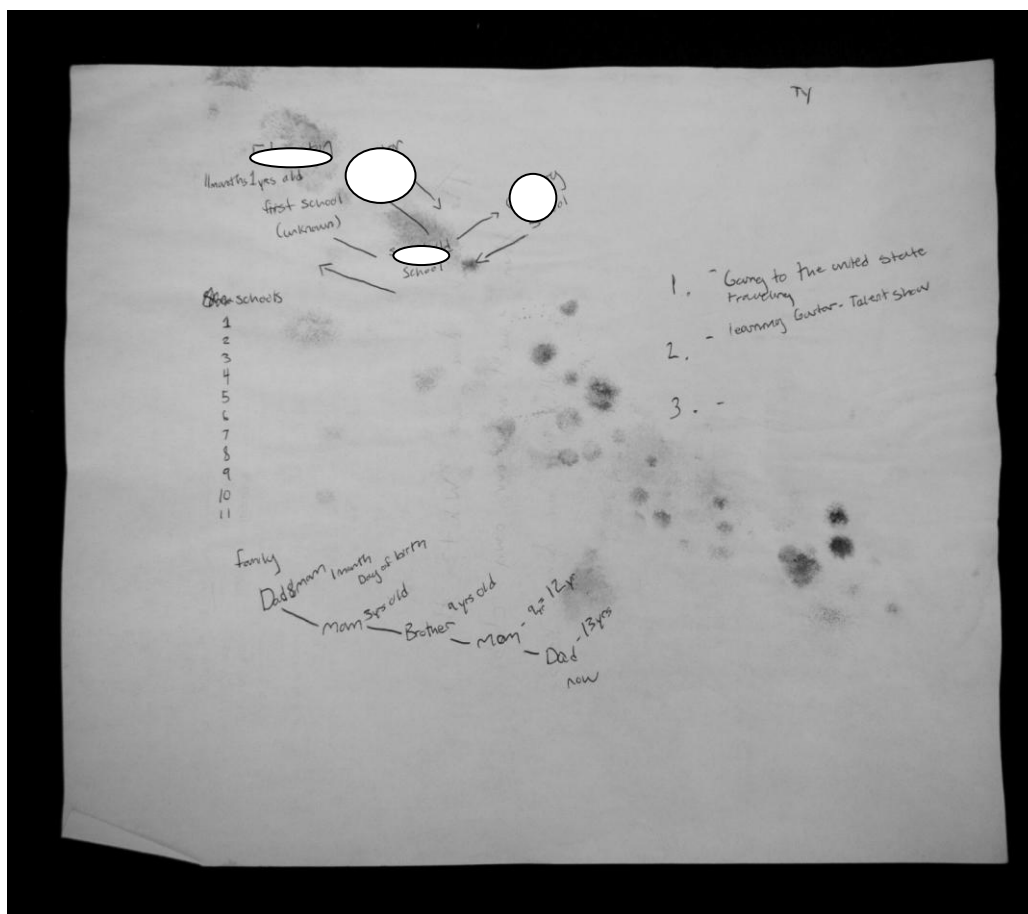


Figure 5-3.

## Prologue

### Harvesting time is near.

Stoney, Alexis, Nakota Sioux, Lakota Sioux she is a Kootenay from another place. She is a kind woman with generous and warm smiles. She teaches in a gentle way, patient and strong, working her way through the layers. I have learned a great deal in the past few years as she has guided me, helping me to think in other ways, helping me to look within myself. She has helped me create



a space for thinking and belonging, a starting point each day, a reflective glance as her words move across the school landscape. At times through words; at times through actions. I write of Elder Isabelle Kootenay and open this narrative account honouring our relationship and our time working alongside each other in schools. She has helped me as I make sense of the stories of youth and their families. She has taught me as I have watched her in an institutional space negotiate the different rhythm that is so often disconnected from who she might be and how she might see the world. It is through our conversations that I continue to learn. It is through this narrative I try to tell a part of a story that I would come to know working alongside her in a large urban high school. Her stories and her teachings are different than the outcomes and indicators of a public school. Her knowledge and wisdom are vast and come from inter-generational places that are at times dismissed and most often ignored in the rush of an urban school setting. As I write this reflective piece looking back at our time alongside each other numerous memories I pull forth.

I look back at the Elder's message she sent as it would appear on the glow of the screen. An encouraging message would flash across the portable hand held device that preoccupied my days.

An Elder's teaching:

Tansi Sean,

RIPENING TIME: 22 JULY - 21 AUGUST is the period when the Sun is at its hottest in the northern hemisphere and ripens the fruit of the Earth. It is a time when, traditionally, man pauses from his labours to bask in the sunshine and refresh himself before the work of harvesting which is to come. It is a time when the whole of nature appears to be opening up to the Sun and bringing forth its fruit in abundance. In Stoney country, as soon as the berries are ready, women start harvesting by picking berries to can, make jam, dry and freeze for feast during the winter. The real harvesting comes in August when men go hunting and women cut, cure and dry meat for the winter.

Thanks,

Gram Isabelle

On a weekly basis her words gave me much to think about and I continued to find comfort in the words long after the Times New Roman 12 font flashed across my computer screen. In hallway conversations and conversations at coffee time teachers often said to me that her words found resonance, and she had spoken to people that I didn't think were reachable. Colleagues spoke to me about how her words connected to their experiences. I could only imagine what would happen if they had met her, if they had sat with her over a cup of tea and good conversation.

What I am really trying to say is that it is difficult at times for an Elder in an urban school system. It is difficult to keep track of the wind as I think of our

time alongside each other in a school place. Elder Isabelle and I laugh when we talk about the situations we face in a big school and a bigger school system. It is difficult to keep track of the wind when I think of her and how she negotiated a school place.

I know that a school has to let her be free. She moves in a different way, she has a different rhythm, one that comes from a place that is not often considered in schools. She is a teacher—certified, university educated. She is also a teacher with the land as it is with the land as a part of her that she creates her lessons; with the land that she finds her words for teaching.

It was good to think about these memories, to think with them. When I observed Elder Isabelle Kootenay move around the classroom and share her stories, she took me with her to different places through the sharing of the stories.

In these moments of travelling alongside her I saw, at least in my mind, the stories of her mother who was a masterful storyteller. When her grandmother told stories she did not share her stories in English. She spoke Stoney and two Cree dialects. I was told that people from many places would come to listen to her share the stories of the land and creation. The teachings, with characters woven throughout them, had a way of gently relaying a message. The stories shared with me were of land, place, rocks, and water but most importantly the stories shared connected me to the storytellers of the past and the storyteller in the present as she re-told what she had learned long ago.

Elder Isabelle Kootenay spoke of her mother and grandmother with great respect, repeating the words as we would spend time together. She was gently reminding the students and I within school and the classroom that at the time when these stories were passed on in their original language, hunting, trapping, and living with very little was part of the story. There was no running water, no electricity, but there were many great moments of sharing. Many nights the cabin was shared by people from other communities who, I imagine, needed a place to stay and probably needed a story to take care of them in a different way. I could feel the warmth in the cabin when she shared her stories and I transported myself into that moment, imagining what it might have been be like with the fire light flickering and the words dancing in the night air.

The sweet smell of sage and freshly picked herbs for the tea brought me back to the quiet moments in the classroom with Elder Isabelle Kootenay and the students. I remember her telling me she “is not just another Indian woman.” She told me some view her as “an old lady.” I agree. I would try to create a space and provide an opportunity for my friend, but it is difficult to capture the wind. It is difficult to explain what it even looks like or feels like when the teachings come from such a different place over time.

It was the back and forth negotiations of variant systems that created difficulties and moments of tension within me. It was a difficult space to occupy for it was a space that bumped up against the systems. Elder Isabelle Kootenay and I quietly laughed when we reflected on our time spent together in school

places. There were too many unaware of the relationship, the friendship that resulted from the sharing that takes place over a cup of green tea. The in-between space is difficult as the linear system asks for the measurable; asks for indicators, time and checklists and I can't always offer these up this way.

As I wrote I thought of tea, herbs, and the sweet smell of sage. I looked forward to spending time in Alexis that summer. I looked forward to another story with the spirit and intent of a simple friendship that is far beyond the limitations of school time.

Grandma Isabelle, the harvesting time is near.

Can you tell me another story?

It is what I need now most.

### **Beginning a Research Relationship: In the Midst<sup>29</sup>**

*Numerous times throughout that first official research conversation Lane started to think hard about what I was inquiring into. I, too, had many things on my mind as I puzzled about the places he had been, the schools he was a part of or not part of, and through his stories I started thinking more deeply about some of mine.*

I heard in research team meetings: “you have to meet Lane ... he is such a leader ... he has such a wonderful sense of humour.” There were so many stories

---

<sup>29</sup> In the midst the beginning research relationship is referring to the Clandinin & Connelly(2000) metaphor of the research relationship as ongoing as I negotiate the field alongside participants.

of Lane. Members of the research group encouraged me to get to know him, so I started to attend the U of A art club more regularly to connect with him. I moved slowly, first through observation and then in small conversations where I soon discovered that we had a shared interest in humour. The little “one-liners,” jokes or sayings that we both appreciated, created a starting place for further conversations. I observed, from a distance in those early moments, a leader as he appeared to have little fear in trying new things. He was often the first person to jump up and put his soul on stage, dancing, singing, and leading in his own way. Whether it was making a video or creating works of art with his friends, he appeared to have no problem allowing himself to play the fool, to laugh out loud with others. The acting, the stage—it was his stage. Lane was filled with life, with energy that is good. I started to get to know Lane a little more each week. Soon, months passed, conversations became longer but still I had not started a formal research conversation with him. I was moving slow in the conversational relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the getting to know that takes time and that builds trust.

### **Chief Chitsalot arrives.**

In the club space the youth were creating a movie with actors, directors, and a script to follow and I remember the day when the camera arrived. Lane brought his camera over to me and started asking questions, urging me to step on

stage through the video he was creating with his friends. He continued to ask me questions with the video rolling and then it happened. He said, “I am telling you that you are now Chief in this movie and your name will be Chief Chitsalot!” We looked at each other and the other boys watched carefully for my response. We all burst into laughter as it was a suitable name and spoke to the relationship and the humour in the young man that I was coming to know. Chief Chitsalot arrived in that moment and our relationship shifted to a different place because of it.

**Side-tracking.**

***Location: The mall.***

My conversation with Lane on this day will stay with me well after the research project has concluded. It was one of those conversations that leads to many more. My day started off with the best of intentions. I stopped by the school, the place of our research, to set a formal time to meet and connect with Lane. We had planned to work together on the research project that day and I was filled with that good, nervous anticipation that comes with new conversations. I was looking forward to moving to a different place in our conversational relationship (Clandinin et al., 2006), inquiring further into some of the stories that we shared over the previous months. My anticipated conversation was sidetracked as I quickly found out that the “boys” (Lane and two friends) were skipping school. At first disappointed, my response to them missing school was

immediate as I texted one student who texted another student, who pointed me in the direction of the local mall and a favourite place of many youth—the arcade.

Without hesitation I drove to meet Lane, Donovan, and one of their friends. As I drove to the mall I thought of these boys who had developed a connection through similar interests and their shared age and grade. It was Grade 7 and, it seemed to me at that moment, they were trying to figure school out; it was a day-to-day negotiation. Sometimes they said they hated school, their classes, the teachers, while at other times they accepted it, but rarely, if ever, had I heard this group of boys speak as if they loved it. School, their time spent in it and with it, seemed to be an afterthought. School was a physical place where the boys could connect with each other. It was a mechanism that provided a space for them in a different way.

I decided the best way to approach this scenario was to have a simple conversation as I worried about their trend of skipping school at such a young age and being so intentional about it. I texted Lane and asked, “What are you doing ... shouldn’t you be in school?” The simple response was, “I am trying to set a high score.” A smile crossed my face and it certainly appeared that he was not worried about missing school or what his parents or guardians might say. Remembering my own experiences in Grade 7, I could not imagine skipping as I would have been scared of what my parents might say or do. Shifting forward, I thought of my own daughters and imagined them in Grade 7. I thought of the long conversation that would ensue if I found out that they were skipping school to “set



a high score” at the local arcade. I reminded myself as I walked through these scenarios in my mind that I was a researcher in this moment and that it was difficult to separate the many identities I lived out in each moment. I reminded myself that the worlds that I was currently composing in my life were very different than the world of the youth that I was coming to know. It was not new to me that young people found other ways of being together besides school, and that schools were not always the best places to be. It was with worry that I thought through scenarios and sometimes got lost in the fear of seeing young people start to lose their way in schools so early. This was how I was feeling that day.

### **The inner dialogue: Unpacking the story.**

My intention was that of a researcher but my job as a consultant in aboriginal education always crossed over in these moments. I wondered if it ever left me at all. I was reminded when I read newspapers that sometimes told certain stories of youth and, in particular, aboriginal youth. Through my experiences with labels and writing education policy, “the at-risk” notions crossed my mind despite my best efforts to resist those words. I worried about the path these boys might be on but in this moment it was not about categorizing and intervention strategies. I reminded myself that I was a researcher and I was trying to come alongside Lane to learn about who he was and how he composed school and his life. I thought of how conversation sometimes disrupted what might be

happening by thinking of things together. In the past, sometimes conversations at difficult points were where the most learning from youth has occurred.

Sometimes my initial *teacher* response to skipping may have been immediate as I tried to maintain some order, standard, or control by finding ways to make up the time that was missed from my class. Being a researcher outside the classroom space provided me an opportunity to slow down and discuss what might be happening in those moments of avoiding school. I thought about Lane in this moment and worked hard to just listen to his stories, which was sometimes the most difficult of tasks.

These moments of thinking and reflecting, talking into my phone so I could listen back later, became an expression of an inner dialogue as I wrestled back and forth about how to make sense of the multiple worlds (Lugones, 1987) I was composing and living within. I was trying to be much more attentive to who I was in relation to research participants I worked alongside (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I was trying to slow down and think alongside—no diagnosis, no rush to conclusions. I was a work in progress. I was troubled as I thought about being a former youth worker, a teacher with the aboriginal portfolio, a community worker, and a hopeful academic. These “roles” pulled me towards “knowing” what I thought might work with youth (Lugones, 2006). I reminded myself that when I thought I had an answer or solution to the complexities in a life, there was a moment where I needed to spend time in deeper thought and consideration. It was as if I absorbed this approach through the lens of an

interventionist or someone who tries to fix pieces of a life that are perhaps not mine to fix.

The idea of what it meant to live a good life was often present. What made a good life was composed through the lens of my own experiences of growing up in a place where my family did not participate in post-secondary studies. It was not part of our family story but it became mine. Living out the school story of "success" changed my life in many good ways. It has showed me places within myself that I had not imagined. I have travelled a little, spoken in some places that I did not think possible, and, for the most part, I have experienced a very good life. The trouble with this experience was that I needed to check myself often. My experience of studying and reading, learning at the university was not the only path to what might be considered a good life. A good life, as I think about it, is so much more than the one story. A university story is not for everyone. My words, my language, my hopes and dreams for youth do not have to include, and should not include, a single forward-looking story (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) because there are many possibilities. I reminded myself to once again slow down and come alongside.

When I thought of a good life in my dad's way of looking at the world I had no doubt that it was composed of family, not school, as he left school early to work the land that was passed on to him. A good life for him was a life taking care of the land. It involved that seasonal rhythm and a way of life that is becoming increasingly difficult to replicate. The prairie landscapes of my youth,

the sights, smells, and moments of silence are connected to place and were part of his “good life.” I thought of him working with his hands and coming home for supper each evening with his family. I am certain for him it was a “good life.” I had an image of him in my mind as I wrote this and reflected on my words. I thought about how I had to take care of my words and actions, my stories of what should be. I thought about being open to the creativity and imagination that could be co-created by coming alongside youth like Lane. I needed to resist the *knowledge keeper* effect that closes off possibilities, as the focus could become fixed and marginalizing at the expense of a person’s life. The beauty of a life could be lost along the way.

As I thought more about this and my journey to find Lane and his friends at the mall, I recall my earlier years when I was starting college in the Rehabilitation Services Diploma Program. It was not my formal schooling that led me to thinking about a good life. I reviewed old essays I wrote in my early years in college—barely legible, terrible ramblings. I was 17 years old and wrote about community relations and organizational behavior before I even knew what they were. We did not speak this way on the farmlands of my youth. I worked on developing programs and intervention strategies for “clients” with behaviour and developmental disorders in this early part of my learning journey. I wrote about how I might best work with "clients" in the community. I wrote about things that I did not know, and I wrote about people who did not know me despite my best

efforts to provide services for them. It is through those early college experiences that other gifts, the subtle gifts that are realized much later, emerged.

The early moments of my career provided me with some of my richest teachings. I recall, as I write this, the leaves turning and the start of a school year. Each morning I started my day by getting a young man named Jeremy ready for school. Jeremy had Spina Bifida and was confined to a wheel chair at a young age. I remember setting out his clothes, feeding him, dressing him, and doing my best to neatly comb his hair. I brushed his teeth, packed his lunch, and lifted him into his wheelchair gently each morning. I got him on the bus for school each day, and then made my way to college for the start of my classes. It was my daily ritual as a 17-year-old. It taught me valuable lessons about communicating with someone who is non-verbal, who cannot say in words how they are feeling, or what their day looks like. I learned patience, respect, and how to listen to families and youth in other ways. The experiences, I now know, taught me about the ethics of caring for someone besides myself. It was a good job. It was a good life. For the 2 years I attended community college I started each morning this way and then helped Jeremy prepare for bed each night, following the routine passed down to me by his family. My nightlife back then involved reading to him, even tucking him in with his favourite stuffed animal. Now, as I walked towards the mall to find Lane, I thought about who I was in relation on this sunny fall day when the summer felt like staying, yet the leaves told me otherwise.

I thought of where I was coming from in this moment of trying to build a relationship with Lane and what my early narrative beginnings were, that led me to working with youth. In working with Jeremy during my college years the experience might have created within me something that resisted the need for fixing. I worked with a boy in a wheelchair who seemed to be struggling in so many ways from the outside. But for those who knew him, he was living life in such meaningful ways filled with family outings, vacations, and siblings who cared for him deeply. It was through this experience that I learned more about myself. I did not have visions of working to fix him up or of preparing him for an academic course of life because it would take him to a supposed better place. In those early years of work it became more than my job to live alongside Jeremy in relationship ... where each day was a new day of playful improvisation (Bateson, 1989). At that point in my life I did not have the words for what I was supposed to do. I did not have a checklist process or manual because we were learning together. I made up games, acted, signed, went for walks, pointed out sights I thought might be interesting. I did not get the verbal response that I was used to but I knew in that inner place that what I was doing was a good thing, the right thing. We were simply enjoying each other's company without much regard for composing a future story. As I think about this in relation to who I am as a person, a youth worker, a father, a teacher I will continue to check myself and continue to resist imposing what I think is best. I will continue to come alongside and see where the relationship might take me by slowing down and enjoying

laughter, having a meal, and not imagining a future direction because of an “at-risk” tag or the troubling trend of graduation rates. The end results are not what I need to worry about if the relationship is truly alongside the youth and their stories. With that little spark of yellow hanging in the trees and the odd leaf sailing its way down from high up above, I go into the mall to find Lane.

### **Beginning research conversations.**

#### ***Location: The food court at the mall.***

I parked my car and made my way to meet the boys ... not to scold them or dismiss what might be going on in their lives at the moment. I felt that the best time for conversation was in those in-between times. I wondered what the boys would say, what their response might be to me. I wondered who I was in that moment to them: a teacher, a researcher, a service provider, a community member, a father, or just another guy with a few dollars for a slice of pizza. I had these questions in mind as I edged closer to our meeting place. As I walked in the mall I heard a voice say, “Mr. Lessard, how are you? It has been too long” and in that moment my cover was blown—a former student. She was one of the toughest students I had taught. She was tough in that she was a young person who bumped up against school—the policies, structures, and rules that inhibited her. But she was also tough in that her life was extremely difficult. School was not always the most important part of her life. She ran up to me and gave me a hug, right in front of the boys. They smiled and looked uncomfortable as they

still awaited my response. I believe they thought that they were going to be in trouble. My former student shared stories of our class together 5 years earlier and how she was making a life as a young person soon to be married. She was studying at a post-secondary school now, shifting her life story in so many different ways. It was good to hear her stories.

I introduced her to the three boys and she announced pointedly, “You are lucky to have him as a teacher. You should be in school, not skipping, trust me.” The boys looked at each other and smiled, laughing at this ice breaker. The awkwardness that must have been in the air was now over and her words resonated. It was as if she knew what the boys were up to. I recalled the difficult moments as we shared stories but I also remembered the great stories shared—her mother, her family, and her interests in art and dance. As she prepared to leave she shook all the boys’ hands and gave me a hug good-bye. It was a good day. It was a good start to a conversational relationship with Lane, even if it was at the mall when he was supposed to be attending school.

While I had wondered why the boys decided to miss school on this day, I decided it was not going to be my starting point for a conversation. The shared companionship between the boys was evident. The sense of adventure, of ducking out on the formal structures, of taking a break from where they were supposed to be, was most definitely in the air. I imagined that the freedom of going on some rides and having a soda were all valid reasons in their minds. I did not ask.



We found a seat in the food court and I ordered a juice for each of the boys. We talked as a group, deciding together that it probably was not the greatest idea to be cutting out on classes and having research conversations. We talked about the research project and how I wanted to discuss some parts of school and life more in depth with Lane. The boys all agreed, but with that they also said they wanted to share their stories. They talked mostly of being friends and that they felt comfortable sharing some parts of their stories together. It became apparent to me, in that moment, that the boys had so much to share and that they wanted a space to tell their stories. They shared fragments with me, bits and pieces, over the course of a couple hours, in-between sips of their drinks and the laughter that often entered the conversation. They shared stories of their families, places travelled, friendships, memories, and the beautiful things that come when thinking of places that they had been in their lives. Seldom did the talk of school, specific classes, or grades in our conversational space. Our time spent together focused on what they imagined for their lives in the future. On that day in the food court I visited with a future police officer, an actor, and a train engineer as they shared their stories, letting me into their worlds, glimpsing snapshots of what might be.

*The inner dialogue.*

Eating together, mostly pizza, and then sharing, gradually moving towards individual conversations that are more in-depth, going to deeper places in one-on-one conversations was my intent. It was an interesting rhythm that the youth and I began to create in a food court conversation. It was difficult for me to locate who I was in that conversation as my teacher identity lingered in the air. It took time to disrupt that identity in that first conversation. I reminded the youth both informally and formally that in that moment of sharing together I was a researcher, not their teacher. I needed to say it because I felt the stories would then be less guarded. In this space the words, the laughter, and expression became richer between us. I had to move away from resisting this idea of collectively sharing. Coming together with friends was part of who Lane was. He was inclusive, community minded, a social convener but mostly a young man trying to work out his words and his worlds alongside friends. I recognized that this communal sharing was part of our process. It was a safe space alongside friends and that was where we needed to be in those early moments of getting to know each other through the sharing of experiences. Being open to the possibilities that came from the conversations was part of the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Coming to know Lane as an individual, by bringing another confidante to the restaurant table so we could begin our work together of sharing stories of our lives, was what we began to negotiate on that

first occasion. It was part of our process. It was how we began to learn to take care of each other's stories (King, 2003).

**A hint of blue.**

***Location: The local donair shop.***

We met once again as a group. We sat at a table with our book bags on the floor and donairs surrounding our seating area. I started the group conversation with Lane and asked him to help me think about school and the importance of place in his story. When I was explaining place I told him I was interested in hearing more about where he was from, his community, and the schools that he attended. As I asked questions, Lane quietly started to share. He played nervously with his hair and explained carefully the different places that he had been: "I have been to a lot of schools." The back and forth between places that I had no idea existed became clearer to me as he took my pencil. He started mapping it out<sup>30</sup> on a piece of paper. Sharp and wavy lines filled the paper as some places he forgot and then remembered, jotting them down for me as he remembered. He talked of going between a reserve and the city and that "there are changes in each place, it depends on where I am going." He shared these stories in front of his friends, stories that brought him to different places usually revolved around his family and the "things that happen" in families. "My family

---

<sup>30</sup> Mapping it out refers to the co-creation of a time-line or annal which we could inquire into as both an artifact and memory marker in our research conversations. The time line is included at the beginning of the narrative and has different copies included as we continued to co-create it over 2 years of research conversations. It was an ongoing inquiry process.

has had to move around a lot.” He explained why school was sometimes hard for him by pointing to lines and points on the paper where he sketched parts of his life. He shared struggles with moving, and his family, by pointing to the time marked on the paper when his dad and mom split up, “it was when I was only 2 years old.” He talked about how he remembered not growing up with his dad, “I was mostly with mom and now I am back with dad because my mom’s new boyfriend. She picked him,” he says.

Lane played with a wisp of his blue dyed hair as he explained parts of his life to me. On this day we listened closely as he taught us, capturing the attention of his close friends through the sharing space created.

“I moved from the reserve in kindergarten to Edmonton in Grade 1. Then I moved back to the reserve for Grades 2–4 but only for a short time, then I was back to Edmonton again for Grades 4–6. Now I am at the junior high. I am at that junior high because of all the natives going there.” I looked at him and he started to laugh. “No, it is where I met my friends in the art club. That is why I like it there—most of them are native.”

He described to me the art club place and how important it was to him. It was the place where Lane and I first met and a place where we continue to meet once a week to develop our conversational relationship (Clandinin et al., 2006). It was apparent as he talked about school that it was a connecting place for him and a place where he could see his friends in school.

As the research conversation continued, Lane explained to me his love of guitar and how Grade 6 was a great year, “I performed in the school talent show.” I recognized and listened as he explained how he loved band, art, and music and how his Grade 7 year had been difficult, marred by fights and trying to fit in both at the school and through the in-between-ness defined by what he is now calling home. He said, “I am with my dad but unsure where I will be.” He was uncertain and he did not know what the plan might be for him. An unsettling feeling came over the conversational space. I wondered if it was that sense of temporality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that made it difficult. I wondered how he continues to negotiate this so skillfully. I had many questions and there were places in our conversation filled with gaps and silences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

### *The inner dialogue.*

When we met again at the local donair shop I was looking to build on our previous conversation. As word spread throughout the art club and the school hallways, I managed to meet two more youth who were part of the art club. I intended to work closely with Lane but I understood that there was a certain comfort in sharing some stories collectively. It was part of this process. The idea of collectively sharing stories was a starting point for our research conversations. We started by coming together over a meal at a restaurant. It was in this place that we started talking about their day-to-day adventures, where life and school

stories were shared. It was a “checking in” exercise to reconnect over the weeks that came between each research meal. The youth, as I was beginning to understand them, came to the research conversations together because I felt it was difficult at first to get to that comfort space. It took careful time to create a space to share difficult experiences and that took all of us to vulnerability in sharing. Many youth that I have worked with have learned to take care of their stories, as sharing in the past has not led to good places. It also reminded me gently of the work that I was engaged in and the ethics (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) required when working alongside youth.

I know it is important to listen carefully to the stories and to take care of them. I thought about how we create the collective spaces where we share between us but also that individual space where more intimate stories of life and school are shared between us.

The inquiry process is a back and forth negotiation where shared stories of experiences take me back in so many different ways. There were flashpoints in the conversations between us and the later listening that carried me back to my own Grade 7 experiences. I was trying hard to remember what life looked like in those moments. I thought of the distance physically and metaphorically between rural and urban settings that Lane and I negotiated and travelled between. It was beautiful when I went back in this way as he taught me yet another way to “world-travel” (Lugones, 1987, p. 3) through his stories of his early beginnings.

As I reflected on this conversation it was so evident that Lane had a magical quality about him that drew me in. He was still a young boy in many ways but he was in a position in his life that required constant negotiation and a sense of the temporary, the ‘for now’. Part of his beauty was his positive outlook on life and his unwillingness to blame others for the life pieces that were difficult for me to understand as an adult.

**Another conversation: A drive to avoid a fight.**

***Location: Reflections in my vehicle.***

One week I drove Lane and his friends to a family member’s house to avoid a fight with other students. When I arrived at the art club space I quickly learned that the week had been filled with controversy as Facebook stories between separate groups of friends emerged. Stories of families, stories of people from their shared communities on the reserves where their families lived had impacted them in the present, following them into the urban context. The social media networks were relentless and the stories changed and shifted with people— young people and older people participating—adding comments and pieces to an already volatile situation. A thread appeared and grew, soon taking on a life of its own. The stories created from keyboards and kitchen tables were now inhabiting the living spaces of young people. The stories from computer key moments soon left little room in the boy’s minds and forced a direction, a path misled, but in the life of a Grade 7 student a reasonable response I suppose. It seemed that the only

way to handle the situation was with violence, “with fighting” the boys said because “you have to protect your family.” Even if it was with your cousin, your friend, your tribal neighbour, they felt the need to confront through fighting. It was what they knew and how they responded in those moments. The shared ancestry meant very little at moments like that in the urban settings where words stuck and fighting somehow remained the only option. It saddened me. I was glad they told me today. I quickly loaded the youth in my car and drove them to a safe place, for now.

*The inner dialogue.*

Through this tension I started to get to know Lane in different ways. I had dealt with three fights in 1 week scattered across the city; different youth with different situations but similar responses. Through the initial shockwaves of a fight—the energy and nervousness; the emotions of being worried, scared, and stressed at the disruption; when I drove the kids to another place so they could get home safe—our relationship turned. It turned, shifted in such a good way. I saw it clearly as I walked away, looking back and seeing Lane pause for a moment, make eye contact, and wave before closing the door behind him. He said thank you in a different way. At least that was how I interpreted it. I do not believe he wanted to fight. I was glad that I showed up at the art club that day. I learned this was a part of Lane’s life that he constantly negotiated. It was a different life than my suburban experience as I drove away across the bridge, across the city, to my



home and rather ordinary life. It was quiet in my neighbourhood with manicured grass and prescribed colours ... every fence was the same.

Despite the differences in our lives I eagerly anticipated another chance to share our stories alongside each other. The stories, as we told them, began to take on a life of their own as they were starting to weave together, both mine and his. Through the next months, in different places, sometimes with a meal, perhaps listening to Lane play guitar or watching him act out some of his impressions, I was there in conversation. I observed and listened carefully to him as he shared with me. I tried to learn more about his school and life stories, not as separate entities. I hoped he would continue to open up that sharing space between us to help me understand what I could not see.

I did believe he would be on stage some day with his gifts in music and dance. He was a performer. I believed it when I listened to him and watched him move through a crowd, captivating the onlookers with his presence. He had a special gift that caused me to sit up in my chair and pay attention to the show. I hoped, as I thought about this research process, that we would get to another place in our conversations as we learned about each other over time. This work with youth was a slow and careful process. I also hoped that I would soon get to meet his dad who worked out of town during the week. It was up to Lane to show me, to lead me in the way he wanted as I walked alongside him, and as he shared with me about what was important to him in school and in life. Perhaps the responses to these puzzles might have been in those in-between spaces (Clandinin et al.,

2010), through those observations where I started to begin to understand where a young man was coming from. I wondered who he was in those moments and in the other moments before and after an art club space on a Wednesday afternoon. I wondered who he was off the stage, when he was alone with his thoughts. I wondered about the places he had lived and travelled and the people in his life—his family, his ancestors. I wondered.

### **Images of a home-place.**

#### ***Location: A school classroom.***

I set up a meeting with Lane to connect and unpack some of the pieces that we had been discussing. Lane arrived at the door of the classroom where we planned to meet. He explained to me at first sight, “I feel bad if Donovan can’t be here ... and especially since I am getting some food.” He said that “this is the first time the guys get to meet ... it is usually only the girls that meet here at lunch.” I looked at him, thought for a moment, and then told him to “go get Donovan ... we will figure it out.” These were the ethics of our relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and at this moment, this was where I needed to begin the conversation. Lane was most comfortable alongside his friend Donovan. They had learned to take care of each other in school and out of school. It became evident to me in that moment that the youth noticed who was having research conversations and who was not. It caused me to pause and think about the difficulties in this work and the limits that I had. I wished I could have bought

lunch for all of the youths and that we could have told our stories in that way. Even in this deeply relational work, some were chosen while others were not. It came down to the number of youth that our research team could work with. I didn't realize that the youth saw it so clearly or that it meant so much to be part of a research conversation. The youth wanted to be heard and they wanted to tell their stories.

Despite a little shift in my planned research dynamics, the conversation started to flow once again between us. It had become a regular occurrence in our conversational relationship (Clandinin et al., 2006) to sit alongside, the three of us sharing. Sometimes it was 4 or 5 but this time it was just Lane, Donovan, and myself. The conversation was served alongside and between bites of pasta from the take out of my favourite restaurant. We shared the two meals between the three of us as we visited like old friends over a meal. First we started by revisiting, going back to what we talked about in our initial conversations. I wanted to hear more about where Lane was from about how he storied his "home-places." The conversation went many directions. It was filled with laughter, humour, jokes about things, smiles, and a great conversation over food and a soda. Slowly the space between us became more fluid and the stories went to deeper places as we recalled, told, and learned to share more. The humour and the laughter at times got us through the more difficult negotiations ... the bumping places (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) that required a pat on the back and quiet reassurance that "it is o.k."

Lane shared stories of his reserve, Sunchild First Nation. He called it “one of his homes.” It was a place where he grew up and lived, on and off, throughout his life. It was a place where his family lived and where he stayed at his aunty’s house when he went back. He shared memories of the fishing, the hunting, and the beautiful landscape ... the postcard of a place that he lived in and called one of his homes. He called himself “the berry picker ... the gatherer” as he smiled and the boys shared a laugh. He told Donovan and I about some of the places within the place that he had lived. He spoke of bears, deer, and cougars in that moment of sharing. I had an image in my mind, it was almost immediate as I knew the community he lived in. It was a place that reached out into the mountains where the water and the river flowed in such amazing ways. I imagined him as a young boy playing with his family, “mostly with his cousins” on the rocky beaches that dotted the shore of his community and made for beautiful memory markers. Some of his fondest moments growing up were in that place.

***The inner dialogue:***

Little one liners that say so much speak to me and take me back to my own experiences. Unexpectedly, the words have the ability to let my mind and thoughts flow to different places within myself. There is a geography that is so often a part of the story (Caine, personal conversation, 2010) connected to the past as we share in the present. I travel through the sharing of our stories together. The one liners, followed by gaps and silences (Clandinin & Connelly,

2000), the non-verbal responses in places provoked many questions—many that I had to tuck away at the moment so as not to be overwhelmed.

Through the stories of a home-place I thought of Lane's "world-travelling" (Lugones, 1987, p. 3) as we got together and shared stories, and how, through the conversation we travelled to each other's worlds that were so distant. It seemed as if we were co-creating a way of living in multiple worlds where our urban and rural stories were stories that transformed or were re-shaped within the context of where we were living and sharing in the moment. I thought of the stories he shared of his home-place on the reserve and how he had specific memories of family and his school, as he "knew everybody there" he often said. The stories of remembering included images of a landscape, the rugged rocks and river that were central to the community stories and history of a place.

He used his imagination in those moments of coming together to compose a landscape in both a physical and metaphoric sense. It was this place where the landscape evoked a feeling of serenity and peace where the animals, the trees, the family members were so clear in his mind as he shared those moments with me. As a young man who had lived on the reserve for short periods of time throughout his life, but mostly his early years, he had strong memories that wove towards the place of imagined landscapes filled with stories that were both secret and sacred (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). The stories of his memories and his imagined landscape spoke to what might be most important to Lane as he shared distinct images of what life could possibly be in this place. There was hope and optimism

in the recollection of the pebbled shores where animals roamed and imagination captured the endless possibilities. The stories he shared with me helped me understand more about who he was becoming (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It was through his stories that we travelled together to those early narratives. I got a better sense of where he had been and what he valued as he spoke so strongly about this place he called home, where memories filled his mind each time we shared.

I thought of what he told me and I also recalled the beauty of places in my early childhood. Most places were composed through the lens of a physical landscape but as I thought more deeply about them (the context) I recognized that they were also closely tied to the people within them. Most of my stories were the stories where my dad was not that far away in my mind, where he was closely attached to the activities or the places we had been. In those moments Lane shared I wonder if it was the physical landscape that we both longed for or the people and relationships that helped us to appreciate and bring alive the senses and fill our memories, reaching towards those deeper places that we imagined together. In writing this I looked outside and thought of this particular time period—fall. It was the seasonal rhythm when the combines made their last rounds. It was the gathering time in a different way. I thought of going home over 15 years ago, while I was in college. It was a time when I would stay up throughout the night and work on the farm. If I slow down and think deeply,

remembering back, I can recognize the feelings and distinct memories of these rural experiences.

At the time, during my college days, I would not have appreciated this experience in the same way or take delight in remembering how I used to run my hands through the grain or revel in the simple smells of a prairie evening. I remember watching the dust kicking up in the night sky, watching it hang ... linger on for a little while. It only remained visible when the lights of the machinery cast shadows across the prairie night sky. And then it was gone, disappearing into the darkness. Those memories start with solitary moments that are closely followed by an inner desire for relationship, as the stories on the landscape, at least the ones I am imagining, almost always weave their way back to the farmhouse of my youth. I walked slowly after a long evening of work, climbed up into the cab of the grain truck, and made my way down the gravel road pointing north to meet up with my dad, the person who introduced me to the experience, the man who shared stories about a place. It was a part of his life that I remembered in those deep places, where the imagination and memory are closely linked to the stories of the physical landscape. It is here where the stories shared between my dad and I became stories that lived within me in the present and the stories passed on become part of who I was becoming as I imagined the future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I wondered, as both Lane and I painted the pictures of physical landscapes with our words, if, in some ways, we both desired the relationships within them that etched markings on us long ago. It was sharing

our stories together that allowed us to go back to those places—creating, imagining, and living in moments that had yet to be discovered. We could both see them in our own way.

### **Life in school now.**

Suddenly Lane transported both Donovan and I to the present, to his life in school as a Grade 7 student. It was as if a record stopped suddenly, scratching the vinyl in the process, the gentle rolling journey that he took us on was now over. The change in direction brought me to the cement walls of a '70s style school in the present where Lane attended school. He spoke of how he went “back and forth from the reserve to the city” and explained that he was currently “in 7-4 a class that is different than what he was first put into.” Donovan explained that “the 7-1 and 7-2 classes are the normal grade levels and the program called ‘FACE’ is an arts and academic program that gets you more.” In the ways Lane and Donovan explained the classes, they showed me that they knew more than what many educators thought students knew or understood about streaming. Their words were powerful as they each made sense of how they were assigned into classes. It became apparent that they had prior conversations and they had thought about these school programs before. I asked questions because I had heard of Lane and his gifts in both music and art. It was a common story that the youth shared of Lane and his abilities to play the guitar and the piano with ease and skill, despite no formal training in music programs. From a school



perspective, it seemed to me that the “FACE” arts program or parts of it seemed like a logical program choice for a budding artist. I asked him, “Why are you not in this program with your artistic background?” His reply was simple and to the point, “I would have gone I guess if I would have known to sign up. I would have ... I think we have a choice if we want in but then they said it was too late.” I was not sure who “they” referred to but I assumed it was a reference to school administrators. I felt for Lane, as I knew that a program that is half time arts and the other half academic programming could have benefitted him greatly. It could have been a chance to create and explore the gifts in music and art that he carried within himself. It was potentially a program that could help make being at school more comfortable for Lane. I catch myself once again imagining a different school landscape for Lane and imagining what I might think could be possible within this place. It is not for me to decide what schools and classes should look like as I am a researcher in this moment.

### ***The inner dialogue.***

As I slowed down and thought carefully about this conversation with Lane many thoughts came to mind. I thought about the music and the programming and wondered if Lane had it right all along and if my hopes and wishes were misguided. I thought about the conversations that I had with both him and his family, and I reflected more deeply about the music that had filled our conversational space. We had moved from Johnny Cash to Justin Bieber in our

conversations. I know Lane's name came from a famous cowboy and that the guitar playing first started in his family with his grandfather. His roots run deep. His music came from a place of teaching and being passed down through his family. As I thought about his music and how he played, I wondered if he held his gifts close for different reasons. I thought of him as he walked up to a piano casually, shuffling with his hip hop swagger as he approaches it, and he played with ease. He was creating the music and helped it come alive in a playful way, free of the structure and rules that might impede. When I thought of this imagery, I wondered how his music might have taken care of him and how it may have created worlds to travel within him (Lugones, 1987). I wondered how a school music and academic program was designed and what it asked of those who were chosen to participate within it. Lane, with both a piano and his guitar, played melodies ranging from the blues to more contemporary offerings. He played in his own way and in his own time. He had a rhythm from which he created. I thought of Lane and how carefully he introduced me to his talents. It was not immediate. It was over time that he shared with me. At first it was through his guitar and then via piano. He carried this gift of music, sharing it with me after trust was established. Those who were close to him knew that he had this gift in music. Most teachers in this school did not know. They had no idea until they heard about it second hand, third hand, or by walking by the empty music room and hearing him gently bring the old piano back to life by playing it. In the stories he shared with me I imagined him as a young boy playing like this through

the teachings of his big brother. He would, as he shared with me, be playing late into the evenings in his room ... by himself. He closed the door and played songs over and over by himself. I wondered if the music had a certain way of taking care of him ... protecting and sustaining him in more difficult moments. I wondered where he travelled in those moments of creativity and solace. I thought of the gifts he had and the importance of taking care of those gifts and the silent places that came along with it.

**“The U of A is my club”**

Lane and I, over time, found the space to move from a group conversation to moments of individual research conversations. It was in this space we shared many good stories. I often wondered about how he made sense of his school experience and what was important to him, what kept him connected to school places? I wondered about what spaces were available to celebrate or explore those gifts that were not always present in the 60-minute blocks of time defined by school subjects. For Lane, my wonders come from our previous conversations about “where is the art?” or “where is the music?” I knew by observing the school that he attended that there were sports and drama, some film clubs, and travel clubs. Once again I wondered. I asked, “Why don’t you sign up for one of the clubs?” He responded, “I do have a club ... the U of A club is my club.” The words spoken seemed so simple. However, I wrote about this because it spoke to my questioning and how I needed to pay careful attention. Although the research

team developed a connecting space in a school where we could begin and sustain our research conversations, I had not equated the space to a club in the same sense as I imagined Lane might. We met after school once a week in a space where we created and connected with the youth. I found it difficult at times to be fully present within this space, while other researchers nurtured this environment through their weekly presence, cooking, and attentiveness to planning and details. I wrote about this as I thought about what was important in that story of both connecting and sustaining relationships within schools. Lane's simple words spoke so clearly, "The U of A club is my club."

I inquired further into the club space and why it was so important. Lane explained that "his mom wanted him to go to a place where he could learn about aboriginal culture." He spoke of having fun in the space, and that his friends in the hallway encouraged him to go and then "when Donovan started going to the club I decided to go also."

### ***The inner dialogue.***

Lane taught me a great deal about what was important to him in school. We often talked about the difficulties and weekly challenges of getting to school because, as he said, "it takes me 2 buses to get here" and that, "I wake up on my own, and sometimes I am hungry ... coming to school is hard." Once again those small sentences in a conversation or that appear in a transcript could be dismissed.

But as fragments in a much larger story they are important to think about as I wrote and reflected on the club space as a gathering place in a school.

The club, although having multiple purposes, served as a consistent connecting space where youth could interact with adults and each other in a safe place (Clandinin et al., 2006, 2013). It was a space where Elders and guests, university students and teachers, at times, came together and improvised (Bateson, 1989) through art, meals, teachings, and sometimes dance. It started slowly. A few students showed up regularly and then brought friends, some only stopping by for a quick bite to eat and then leaving for the next part of their day. The relationships continued to grow and as we listened to youth within this space, they started to share what was important to them. They began to provide suggestions and asked to create videos, sculptures, paintings, and photography. It seemed as if they wanted to always try new things. In the club space, as I look back, there were moments of laughter, tears, sharing stories, and memories of busy school days but it was mostly about building relationships on those Wednesday afternoons.

The space was not limited to only the teachings of traditional dancing, drumming, or beading, and it moved beyond the crafts and artifacts that, at times, can become the dominant narrative when working alongside aboriginal youth. It was within this space that we tried hard to not only listen but to respond to what the youth were telling us.

Through the conversational relationships we found that the youth had many interests and that some of these were contemporary offerings far removed from what we might have originally thought. It was over time and through relationship that deeply nested stories of experience (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) began to emerge. The stories of grandparents and parents, relatives from far-off places, languages, teachings, protocols, and experiences became more visible.

#### **A relationship that sustains.**

Lane often repeated one story of his Grade 7 school experience in our conversations. He talked about the beginning of the school year coming from Grade 6 in a different school and not really knowing many kids. “It was difficult,” he said. “I didn’t know what this new school was like and it is hard starting junior high. It was difficult,” he repeated,

until I met Donovan in gym class and we just hit it off. It is like we became instant friends and we do everything together now, he is the one that brought me to the U of A art club, and that is where I met you.

Lane told that story alongside his friend Donovan. I have an image in my mind of the two boys as they participated in “gym class” during a game of dodge ball. I imagined them laughing as they dodged, ducked, and ran, hiding from the projectiles coming in multiple directions. As they told me this story I smiled as I could imagine them striking up a conversation through the laughter and chaos.

The boys spoke of how they phoned each other if they didn't see each other at school, encouraging one another to come to school, mostly in need of the friendship and relationship. The school was just a place where they connected. "He phones me or I text him and we meet at school but he also does that for me when I sleep in or don't feel like going to school," Lane explains. The boys were in different classes with different teachers but it was powerful to observe how they negotiated their Grade 7 school year.

I saw them share their gifts and interests as Lane taught Donovan how to play the guitar, showing him slowly, patiently, and teaching him about the chords, and what sounds they made. He showed him how to strum, they talked about music—not just rap, but also about blues and rock and roll which surprised me as I sat with those two old souls in conversations about music and song.

It was a back and forth relationship where Donovan led in such different ways. He explained to Lane about the drum he made with an Elder. Donovan shared how he wanted Lane to learn this with him and that "it is important in his community and to many within his family." Donovan explained to Lane in a gentle way, sharing stories from his community interspersed with unique protocols based on place and community.

Both boys are Cree but within this identity marker came great differences and complexities unique to their own experiences and connected to place. When talking about cultural protocols and teachings Donovan explained "in my community" or "in my family we do it this way but I think Lane's family

celebrates differently. There was an understanding between them of the commonalities in their Cree heritage but also the differences that resided in their own experiences. Their family and community stories played out differently and the boys recognized this and spoke to it beautifully.

*The inner dialogue.*

These two young men helped one another negotiate their school experience by supporting each other and teaching me along the way about what this looked like. Stories of weekend travels, all day bus rides, school classes, the girls they were dating, and the girls that they intended to date filled the conversation. The dialogue was closely followed by laughter, teasing, and the playful back and forth between two friends. When I thought about that time I recognized that they taught me a great deal and helped me travel back to my own junior high stories, thinking about what this experience looked like for me ... it becomes so easy to forget. When they told me their stories I tried hard to remember and now, at times, I can remember my own field trips, teachers, the friendships from many years ago. Sometimes I can even remember some of my Grade 7 girlfriends, which leaves me in that same euphoric state. A smile crosses my face ... a snicker and sometimes even an outright laugh.

I wonder if the boys' stories of coming and going between places, the continuous shifts and changes in life, brought them closer together. Did their experiences become shared or was it simply their laughter and humour that



connected and sustained them? It was a wonder for me but one that was not for me to ask. It was good enough for me to sit back and enjoy a friendship evolving. I reflected on the experiences, the teachings they shared with each other, and the special friendship they formed during the school year. It was a relationship that sustained them both and helped them in different ways bring each other along to a place called school. The school in their stories was a place where they met. It became an occasion for meeting in their stories. As we shared during the year the conversations rarely, if ever, were about their report cards, the teachers, or the subject matter that they learned during the school day. The conversations always revolved around the experiences of being together, meeting at lunch or after school. Through school I learned much about the many gifts that they both shared and that they shared with each other. The guitar, the drumming, traditions, and the family stories came out in the conversational relationship. These were gifts that only become present over time.

### **Bucas and Pasta.**

Lane texted me and requested a “business meeting” as he affectionately called our meetings. I planned to meet the boys at a nearby restaurant called Bucas and Pasta. It was a little restaurant I had been going to for 10 years with teacher friends. I was looking forward to seeing the boys and as they walked up to my vehicle we smiled and laughed as we most often did. I found it extremely difficult to engage in the research in a group. However, part of the relational

research evolved to include maintaining and sustaining the relationship with Lane and developing relationships with peers he felt were important. As I looked at Lane he shrugged his shoulders and I understood ... it was the right thing to do. I looked a little closer at Lane and noticed his eye was swollen shut. It was black and blue again. I asked him to explain to me what happened. "At the mall I got jumped when I was with friends and got beat up by a bigger kid." As we talked, another youth that I had come to know through the research project came around the corner, visibly shaken, walking in a group with friends. I asked the boys what was wrong and they simply replied, "Oh he just got beat up by another kid at the church parking lot ... that is why we were late. We had to watch to make sure nothing went on." At this time I said out loud, "Unbelievable guys!" It concerns me that this fighting was so present in the lives of these young people. As we ordered a meal, I said, "I am happy to see you but concerned." They responded by saying, "Well then, before we eat we should pray." This statement was followed by laughter. I said, "I think we are going to need more than that guys," and once again we laughed.

### ***The inner dialogue.***

I recognized I was in the midst of a research project (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) but I did have teacher expectations that came out in certain moments. Perhaps they were even parental concerns as I worried about the path Donovan and Lane were on. To me it was far from funny and a casual

observation that I could make in my field notes. The fighting and violence towards each other got to me.

As we ate together and enjoyed the silence between us in the cafeteria-style restaurant I had many thoughts on my mind. We sat and enjoyed buns, drinks, and a nice but simple pasta meal where we talked about life. Discussions about school always came up much later in our conversation.

It was good to have a meal and through the conversation I introduced the boys to the owner of the restaurant and his daughters who managed it. They all shook hands, then the boys took their dishes up to the counter with me when we were finished. Donovan and Lane said, “Thank you” to the owner and we left the restaurant, hopefully leaving a different story about who they might be. I saw so much promise in those moments where we could step away from the busy parts of life, those crazy moments where fighting was such a part of the identity that they were reaching out for. I had a hard time making sense of it and I knew there was no one answer to this puzzle. I was not there to try and save students. I was with the boys as part of my research but I wished, as a teacher, I could have worked more closely with them.

When I drove home that evening I was still optimistic but perhaps less hopeful in some ways as I imagined an audience for what I was writing. I was thinking of school policy makers, teachers, and administrators when I started to write. It might appear to be too simple in that their response to my puzzles might

be “it is most definitely a home problem, a family issue, or connected to risk factors.”

That might be one part of the story, all, or some of the checkbox items that spoke to deficits. However, in those boys as we sat and had a meal together, I saw kindness, gentleness, and a caring for each other that was difficult to articulate and moved beyond a check-box system. That evening I was part of a table of Grade 7 boys trying to make sense of a life over a bowl of pasta. Our conversations moved beyond black eyes and sad stories as the boys continued to teach me about their lives.

### *Urban melodies.*

This was a great day. Lane told me that he wanted to practice his music and play a couple songs. I did not know what to expect. I had heard from others that he could play ... not only could he play but he was magical with his guitar. He had something special when he sat at the piano. I was even more confused how a school could not recognize these gifts. He told me he learned to play at the age of 10. On this occasion he played his guitar and he sat at the piano showing me songs he thought about. He was experimenting. They were not full songs, just musical combinations as he wove between genres. He played smoothly, gently ... at ease in this world with a piano and a guitar. It was a back and forth between both instruments as I watched the display. I was truly moved, fascinated with the compilations and creations Lane conjured up.

**When thinking about place.**

Lane was named after a famous cowboy and a singer. His name came from a place with meaning from his parents guiding his first and middle name to a place of personal meaning. In our conversations I asked Lane to help me understand his sense of place, where he had lived, and what home meant to him. Through our conversation he explained that “I am from Sunchild and Edmonton, both places I guess is how I would say it.” Lane spoke about both places and shared with me moments across his life, looking at our timeline that we created. He explained details. “My dad is very important to me. I live with him now and have lived with him sometimes in the past, he is from a reserve in Saskatchewan but not sure which one it is. My mom is from Sunchild so that is why I spent a lot of time there.” His explanation of the places he had lived helped me further understand some of his life complexities. “I go back and forth between the reserve and the city, with my brother, dad, mom, and auntie is where I have lived, it depends what is going on.” “Tell me more about this,” I asked. “Where do your brothers and sisters live?” With a smile on his face he took my pen and sketched the different family members with different names, living in different places, dotting the time line map.

I have many brothers and sisters, they live in different places, there are so many to list but they are all my brothers and sisters. Where I am living

right now is with my dad and in this place I have two brothers and two sisters and share a bedroom with my brother. (December, 2011)

Our conversation over a quick bite to eat helped me think about place and how he might be making sense of it. There was a certain feeling of temporary in our conversation as he spoke of looking for another place to “move out with my dad, it needs to be bigger.” The stories of place helped me think of his life in more detail as we sketched out names of his brothers and sisters. There were so many on the list named from oldest to the youngest. It was a struggle at times trying to keep the timeline together. During this process Lane filled in names, erased others, changed the names, and interjected with little stories or memories of family members. “This brother works here, this sister went to college ... I think this one lives in Saskatchewan now.” I inquired further “What about your grandparents Lane?” “Some have passed away and some are in Saskatchewan, I don’t really know them that well. I remember being mad at myself one time because I missed my Mooshum’s wake when he passed away ... I slept in and everyone left.” The story of family is important to Lane as he goes back and forth between his mom and dad and other family members in different moments in his life. The family stories were interwoven closely with his memories of school as he explained, “that is why I go to a lot of schools. It depends on what is happening in my life.” As I think of transition and the school part of his story it cannot be considered without these details which shaped his story of making a life. Filled with optimism and laughter, his story was a challenge for me to write

out at times because there was so much movement. The home and place lines are far from straight in his life as we continued to think this through together. Lane continued to teach me as he wrote certain memories down, the gaps and silences (Clandinin et al., 2006) the not knowing your grandparents' names or being sure of all your brothers and sisters said much to me. I thought of "his two bus rides each morning" and "the difficulty in sleeping." He told me "I can't sleep too much now, it is hard so I just stay up. I need my own room ... it is hard with a little brother." The stories ... the movement ... his life in motion helped me think about the complexities in a life and how so many young people were negotiating school as a small part of it. My own life was different. It was driven by routine and structure in those early years. A bus picked me up at almost the same time every day. I arrived to school with a lunch after I had eaten a breakfast prepared for me. My school story became easier because of my family story. I knew what time supper was each evening and I knew what time I was supposed to be getting ready for bed. As I read the transcripts and pulled pieces from the larger conversations, some parts were hard for me to imagine. I thought about Lane, usually in the moments of togetherness at the destination, our research lunches, or conversations at school when he had already arrived. What I wanted to continue to think about was the art and skill in arriving at the destination point. At times I disregarded the back story unintentionally and only through the conversations did the back stories become more visible to me. His stories shifted me and helped me

think of the word transition in new ways. No longer did the word describe the movement from school to school for me (Clandinin et al., 2013)

### **Constellations.**

I asked a former student named Bluebird to paint a picture for a project. The moon was to be the main symbol and from there it was be up to her creative discretion. We visited with others, asking for guidance as the painting was to help a group of university friends think about “warrior women” and what that might mean. As Bluebird often does, she went to that creative place and shaped figures and colors in ways I did not imagine possible. Her creations come from places nested deeply within. Her painting and the imagery was on my mind as it crossed over in my writing and research conversations with Lane. I thought about the lives of youth, the many places they live and travel between. It was a constellation (Clandinin et al., 2010) of experiences.

In this particular painting, the moon is central. It took its place on the canvas from that middle vantage point. White, greys, different yellows, and a texture filled the circle and evoked images of night time gazing. The brush stroke creations pulled themselves away from the canvas with three dimensional poetry. It’s haunting, that beautiful harvest moon that Bluebird created through conversation by listening to the words of different people, mixing the paint with the stories told and her own experiences. Layered over that image of the moon is a grandmother dancing ... a braid stretches out across her back, outlined with



touches of black. She reaches up with her right hand holding an eagle feather to the sky. She is dancing in her own way, as she is etched into the moon so gracefully. The grandmother's traditional shawl gently rests over her shoulders with the movement of the material visible when I look closely enough. It moves on the canvas and sashays those fabrics across the painted nighttime sky. The painting of the moon highlights this faceless image of a grandmother. I can only see her back and I see her holding the eagle feather towards the blue that surrounds in all directions. It is the artist's warrior woman. It is Bluebird and how she imagined Grandmother. It was what she saw in that moment of creativity and experience as they met and wove a new story.

I thought about this painting and spoke of it the other evening and how it reminded me to be attentive to the lives of young people in this research process. I thought of the grandmother and that image as being important but also those colors that surrounded and highlighted that harvest moon, breathing life into it in different ways. Teals illuminating aquas, navys, and the blues that were created when the mixing of colors came together and created something special. The colors wove throughout the picture highlighted by black lines that separated yet tied the motion together. The colors were dancing their way around the grandmother and the harvest moon in beautiful symmetry that was far from a straight line. Dotted on those beautiful waves of blue were the stars in the sky surrounding the moon, a constellation ... the places of connection that tied the image together with the slight touch of the artists' brush. The stars in that sky

were riding the waves of blue wrapping their arms around that three dimensional moon. As I looked closely and saw the grandmother; that warrior woman was looking over everything. I imagined her shuffling as she looked across that beautiful night time sky making sure that the symphony of colors came together just the way it should. The painting speaks to me as I think of the movements in a life. There is a beauty in the not so straight lines where the stars are those points of inquiry—a constellation of experiences (Clandinin et al., 2010) not only defined by geography but also in that in-betweeness (Heilbrun, 1999) that comes in relation. I now think of the grandmother and how she had a certain way of keeping things together; weaving the not-so-straight lines, tying them together through colors, and shaping them into an image of beauty that formed a perfect place in my mind.

### **Beginning a drum.**

Over the course of a year, the dialogue between us shifted. Some conversations were longer than others; some were just little moments where we exchanged thoughts and ideas. As the boys worked on creating a drum one day, we began to speak to each other about culture. We sat in a classroom across from each other. I put my phone on the table, hit record, and let the conversation go where it might take us. Some questions started with me while others were asked by Lane about culture in my life and my own stories of growing up. As Lane explained culture in his words he spoke of smudging and feasts. He said, “We

honour people who have passed on at our wakes. You can't fall asleep when honouring, that was what I was taught." His words of honour most definitely came from a place of teaching, where he had learned in certain places that he lives "that culture matters." Lane shared how it was different in the city and that "I get away from the culture in the city. It is why I like going home to visit ... I guess I miss it a little bit if I think about it." I wondered where he got his teachings. When did he learn about culture? How did he learn? "I mostly learned at Sunchild. I used to spend time with my grandparents. My one grandma lives in Saulteaux and my Kookum lives in Sunchild but I haven't visited for a couple years." It was just part of his life as he explained it. It was not something you just did on the side, because the culture and the language were visible and present in the life he was living in this place on the reserve. "We took language classes in school, people spoke the language at their houses and culture events are where you get together with everyone."

The drum was beginning to take shape and Lane continued to share as he continued carefully working with his drum, weaving the sinew, tightening the wet hide stretched over the sides. "I have many homes," he said. I asked, "What stays and what comes with you as you go between places?" Lane responded with, "My guitar and my clothes, it is a lot of packing and unpacking. I guess I do miss it ... my auntie said she is going to come get me this summer for a visit."

I was left with many more wonders and wish that Lane would have explained parts of the stories he shared but I recognized that they would come out

over time in their own way. In our conversation we shared ideas about details and about how people identify differently in each place that they live. I asked Lane what words he used when describing who he was. I wanted to know how he identified himself to others. He said, "I say I am Cree or First Nations and sometimes Aboriginal but it depends on where I am and who I am talking to. My name mostly comes from those famous cowboys from the movies." He talked of names being different in each place and the movement between his reserve and the city. "The hardest part of the rez to city schools is the getting up in the mornings ... the toughest part of the rez life for me is leaving behind my family."

His words were strong, and through this story more stories emerged as he started to think about his life on the reserve. "I do miss it but it is also tough because I used to get picked on a lot. I would get mad ... some kids would make comments about me because I am not from there." Lane carefully worked on his drum, keeping the hide wet. It looked as if he had built drums all his life as he masterfully continued his work. "The city wasn't as bad for me because I liked art and music and gym and we don't have all those things at the reserve schools." As he explained this, he again mentioned the gym was where, "I met Donovan and that makes it easier here. Loyalty is important to me. I have good friends and I have between 6-8 brothers and sisters in my family."

I asked him to tell me more, to help me understand this piece on family. As he talked he threaded with a continuous motion, pulling through meticulously, paying attention to the details required when taking care of his drum. He said,

“My brother Mark and my brother Nathan are important to me ... Mark taught me how to play guitar when I was young. When I was 9 and 10 years old and living with him he began to teach me and now I am trying to teach Donovan ... because he is good with the force,” and once again, laughter ensued.

Lane shared how important his dad had been to him growing up and that “he is definitely loyal but my mom, I am not so sure now ... I don’t feel comfortable with her, I am mad still ... mad about stuff ... it will probably take time. I talk to her but not really.”

As I listened to this recording, a short conversation filled with text, words, and sentences that took me in many directions, I wrote out each word, did my best to recall the activity, paid attention to the details. The drum, the indirect activity, and the “sideways conversations”<sup>31</sup> are sometimes the most powerful where the conversation flows through the activity and takes the conversational relationship to unexpected places. I watched as the two boys worked through lunch on something that was important to them; they were creating a drum and thinking about the teachings that an Elder had taught them about what it means to carry this responsibility. The bell rang and it was time to put the drums down and go to class, to other subjects, different activities. I wondered what might happen if a class like this was available to them where they could continue to hone their new

---

<sup>31</sup> Sideways teachings are those that some Elders that I am in relation refer to as the conversations that are indirect and the teachings and conversations that become more alive through working alongside each other. The conversations that occur when we are engaged in activities like cooking or preparing a meal together. In this narrative it was through the creative and intimate work involved in making a drum where the conversational relationship continued to shift between all of us.

skills, refine their craft, and think alongside the activity ... reflecting on the process that they were involved in. It was powerful to observe ... the boys carefully placed their drums on top of a cupboard tucked away from view ... they walked out the door with a wave heading to the next class.

### **Coming alongside.**

The relationships with Lane and Donovan took me back to days long ago when I used to spend most of my evenings working within the community. The titles and job descriptions were varied; some called me a youth worker, justice worker, mentor, or coach. In the moments of little formal education these are the jobs that I was drawn to. I was moved by the desire to lift a spirit even if sometimes selfishly the spirit was my own. In the most simple of paperwork processes, I was granted 10 hours per week with a young person, tasked with the job of “mentoring,” “leading,” but mostly spending time in positive interaction. It was about building relationships those days. Each time I started my contract it would invariably lead to many more. There were so many youth to connect with and with that many good moments of relationship.

I can remember when I slow down and think. At this moment in my writing process I put my headphones on and select a song by Joni Mitchell that always takes me home to Saskatoon and to my early beginnings and my work with youth. I was fortunate enough to get a job in a school as a teacher assistant where they soon matched me with Jesse, a young student who struggled with

school but who loved sports. We started our days at school shooting hoops or taking shots on an imaginary goalie. The school gave us our own classroom removed from his peers so he wouldn't be distracting, disturbing, or however they perceived his actions. It became evident to me in my work that once Jesse and I established trust and a relationship it was easier to work with him.

Through this early introduction to working with youth, in a much bigger city than I had been used to, I started to learn in a different way. Each young person taught me—through their stories, their experiences, their lives. Although I did not have the words back then to explain what was happening, the relationships, it seemed to me, were what helped me survive. When I go to those deeper thinking places and remember back, I can still clearly remember many of the youth from those early days. As I recall stories, they fill my head and heart with feelings of long ago. I, at times, forget and then suddenly the memories come rushing back in the reflective moments or through the stories shared in my current school life with the youth that I am coming to know.

### **Tennis court stadiums.**

I think I still have “it.” even though I can’t play hockey with the youth as well, and my energy no longer remains at the highest level, I am still skilled with the one thing I can control that might make the biggest difference in relationship. It is about “making time” for the youth in relationship that I can still hold onto.

The breaking of bread, even if that bread is a hamburger bun, always changes things between the youth and I. Laughter fills the air over time; eventually this happens, not always at first. Perhaps it's the distraction or comfort of a good meal or the safe place between us in a warm restaurant where we can just visit and listen to each other's stories. The relationship between us slowly changes, even if I do not recognize it at first. It comes over time. The relationship starts to weave its way to deeper places—those layered places that are sometimes difficult to negotiate in a classroom place. The stories shared between us are like a campfire sharing when we lean closer and listen more intently just to hear what is going to happen next. It happens over time. The experiences shared as we sat across from each other filled the air with good thoughts as I imagined the orange and yellow illumination, the flickering of light from the source that warmed in a campfire sort of way. I watched the sparks rise up into the night sky when I closed my eyes and visualized it. It was those camp fire feelings of sharing that opened up the space and moved relationships in new directions, forever changing it, shaping it as we went forward in relation over time.

As I reflect on my youth work days, I realize they are nearing an end but they have taught me much. This was probably why I felt that I could write for a year and a day straight and not be close to telling the stories that were within me. The memories were in those embodied places (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) that came out on those long walks, or in the silence when I thought to myself for a moment and celebrated with a smile on how fortunate I am. I adore that feeling



of life being good that comes from time to time. I felt I had to write about my youth worker days because of my work as a researcher. The experiences of sitting alongside youth brought me to those moments of early beginnings and backwards glancing. I used to be a contract worker hired to work with youth ... mostly aboriginal youth. As I thought back to the early moments of working alongside youth, their stories shaped who I was becoming.

I can still hear the bouncing of the ragged tennis ball on the inner city tennis courts, our weekly hockey games in a place where none of us had tennis racquets but most of us had hockey sticks. The tennis nets would come down and we would make our own hockey nets with jacket goal posts and play during those summer moments. From early afternoon until late in the evening, sometimes the sun would be our only timekeeper to let us know when the games were finished. We had tournaments with teams of kids that I did not know but were always welcome to our game. I went to meet the youth I worked with and I filled my car up with old sticks, mostly donated from rinks and sport shop owners clearing out their discards. We grew up in the solidarity of these moments in a place of prairie poetry.

I thought to myself back then and even now that I wished I had a van. I wished I had a van and then I would have had my own mobile youth worker machine. I would have filled it with the best of equipment discards that I could find in the city. What I believed then and still believe now is the importance of going to the places of comfort to build relationships ... whether that is within a

school (probably not) but mostly within the community places (more likely). By connecting at the tennis courts I knew the kids would come because they heard the sounds of improvisation (Bateson, 1989) and movement ... the freedom that came with playing. They recognized the call and the cheering ... jeering moments between celebrating our imaginary championships.

As I recollect these early memories I hope the games we played back then stayed with the youth in some way. I hope the youth that I worked with remember and recall those good stories from time to time. The games we played were filled with fond memories for me. To me the memories could be like a blanket that is gifted in the most sacred of ceremonies—memories that are guiding, protecting, comforting, and sustaining, even in the present.

I thought of these stories because of the youth I worked with on the research project. As I thought of their lives going forward I hoped that they would remember some of these good moments of coming together and sharing some stories about our lives. I hoped that they too could recall some of these good memories.

You see, back in Saskatoon, on those courts, we were the kings and queens. In those days, at that time it did not matter about all the other “stuff.” It was not present, it was not one of the factors, the decision makers, it was not the story on our outdoor playground during our weekly pursuit of the imaginary prize. We celebrated with freezies. So simple coming together in relation; it brought so many different people to the games, even parents sometimes, for those of them

who had parents. We found each other on the inner city tennis courts once a week. I suppose I write this because when I reflect on these moments in the past that are ever so present these days those were the best teachings. They are my memories from a different time. I believe they helped me become a better teacher. I know they are helping me become a better person. I think about these moments of freedom. The sun and the light of day was the only timekeeper. Some place between the sun going down and dusk beginning was the only determinant for how long we could keep playing. We scored hundreds of goals during those games.

I think to these moments as I look back and see how they have shaped me, how they have stayed with me. The most important piece for me was that freedom ... running back and forth through the different seasons.

We were all native youth back then ... tribal brothers and sisters. But we never looked at it that way. It didn't start there and it didn't end there. It wasn't about definitions because we were flying out there ... in a freedom sort of way that perhaps let us forget for a moment and imagine together in different ways who we were becoming. It was a close your eyes and dream for a bit time period that I wish I could return to. I wish I could travel back to that green tennis court stadium, somewhere between the boundaries of the faded lines with stick in hand, tape dangling on the edges of my old wooden stick. I wish I was there. If given a chance I would watch the sun go down one more time across the horizon ...

through the trees it would slowly become less visible. Its lingering effects are still evident through the feeling of another good day.

**Are you alright little brother . . .**

The week was one filled with twists, turns, and the raw emotions of a life turned upside down. As the snow fell coating the trees and the ground in a twisted sort of way, I was challenged by feelings of worry. The snow and wind came calling early in the morning. It was always a unique combination. Whispering winds made for difficult vision and wreaked havoc on my morning travels. The seasons were changing in early November. The call of winter was in the air but all I could think of in this moment of reflection was ... are you alright little brother?

Research relationships can shift dramatically and what seems a straight line becomes filled with movements that were not anticipated or planned for, a certain blurriness that requires action mostly filled my thoughts. Lane had been going through difficult moments in his 12-year-old life. He had been crying out for help, reaching out in different ways to express emotions that were deep seated, somewhere in those places between hurt, anger, and confusion. He was like the weather ... blanketing the urban landscape with fury. Snow has the ability to play tricks with the eyes, impede the vision, but mostly it demands change and a response to how I interact with the world around me. I moved a little slower, paid more attention, and planned my actions with more detail on days when the wind

met the snow in those faraway places above me. But all I seemed to be thinking about was ... are you alright little brother?

The prospects and thoughts of Lane living between places—“couch surfing,” some even say sleeping outside—hurt me in ways that I had not expected, in places that move beyond the objective realities. The silence and the inability to contact Lane for a few weeks, despite my best efforts, left me with a feeling of hopelessness on this landscape. All I had at my fingertips was a cryptic message, that asked “can we meet?” ... and then silence. I was unable to connect. I had no way to help him despite my best efforts to put these troubles on my shoulders. I was walking through the snow ... a slow walk on the city streets with these thoughts weighing me down in different ways. The heavy snow and wind pulling at me was just fine because all I could think of was ... are you alright little brother?

Sometimes I don't know in my heart, in those inner places, when a relationship has changed. It just changes over time and I can only see the change in those moments that push at the edges. It preoccupied my thoughts when I was unable to find Lane, contact him, or see him. It became more difficult for me when I started to think of how hard it must have been for him to negotiate the life that he was trying to make, mostly in solitude. As I imagined this during my morning walk, the winds picked up, the snow started to lose its gentle and playful touch and began to swirl, making it impossible for the birds to even sing their morning songs. The weather was heavy out there this morning when I heard

about him going missing. He finally came back to the school but only to stay long enough to cry out for help in a different way. All I could think about as I walked and as my movement became more difficult and my path was blanketed over was ... are you alright little brother?

I guess Lane brought a toy gun to school. But I believe, and now I know, that he was asking for help in a different way. A friend of his told the school staff about the toy gun, they reacted to the situation by calling authorities and relaying information to the crisis line. “Workers” then took him out of his home. They told him that they were sending him to a farm or to a group home and that the choices were no longer his. He spoke from his heart when he said he was “tired.” He was done ... he just wanted the difficult parts of his life to stop. He told me that he “can’t see a way out in his life anymore.” He was so hurt. He was so angry. But he was mostly just calling in a different way for his mom, his dad, the people in his life. He told the worker that he would only talk to me. This once again changed our relationship as I was now looked upon as the counsellor ... which most definitely I am not. Despite the titles and role definition, the response and reaction, all I could think of was ... are you alright little brother?

I spent most of the week that followed in meetings, writing, advocating to find a space so we could listen more carefully to Lane. In many ways it seemed so simple to spend those days alongside ... listening to some stories over a soda. The space between relationships was so important for me to continue to think about as our research relationship shifted once again, and asked me to participate

in such different ways. The week was filled with twists, turns, and the raw emotions of a life turned upside down. As the snow fell coating the trees and the ground in a twisted sort of way, I was challenged by feelings of worry. But all I could think of in that moment of distracted thought was ... are you alright little brother?

## **Chapter 6:**

### **Resonant Narrative Threads**

Narrative Inquiry, a relational research methodology, shaped my research process alongside three aboriginal youth and their families. Each narrative account that was co-composed alongside the youth and their families helped me become more attentive to what was important in their lives. Through the moments of sharing and writing alongside each other, the evolving relationship between us, as researcher and participant, became increasingly important. The stories shared shaped who we were becoming as co-researchers and they helped us think about new stories as we looked backwards and forwards at our experiences both in and outside of school places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through the co-composition of each narrative account, alongside the youth and their families, resonant threads or patterns emerged (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Words in sentences evoked images and memories throughout the process of co-composing each narrative. These sentences within the narratives became threads made visible to me in different ways, and helped me to further think with the stories that I was hearing. Some threads only became visible over time, and only after I became somewhat temporally and relationally distant from the ongoing lives of the participants (Geertz, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The resonant threads found within the narratives are not generalizable. The patterns within the experiences shared do not apply to all aboriginal youth and their families participating in urban school settings. The threads that have



emerged between the narrative accounts are contextual compositions; they are the stories for now. This chapter explores four resonant threads: Family and relationships that sustain; Inter-generational stories deeply nested within; Connectedness with a home-place; Taking care of our stories/gifts.

In this chapter I discuss in more detail these four resonant threads. Each thread provides an opportunity to think alongside the stories of these aboriginal youth and their families within and in relation to an urban school setting. The resonant threads are contextual and a reflection of my research process alongside three youth, their families and the stories of Elder Isabelle Kootenay, Elder Bob Cardinal, and Elder Francis Whiskeyjack with whom I am in relation.

### **Thread 1:**

#### **Family and relationships that sustain**

The narrative accounts, co-composed alongside participants over three years, have strongly included the stories of family within them. Family and relationships that are sustaining compose a resonant thread across the three narrative accounts. My concept of family and what family looks like within the worlds of each youth continuously expanded throughout the research process as I listened to their stories. Through the research I understand that family cannot be defined by fixed or frozen definitions or through the numerical computations that are more recognizable to my own knowing. A family within the dominant discourse may be interpreted as two parents (male and female) or one parent

families, or, at times, mixed or blended families. The relationships with the youth continued to teach me that family is so much more than numbers or what the dominant discourse suggests a family should look like. The youth at times had difficulty in listing or explaining the complexity of their families. Perhaps the tension within naming what family may look like within the youths stories was in part due to an evolving definition of what family might look like in their stories as it changed over time. As I reflect on these tensions I also wonder about the importance of taking care of family in its composition and complexity as the youth slowly revealed who the people in their lives were only over time and relationship. Counting the numbers of family members or carefully constructing a family tree in expected ways were exercises that we resisted as I continued to listen to their stories of family and relationships. The families that I came to know through the research conversations were composed of brothers and sisters, cousins, grandparents, parents, step parents, and other family members. At first I found it was a challenge to write out how or describe what the youth meant when they told me that this is my family ... this is my brother, sister, cousin and so on. As a researcher I continue to think with the words and the stories of families that I came to know on multiple landscapes. The lives of both the youth and families within the narrative accounts are ever evolving, taking different shapes and forms that I continue to learn from as I walk alongside and listen to their stories.

I think of the shifting landscapes each youth negotiated, at times it is a familiar place, perhaps even consistent. However, at times they are temporary

and rapidly shifting places of foster care, separation, and in-between places that hold meaning within their stories. The youth told stories of family many times throughout our conversations. Family, and the relationships within, are also composed in these new places where the youth are living and learning how to negotiate. Stories of family also included honouring the difficult stories and expressing the longing for family in a different way, as each youth has experienced the complexities of loss.

Family and relationships that sustain resonated across the experiences of Sky, Donovan, and Lane. The thread of family and relationships that sustain were evident in the annals that we co-composed and throughout the stories situated across time, place, and the personal and social contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Temporally understanding the youths' experiences of life in and out of school is significant to the youth. They do not forget the experiences of what family might look like relationally but also the memories that are nested deeply within that honour these relationships. Their experiences within multiple family compositions continue to shape who they are becoming (Clandinin et al., 2006); these stories sustain them.

The experiences of youth in, and outside of, school places was the focus of the research and, as part of attending to this focus, we (the research team) wanted the youth to metaphorically take us home in order to help us understand their experiences alongside their families. The experiences of families within the school system and specifically the experiences of aboriginal youth and their

families in urban school settings are areas that are underrepresented within current research, policy and programming.

Family, and how each youth negotiated this representation, was significant within the relational inquiry as the honouring of individual experiences and the sharing of stories took on greater meaning. Part of the relational inquiry was around what family might look like to each youth as they negotiated multiple contexts. Family, with its multiple meanings, is something I considered closely in the ethics and development of the research relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I quickly came to understand that the concept of family had different meanings for each youth.

Family and relationships that sustain resonates with me, in particular, I am drawn to the word sustain as I consider and honour the experiences of youth and their families. Relationships that sustain took on new meaning as the relationship between the youth and the U of A art club on a weekly basis was also an important consideration for both the youth and researchers. The consistency in meeting in a safe place within a school but outside mandated school hours cannot be overlooked as it shaped research relationships; relationships that are ongoing, evolving and sustaining. The U of A art club space was, for 2 years, a connecting place that we, as a group of researchers, co-created alongside the youth. It was a place where relationships began and moved to new places. It was also a place that created an open space where families, community members, brothers and sisters,

Elders and caregivers helped us further understand the experiences that we were trying to make sense of.

As a research team, we were constantly negotiating the experiences and the stories of these experiences on multiple, new and unfamiliar landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This thread takes on great meaning for me personally as I reflect on how relationships not only included families but also other relationships that came out of the research where I was welcomed in, and included in meals, ceremony, and teachings outside the U of A art club space. The space between researcher and participants continued to shift over time.

I think specifically of the narrative accounts of Donovan in relation to this resonant thread. Donovan told stories of a home-place and what this means to him personally as he recalls memories of walking down a dirt road as a young boy to "spend time" with his Kookum on the reserve. His stories of his Kookum include the narratives shared but also the pictures on his phone, his computer, and those images that are etched on his arm, marking her passing. A tattoo of a single eagle feather created by Donovan's older brother is much more than urban art. The words and the numbers that accompany the tattoo and tell a story are honouring in their own way as her grandsons continue to hold on to memories of a significant person in their lives. Donovan says, "she was an Elder to everyone." His words evoke powerful images within me as he told stories of memories on the reserve and how his Kookum "would just spend time with me." The telling and re-telling of the stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) of people within his life,

like Kookum Muriel, are stories that can sustain and create forward looking stories (Lindemann Nelson, 2002) but they can also be stories that become difficult to see beyond. The relationships that sustain become part of a larger composition and take on new meanings for me within this research process. The words linger and help me see the importance of ethics in research relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) when he shares with me. The consistency in being there, and honouring Donovan as well as other youth in the sharing of stories, is part of the resonant thread of family and relationships that sustain.

I am reminded, through Donovan's stories of family, how this looks different in each youth's life. Donovan negotiates multiple places as he lives between his aunt, his mother, the city, and the reserve. He has strong feelings of being together with his mom but knows that, for now, it is not possible. He continues to teach me that family and relationships that sustain include relationships with the land and with the Elder teachings that he looks forward to at school with Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, and at home on his reserve ... as his "family is all over the place" when he goes there. How Donovan sees family and relationships is evident through photographs of his little nieces and nephews which he proudly shares, or as he skypes into conversations letting those who are in relation with him know more about what might be important in his life as he composes his stories of family.

Family and relationships that sustain have meaning also within the activities of each youth. I think now of Sage and how she speaks of the memories

on the pow wow trail and how it “brings family together.” Through the movement and the dance a relationship forms between her family, the people they meet during travels, and the memories that they bring back each summer. In many ways these are stories of sustaining and an example of creating forward looking stories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) as the sisters within the family dance together, helping each other with the steps in the stories they live out in their multiple worlds.

School and outside of school places (Clandinin et al., 2006) become places where the stories of Sky’s older sisters hold meaning. The stories that sustain are present through the sharing of how it is to live in unknown worlds (Lugones, 1987) and negotiate shifting landscapes. Sky calls on the teachings of her sisters and mother throughout our research conversations, as she tries to understand math problems, write essays, dream about travel, and life in high school. Her sisters sit alongside her as they share their stories and experiences of school and life outside of school. It is through this sharing process that she begins to understand parts of the world (Lugones, 1987) that she will soon be negotiating. I hear, in her words, the honouring of her family and “making them proud” as she often explained how her sisters and mother guide her in her decision making.

Her stories, and how she tells her stories, become more visible to me in the sharing spaces that we co-created, as she found her words differently when she shared with her sisters alongside her. I saw it also as I stepped away and thought of how she also finds the rhythm and the steps within her dance when she closes

her eyes and lets herself "become free" alongside her older sisters. Through the dance, the relationship becomes more recognizable to me ... it becomes clearer to me how her family and the relationships sustain her.

Her stories of life, family, and relationships also include the more difficult stories of a grade 9 school year when her family struggled. The stories of her "heart being broken" because of the changes that come when families move away from each other reverberate within me. I think of relationships and how, as she shares new experiences within her life, she holds on to memories when her "family was together travelling." She shared with me over time the importance of both her father and her mother and how strong her feelings are for the "way things used to be." Her stories are nested deeply within the personal and social contexts (Clandinin et al., 2010) of growing up in a small reserve with family that includes cousins as sisters and brothers. Her extended network of family are a significant part of her family stories and of who she is becoming (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Her stories of family and relationships are stories that are sustaining her, both in, and outside of, school places.

Lane, his name and his gifts, come from a place, connected to stories of family and experiences that are closely tied to family members. Throughout the research process Lane helped me think of the multiple worlds that he is negotiating and how he thinks of family within his life. As I write I am thinking of Lane as he lives now in a temporary place ... a home for now, as he cannot be with his mom or his dad or his sisters or brothers. He is in a place for now ... a



home that is uncertain, and it is through his sharing that I think more deeply about family and relationships that sustain. He helps me think of the complexity within the definition of family in the more recent moments of our research relationship. I am becoming more attentive as I recognize how he is struggling to understand the pressures of not knowing family and being estranged, “missing in action” is how he describes this. He shared stories of his life in a new place as he looked back to the difficult moments when he did not know where to go, or where to live, times when he just wanted to run and hide. He shared with me stories of those who welcomed him in “from the streets” ... the beginning points of joining a gang of brothers and seeing life differently through what it means to participate in this type of family. He explained the stories of physical markers to me, where the branded and the tattooed words of warrior or posse number signs help him understand what family means to him for now. As he shared his stories with me, I begin to understand more fully the importance of sustaining stories of family and relationships. He tells me as he shares that “at least I have a place to go to at night now.” I understand a little more and think about the experiences of youth and their families in a different way. I understand Lane and his stories differently now because of the stories he shares with me.

His memories of the rocks and water from his reserve with his cousins and family members are vivid recollections that stay with him. He longed for those remembered places as we shared our lives alongside each other. Through our time together he shared photographs of himself as a young boy playing alongside

various family members in different places over time. His images are filled with laughter and happiness ... his stories of earlier memories ... of his brothers who teach him and sisters who care for him are sustaining. Through his stories he also speaks of the uncertainty of where he should live ... whether he should choose his father or mother ... it depended on each circumstance and each place. Through his stories and the experiences of spending time together for over 2 years I sat alongside various family members including his father. Each family member shared stories of hopes and dreams and expressing the appreciation for the gifts that their little brother and son hold. Lane's negotiation of family and relationships included the negotiations of new step-brothers, step-sisters, new family compositions that were, and are, different and challenging.

The resonant thread of family and relationships that sustain becomes more pronounced to me as Lane shared stories of his younger brother and how he took care of him and looked out for him. Lane used to share a room with his younger brother until life situations shifted this arrangement. Lane's stories at this time were filled with sadness and worry about his little brother who was now living in a different place, with a different family, removed from him.

Family and relationships that sustain is a resonant thread in Lane's stories and are present in the experiences that are filled with significant people in his life. Meeting a friend at school and walking alongside Donovan for the school year ... helping each other is a relationship that sustains on multiple landscapes. The texting, calling and encouraging each other to meet at school and to make it to

school are expressions of a relationship that was significant to each of them. As we shared together and our research relationship developed, over time, they let me into their worlds (Lugones, 1987). We travelled together both metaphorically and physically over the course of a school year between places both in, and out of, school. While we met at the U of A art club space and the relationship took on greater meaning for me, I did not, at first, recognize the importance or the welcoming invitation that both Lane and Donovan offered me.

The relationships came to include far more than research conversations as they let me into their worlds by sharing their gifts, honouring me with their stories and connecting me with other family members. The thread of family and relationships that sustain is best said through the narratives, "Are you alright little brother?" and "First Thunder" where, in my own way I honour our relationship. The resonant thread of family and relationships that sustain reverberate throughout the stories of participants. The stories shared become part of my own life writing process as the words spoken, the stories shared, help me recall many of my own stories where this thread plays out in the life I am composing.

## **Thread 2:**

### **Inter-generational stories deeply nested within**

As the youth and their families opened a space to share with me, many of their stories included memories of Kookum, Mooshum, Grandma, and Grandpa and stories from earlier places. A resonant thread between the three participants

within my research was the inter-generational stories nested deeply within. The stories shared over three years developed over time, were situated in place, and emerged into sharing through our evolving relationship.

The inter-generational stories nested deeply within became more visible within our sharing space as I recognized language, protocols, and traditions that the youth knew intimately. The intimacy of knowing comes from both the people and the places where the teachings were passed on. I also heard other stories of learning as the youth shared with me how they would plant vegetables alongside Kookum, take care of animals on the farm, or how to play the guitar. Within the places of learning people were present ... present in relationship, carefully teaching the youth knowledge they had come to know in their lives and through their experiences. These, too, are inter-generational teachings in a different way, reverberating in families, as brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts have also learned through the teachings from these places. The teachings nested deeply within are an important consideration as the teachings the youth have learned from various family members and places in their lives are touchstones. Touchstones that help the youth continue to revisit and share the stories within their memories.

The youth and their families shared inter-generational stories slowly and carefully. The sharing of inter-generational stories was not necessarily through formal research conversations but, more often, through coming alongside each other in relationship and activities. Stories were shared through the in-between spaces of preparing meals together, at times painting or beading, or the sharing of

a song as we observed a familiar shuffle around the classroom space (Bateson, 1994). Through quiet observation and paying attention to the rhythm within this landscape many questions and wonders emerged for me. Through the process of engaging in activity alongside each other, the gifts in teachings within the youth often became more visible. The stories the youth know from other places within their memories were often connected to the knowledge that has been passed on and the intergenerational stories that are nested deeply within.

I am reminded of Donovan and how over 2 years of conversation we shared many stories and details of his life. It was only over time that I could see how the drum became increasingly important to him and his identity making process. I observed how he prepared his drum and how he knew within himself to offer Elder Francis Whiskeyjack protocol in the form of tobacco when first asking about the teachings that accompany the drum making process. He recalled teachings deep within himself from prior experiences and stories that he had lived on different landscapes. Perhaps those memories were from moments of walking between places on the reserve, or when he on his way to spend time in the garden with his Kookum. Perhaps the teachings were passed on through his mother, aunt, older brothers, and sisters and their stories of family belief systems, that reside within inter-generational places. No longer was there uncertainty when Donovan was sharing with me in this way as he felt confident as he had been there before, having participated in this way in listening to stories across landscapes that could be understood even within this urban place. The inter-

generational stories, and the ways in which knowledge became visible between us, were not solely in Donovan's experience of making a hand drum. They resonated through the experiences of all three participants within this research.

Inter-generational stories were also shared by the youths' parents as I recall Lane's father sharing with me of places long ago in his memories. He shared these storied memories in the less hopeful moments when his son was lost in a system, lost between families. He told me many stories as we sipped on coffee late into the evening hoping his son would return home before dark. I heard stories of his experiences of learning to ride horses as a boy on the prairies, of horsemanship, and of what it means to take care of animals, both physically and spiritually. There were stories of places where Lane received his name, and how it was chosen because of Lane's father's love of country music and the rodeo. In a similar way, in the present, Lane's father was trying to pass these stories on to Lane. Stories of early teachings that came from a place, a reserve in Saskatchewan, where his family grew up living with a certain rhythm connected to the land.

During that evening I heard stories of language, customs, and protocols situated in place. I listened to how Lane's father continues to go back home to the reserve to take care of his mother, an Elder in the community who only speaks Saulteaux. I observed a son and a father tell stories of different places, explaining to me the challenges of carrying knowledge between places and between generations. It is also through these stories shared that I recognized a desire to

have this take place. In these moments I too understood that his son knew deep inside himself how he should live in the world. It was taught to him from the day he was born, even before this time I heard him share with me during our conversation. I recognized that evening how important it was to Lane's father to pass on the teachings and a way of life that was deeply relational and connected to a place within memory and earlier times. It was within the sharing that I also saw the frustration and sadness that Lane's father struggled with as he tried to provide more opportunities for Lane to see what he had experienced as a young boy and how important it remained to him in the present.

I think now of the dance and how Sage creates each one of her daughters' outfits through the stories of learning how to make this from her mother. The teachings that she knows and shares in the present come from a place of earlier knowledge, education that was lived in a different way, in multiple languages, and through relationships. It was an important teaching within Sage's family, the knowledge was passed down and shared inter-generationally. The stories were shared between Cree and Stoney teachings in multiple places over time. Learning to create regalia that is connected to language and place was a teaching that Sage received as a young girl within her family by participating alongside and paying attention to the teachings that she was receiving. She shared with me and recalled distinct memories of how she learned and the type of materials that were used in these earlier moments of creating and learning alongside her own mother. The beads and the patterns she creates as she works on her daughters' regalia for

dancing are stories in a different way that come from places of early memory and experience. As she creates for her daughters she shares stories of colours, patterns, designs and the details of the materials she is using. The creation includes the details of the jingles, the ribbons, and the sacredness of the eagle feathers that are a part of this creation story. Her daughters tell the stories of their regalia and what it means to them, they re-tell the stories as they express themselves in the dances that they learned alongside their mother and before this time.

Sage danced and now her daughters dance. The intricate details of each outfit are significant. They tell individual stories as her daughters dance in different ways. They honour the stories passed on through traditional, jingle, and fancy dancing. There are different songs, regalia, and honouring within the movements and within the dances. This family lives by stories passed on to Sage from her mother's and grandmother's stories and from earlier places. The stories continue in the present through the lives of daughters and granddaughters within the family. The teachings are nested deeply within the stories of the women in this family (Clandinin et al., 2010). The inter-generational stories are very much alive.

As I write of the inter-generational stories nested deeply within I am moved by the feelings of looking back across time, and how knowledge is passed on to the youth and the families that I came to know. I think of how there is no manual that exists or books to teach this way, these are the stories within that



come from living alongside each other, these teachings come alive through experience. The counting in Cree or sharing in Saulteaux has different meanings within each youth, it calls forth different memories of places they have lived within. The youth's names and the importance of names in their lives, the stories that are passed on in ceremony, the ceremony in itself and how to participate during these moments is contextual and based on teachings they have received in relationship.

I think of Sage and how her daughters have been gifted with names that come from a place. Pretty Flower Girl and White Eagle Woman are part of the inter-generational stories that are nested deeply within each of her daughters, from the early beginnings of their lives. It was in the starting places of her daughters' lives where she wanted them to know something different. I also think of how Donovan who, as a young boy, was gifted the name First Thunder. The name had a story that his family wanted to keep alive, hold on to and protect. They wanted him to know. With this story told he carries it forward in who he is at school and at home ... it is nested deeply within who he is at all times.

In similar ways the youth know within themselves how to participate in relation as I observed it when there was a hush across the room when an Elder entered the U of A arts club space. I also recognized this by observing the silence when we passed our stories around the circle and learned of the medicine wheel teachings from Elder Isabelle Kootenay, a Stoney Elder. It may have been a different teaching, foreign to what they had learned in each place but the youth

knew individually and collectively that there were certain protocols that need to be attended to. The youth knew within themselves that we should respectfully pay attention to these protocols alongside each other.

I have stories on my mind as I look across the narrative accounts of the participants I have walked alongside. I have thought deeply and continue to write about the inter-generational teachings and the stories that accompany these teachings. I have looked at the dance, the drum, and other ways of sharing knowledge between people and places and across time. I recognize the places that we live within, and have travelled to and in-between, also teach us. Many of these places are recalled through our memories of earlier times. These places are artifacts that live within our memories and we call them back in different ways and for different reasons. Sometimes when we least expect them, they enter our minds and sustain us in those moments. Many of the stories shared between participants and I are those good stories and fond memories of earlier places that have taught us.

It is through this reflection that I also pull forward stories that move in different directions as I look across the narrative accounts. It is not necessarily always through the stories we tell and tell again that I am learning. It is, at times, the stories that we move over quickly that are uncomfortable and create dis-ease (Lugones, 1987) within the conversational spaces (Clandinin et al., 2006). I realize that inter-generational stories nested deeply within can also call forward those feelings of places where experiences have not been sustaining ones. Inter-

generational teachings that can be passed on and carried forward also include difficult experiences. Inter-generational stories nested deeply within may be stories of those places of school where the stories were not good stories; where feelings were not ones to be celebrated. I am reminded of these experiences as I look across the stories of failing school grades or of not feeling welcome in the place of school as a student and a parent. The experiences of family members in the place of school reverberate and carried forward as each youth negotiates the place of school in the present. The inter-generational stories are nested deeply within and are carried forward and in this way shape the relationship between home and school.

The stories I heard from parents often were expressions, at least in part, of feeling unwelcomed and disconnected in school places. The place of school within their stories, and within family stories of school, were often not positive experiences. However, these stories of school did not shape or dominate our conversational relationship as we looked at life in, and out of, school places (Clandinin et al., 2006). While each parent told stories of leaving school early, the stories they shared of their children "needing" school were also told. Sky's mother had left school at a young age, returning later in her life to school. Lane's father left school early. He was not comfortable entering schools for meetings with his son. Donovan's family was in-between places when he returned home to spend time with his mom at the reserve. It was at home not at school where she

wanted to be with him so they chose for him not to attend. Donovan's mother and his brothers also left school early in their lives.

The inter-generational stories nested deeply within are not limited to just the *good* stories, the celebratory stories, and the memories of youthful places and teachings. Many stories were shared that helped me continue to learn from the youth and their families. Each family had a strong desire to keep participating in school and felt that school was where their children needed to be despite it being a place that caused considerable dis-ease (Lugones, 1987). As the youth and the families shared stories with me that included hopes and dreams, all their stories included seeing their children in post-secondary school places. The inter-generational stories nested deeply within includes the ambivalence and fear in participating in a place like school that might not value a family's stories, honour where they come from, or acknowledge the teachings that are passed down from inter-generational places. It is a dis-ease that comes from a place within previous stories that are, at times, difficult to share. It is through the telling and re-telling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of our experiences that we explore new spaces together. It is within these spaces where we co-create forward looking stories (Lindemann Nelson, 1995) that allow us to negotiate multiple landscapes honouring the experiences and celebrating the different ways of coming to know who we are by telling the stories of where we have travelled.

**Thread 3:****Connectedness with a "home-place"**

A "home-place" to me provides a sense of belonging, it is an identity marker that provides comfort. It is a place where stories begin and a place where they continue to evolve. It is through the connectedness to a home-place where the youth and families teach me about their lives. The very idea of a home-place is filled with multiple meanings and evokes imagery of places long ago in memory for each of us. The stories connect us not only geographically but also in relation as many of the stories that took us home were filled with people, with our relations in most cases.

Connectedness to a home-place becomes more visible when the youth's stories and my stories become distant from the places within our memories. It is through the sharing of stories that the memories become more alive as we visit with each other in these places through our stories. The photographs and artifacts about these places in our memory provide some context but the words and the stories shared connect us more deeply to the stories situated in place. It is their stories that they are sharing with me. Through the sharing spaces I begin to explore some of my own stories.

I think of the trees and the forests, the bears and the stars, in Sky's stories as she lets herself fall from the trees that she climbed as a young person with her sisters and cousins. Her cartography is filled with vivid memories that both she and her sister recalled. As I read the story of the forest to Sky's mom, she also

knew the places in her girls' stories we had imagined alongside each other. I travelled alongside their family in the composing of a story filled with imagination and memory. It is a story based on memories of play and improvisation (Bateson, 1994). It is a story that weaves somewhere between imagination and places that they have lived within their home-place. I composed the story inspired by the playful words they shared with me. The girls' home-place is the traditional territory where they lived in their early beginnings. Their home-place is a home that their father built. It is a place that is located next to their Kookum's place surrounded by trees, filled with stars on some nights. The place offers far different views than the views from the city landscape they now experience. The connectedness to a home-place does not leave them. The memories of these places are active in their minds and there is a sense of always going home to their stories in these places and moments of recalling alongside each other. I recognize the connectedness in the stories we shared as they resonate within me. As we shared, the girls and I spoke of the land calling us home; calling us not only to the physical landscapes but the relations that taught us and sustained us within those places.

The rocks and the white water flowing, the rapids within the home-place stories of Lane also helped me understand more about who he was becoming (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As we shared the stories of home and what home means, he was living in a place that was temporary. His memories travelled to places where the roads changed from urban to rural landscapes. It was a place

within his memories where mountains were prevalent. I recognized his home-place in his stories. I had spent time there and I find the beauty difficult to describe. Lane told me stories of his cousins and of exploring the land, of throwing polished rocks into the waters and watching them skip, moving across the water for what seems like forever. He spoke of the serenity and beauty of this place as he shared with me quietly and carefully; he was recalling and pulling back memories and imagination from a different time. He told me through the stories of animals ... the deer and the mountain lions ... the eagle and the bears ... who reside in his home-place. His recollections were between the places of imagination and early memories. He called them forth as sustaining stories of what could be a connected place for him. This could become a home-place that was not only appealing because of the beautiful landscape, but also because of what it could mean for a young person who was asking for something different at this time.

Remaining connected to a home-place also became more alive through the sounds of Lane's music as he transported himself to places within himself where there were calm waters. He moved between genres with his guitar, sometimes soulful music, at other times blues and country songs that were taught to him first by his grandfather. During earlier times, when his family was together, they travelled to the reserves of both his father and mother; from prairie landscapes to mountainous regions they travelled together. Through the experiences within each place Lane pulls forward memories, he keeps the memories alive within him.

He tells stories of cousins playing. His Mooshum teaching him. And what this looked like at this moment in time. Through his stories of early memories, the connectedness to a home-place continues to hold great meaning. It is through the sharing of stories that these places and the connections remain strong and possible. It is the calming waters in a different place where language, teachings, music, and laughter with his relations remain stories that are both hopeful and sustaining (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998).

I once again find myself thinking of the gravel road as I reflect on Donovan's stories. The connection to a home-place weaves strongly through the stories shared in Donovan's narratives. I have pictures in my mind as he told me these stories of walking for over an hour to make his way to his Kookum's house. He travelled on a long dirt road by himself mostly, he said. He remembers looking at the water on one side of the road and knowing that he was getting closer when he viewed this geographical marker. Donovan's connection to his home-place comes through in his stories as he shared what this place looked like. His stories of spending time alongside his Kookum during the summer months stay with me. She showed him how to take care of the animals ... how to take care of the land ... how to take care of himself. She taught him the Cree language during their daily adventures, calling out numbers, words, and getting him to repeat what she was sharing with him.

The connectedness to a home-place becomes clear in Donovan's stories of the land, not only what it looked like to him but the memories and the stories that



are connected to this place. These stories that he shares include many family members ... his mom ... brothers ... sisters ... aunts ... uncles ... cousins ... ancestors. Donovan's home-place is relational. His memories of his Kookum connect him strongly to his home-place. These stories sustain him. They keep him alive in many ways, and teach me so much about what is important to him in his life.

Connectedness to a home-place is a resonant thread that weaves between the participants' and their narratives. I read over the words of the youth within this research process and I think of my stories alongside their stories. Within our stories we share a connectedness to our home-places. It is these places that we hold strong in our memories and within the way we are living our lives in the present. The stories of a home-place become increasingly important in each of our lives as the memories fade over time of these places that we have lived and grown within.

The stories that are shared are much more than geographical markers of places on a map. The stories of a home-place and the connectedness within is an embodied sense of knowing who we are within our stories and where we have been (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). The stories of a home-place within our memories are also about who we are becoming (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The stories shared move beyond a gravel road or the water and trees. The experiences within these places and through our imagination are, in many ways, our inner cartography. They remind us of who we are as we now all live in

different geographical places than the home-places within our stories. It is these stories that become our early teachings; they are the wisdom that sustains us from places that we have lived. The connectedness to our home-places is a pathway to travel back to; a place that holds these early memories. Alongside Lane, Donovan, and Sky and recognise that we hold these memories closely as we, at times, fear that the memories, that sustained us, at one time may disappear.

#### **Thread 4:**

##### **Taking Care of Their Stories**

The importance of stories within the lives of the youth and their families and how these stories are taken care of is a resonant thread across the narrative accounts. The stories I came to know through the experiences of sitting alongside youth and their families include memories of drumming, singing, and dancing. The stories also included families and ancestors in the places that the youth have lived, travelled, and learned together. Within the shared spaces of telling our stories, we also learned to hold onto certain stories and to take care of them by telling them in relation over time.

The stories emerged over time, not in text or necessarily in the spaces of direct dialogue, but slowly became visible through the process of living alongside one another. The stories are the gifts that come to the surface when the space allows for these types of stories to be shared. The dancing and drumming but also the more contemporary gifts within the youth became visible over time and

relation. Through the course of the research relationship these were the stories within the youth that they held closely and took care of when sharing. The stories were told and shared amongst us, between us, when there was an understanding that it was now a good time. Through the relationship we could begin to share the stories that they know in a good way (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The thread of taking care of our stories is easiest to describe when I think of earlier memories or of travelling to different places within my own stories. I think of the moments of going home to the places within my aboriginal community. It is a home-place in a different way for me as I look forward to making my way down the highway and travelling to this place. It is a reserve of land but, more importantly, to me it is the land surrounded by trees and water, filled with stories, and names of places that I continue to learn from. It is a connecting place from which I can continue to understand who I am becoming (Clandinin, 2000). I can go out when I return to this home-place and travel in multiple directions, learning to listen to the sounds and stories within this place. In this home-place I know certain stories exist; stories shared by my mother who was taught by my grandparents and earlier relations. The stories are passed on and carried forward in this way and they are connected deeply to the places within earlier experiences. The stories of trap lines and earlier moments of learning to live with the land in this way are teachings that become more visible when I travel and reconnect within these landscapes. These are the experiences through which we create spaces for sharing and telling stories. It too is in these places of

experience where the stories are understood differently, as they are more visible. Here experiences can be understood more clearly; understood within these places that I travel. There is wisdom within the places as I recall stories that my family shares of where the land teaches differently (Basso, 1996). I learn in these places not only how to listen to others' stories, but also how to take care of the stories when they are told ... to hold onto them carefully ... to share them carefully.

In a similar way I understand how to move in this home-place when we gather together as a community. I know I just don't sit down before acknowledging the older ones and the people around me in relation. When I am in the community, visiting this home-place, I walk around the table where we sit and gather and greet each person individually. I make certain that the tea is ready in a different way when I am spending time in my home-place and I help by serving the older ones by getting a warm drink to enter into a conversational space. It is within me that I know that this is how I should participate. I learn through observation but also through attending closely to how we live alongside each other in this home-place. There is a rhythm that I follow and pay attention to that is more visible to me when I travel within this home-place.

I feel by writing in this way perhaps readers can find resonance within their own experiences to begin to understand this way of sharing. It is about more than telling stories. It is about the process of time and relationship and places where stories can be told and shared. It is places where we have learned that it is safe to participate differently and to let ourselves go in relation to places that we

hold close. By writing about different ways of coming to understand how to participate in communities and in relation, I hope the gifts within each youth and how each youth has learned to take care of their stories in unfamiliar landscapes such as schools can become visible to others.

The youth hold this knowledge through participating in knowledge contexts; they live this knowing. They understand their personal cartography that tells them when and what is good to share and, perhaps, what should not be shared. There are borderlands between home and school and the places that they have travelled. It is through knowing who they are in the borderlands that the youth and their families understand that some stories are not safe to share. Regardless of what could be shared, it is best not to share what will not be taken care of in respectful and meaningful ways. Some of their stories will never be told in institutional spaces like schools.

I think of this thread when I think of Lane and what he has come to know in his life both culturally and through the lessons he has learned through playing his guitar or his piano. I recall being awe struck and moved within the U of A arts club space when he shared with me, over time, his gifts with music. I recall the conversation and watching him move with ease in this world of playing music, of performing (Lugones, 1987). He goes to this place within himself, that lives somewhere between head and heart, that is, within his body, as he composes music beautifully. He leaves a room filled with peers asking and longing for one more song. He plays multiple numbers and then makes his way to the piano and

plays this also without fear ... soulfully ... beautifully he plays. He has gifts within, yet his stories and these gifts are unfamiliar to many people who live within school places. Those in the schools do not know Lane can play in this way. It is not known that he can play at all. My personal challenge when observing his gifts is just to enjoy the process. When my sense of being a teacher in a school place takes over and I think that he should enroll in a course that celebrates and acknowledges these gifts, I remind myself to be mindful. I feel if I could get him involved through a course or a school club it would make school easier or more pleasurable, maybe even more hopeful in terms of attendance and wanting to stay in school. These intentions are misguided because I fail to listen to what he is telling me as he shares with me the gifts and stories within him in our shared spaces, but not in school places. My hopes and dreams for Lane let me know I failed to listen and attend to the details of his life (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). I am failing to listen to what he is teaching me with his stories, his gifts and his plot lines. As I step back and move away from my wants and arrogant appropriations, I can see his gifts quite differently and I understand more clearly what he is telling me.

I wonder about how Lane was taught to play his music. I think of the stories he tells me of learning to play alongside family members in different places. I see him in my mind as I write and I think of the stories that we have shared together over the past years. I think of how excited he gets when he tells me of the new music he is playing and how he is experimenting with new ideas.

My images shift when I think of him in solitude as he told me how the guitar gets him through difficult times. The music helps. He shared stories of playing music throughout the night, late into the night when he was young, by himself. “It was loud downstairs,” he said and so he “just kept playing” is how he told the story. I think of the places music might possibly take him as he travels through his life. I wonder if the music is a healing place for him or a place that conjures up memories, some sustaining, and perhaps some he plays right through to help him forget.

As I reflect on Lane and what he has shared, I recognize the importance of taking care of the stories we have shared alongside one another in the research process. Lane does not want the open stage or to be in a class with others to play music in a prescriptive and fabricated way. He does not want to be the aboriginal ambassador playing for the events to open up something that he would not be eligible to participate in. His response, and what he teaches me as he lets me into his worlds (Lugones, 1987), is that sometimes stories need to remain silent on certain landscapes. When the stories are ready to be told and the space is safe to tell the story perhaps then he will let his gifts become known to others, in his own way and on his own time.

I shift to Donovan and his stories of family and life on the reserve with his Kookum Muriel. Certain stories are sacred and others are secret (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Some stories are only shared between us, over time, as Donovan has learned to protect and to take care of his family stories on unfamiliar

landscapes. Donovan's stories remind me of the importance of family and how in school places, at times, it is important to hold on to the more difficult stories that, if told, might be open to mis-interpretations by others. Students and teachers may tell the story of Donovan as between places, with and without family, as missing school. These are different stories than we have shared together over time. It is in the in-between spaces of living and trying to make a life that Donovan negotiates. He tells stories of going back and forth between the reserve and of missing his mom, not knowing his dad, wishing his Kookum was still here. His stories, as he told them over time, were shared gradually, so we could share safely. His stories involved loss and were told from deep within places of experience. His stories were filled with laughter and humour; stories sometimes were shared in this way because they were difficult stories to tell. As we shared over the course of two years, he continued to let me into his worlds (Lugones, 1987) and in letting me in to his worlds, he told me more about his experiences and how he wished he could be with his family. The stories were no longer smooth as he shared them with me. It is between us that we created a space to share our stories; as we found resonance within our stories. I told Donovan that he reminded me of my farm and my own early beginnings of growing up in a place with gravel roads and memories of playful improvisation (Bateson, 1994). Over time, I shared memories from these places and I also shared how I miss those places and the people within them. Donovan and I often looked at photographs together as, through time, the space shifted between us and we no



longer met in groups or with his friends. It is at this time where he asked to meet together, just him and I, sharing a meal and our stories from different places together.

Donovan told stories of school where he had difficulties at an early age with his reading and writing. He shared stories of his early school experiences where he was held back or failed, as he said, and how it still bothers him in the present. These stories were meant to be taken care of and he did not want me to make this the main part of the stories he was sharing of school. Donovan wanted me to tell the story within his narrative account of him skipping a grade, not necessarily failing and not making this the dominant narrative of who he is in school. As our relationship continued to shift, and friends like Elder Francis Whiskeyjack became more prominent in both of our lives, our stories took on new meaning as we spent time together. As we entered a new space together in a new school alongside Elder Francis Whiskeyjack, the drumming and the stories within Donovan became more prominent. I wrote about the rhythm and the beat beginning to be heard more clearly in my life as I learned to listen to Donovan over time. He was quiet at the beginning ... some might say guarded but, as I continue to come to understand him, he was teaching me all along in a gentle way.

The perceived distance that I sensed within Donovan comes from a place of teaching. He is familiar with his stories from different places that were taught to him and passed down in relation. Donovan let me into his life gradually when

he was ready; perhaps when he knew that he trusted me to take care of the stories he wanted to share. His stories are reflected within the songs that he continues to learn. By the end of our time together in the research conversations he sang and told me stories of his drum and the songs he wanted to play in the future. I came to know more about Donovan through his relationship alongside Elder Francis Whiskeyjack and through his coming to understand the power within his stories and his songs that he played on his drum.

I think of him in relation to one of the last stories he shared. “My name is First Thunder” he told me. I recall our conversation and the follow up conversations with his family about where this name comes from. I remember him sharing with me the stories of his name and how he was given a name when he was a young boy in remembrance of a family member who passed away. It is his story. It is his song. It is his name and, through this name, I continue to learn about what is important to him and how the intergenerational teachings are nested deeply within him. The songs within the drum are who he is becoming as he now plays his drum alongside Elder Francis Whiskeyjack at the school he attends. The songs within are now visible in how he plays his drum alongside his family members on the reserve during the pow wows throughout the summer months. He has his own drum now and, with that, he shares more of who he is becoming. In the space of a different school when I first met him, there was little sense of this sharing space within him. His stories and the teachings within him were not visible or made known in the school. Despite a cultural worker being present

within his past school, he did not participate in planned activities. When a drummer was needed his school needed to hire someone from the larger community because he did not attend these events. When the opportunities to create a drum or to learn how to bead were provided in this school, he was not present. What I learned from Donovan is that the teachings within him are from a place and he has knowledge that is deeply nested within him. The stories that he knows from different places are stories that he will not share if the place and the relationships are not comfortable. When I first met him, the school was not a place where he could explore his inner gifts and share the knowledge that he had from different places. He took care of his stories in his own way by not participating, by not coming to the table in a group and learning in this way. Perhaps it was unsafe or not part of his teachings. He had learned that it is best within that particular school, to take care of his stories and not participate in this way for now.

Sky carries gifts within her and holds her stories closely. Sky learned that, in school places, she needs to take care of the stories she has learned. She goes about the day to day routine and seldom allows others to come to know her in the place of school. She participates in school with a rhythm that exists between the times of school and in the movement as she travels to different classes. People within school get to know parts of who she is despite her reluctance to become visible. There are gifts and stories nested deeply within her as she has learned to take care of her stories. People, at times, come to know parts of her life

accidentally or, perhaps, she lets some people get close. Sometimes in school she lets herself become more visible, for example, as I observed her beading with intricate designs, or sharing a story that she knows from other places. I did not understand the depths of where she was coming from when she shared in this way. She danced and moved with ease but most often this is not in school or classroom places. There were snippets of language and the strong sustaining stories of ceremony in her life and the life her family is composing but she holds on to most of these stories and shares them only outside of school places. When she does share at times in school places, she then holds back and closes up, perhaps realizing too much is being shared. Sky understands these stories and gifts should not be shared in the place of school because some people in the place might not understand and may begin to tell another story of them. Some people within a school may change who they want her to be because of what she shares. It is only in places like pow wows and travelling alongside her family that she can make visible who she is becoming and let herself live within this other world where she is at ease (Lugones, 1987). Sky skillfully negotiates the movement between worlds. She has learned to travel to multiple worlds and learned to be with more ease in each world (Lugones, 1987). She is a world traveller, she knows more worlds than those in schools might think she does; she has learned to take care of her stories and her family stories in school places.

## Hopes and Dreams

I reflect on the threads that weave their way throughout the youths' narrative accounts. We have had conversations in both school and community places over three years. Our conversations are filled with memories of people in places that we have come to know. Our stories shared, our tellings and re-tellings are temporal, they move backwards and forwards as we negotiated life and evolving research relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The stories shared between us teach me as I think *with* them. I continue to wonder about what they might be telling me as the youth shared their experiences and as we co-composed the narrative accounts. I lay the narratives side by side and they help me travel (Lugones, 1987) to those places where we shared but also to those places within memory, both their memories and mine. I will continue to honour the youth and the stories they shared with me. I am moved by their hopes and dreams. I learned through their stories many ways to think about the life I am making and the life we are making. I look back through the stories to earlier work and how I continue to grow through the teachings of the youth and the families.

Hopes and dreams express an optimistic view of the sharing spaces that we have travelled alongside each other. The threads of relationships that sustain is on my mind as I imagine each youth differently through their stories. The individual experiences of Lane, Donovan, and Sky and how they are composing their lives will continue to shape my research in the future.

I am reminded through their stories of the relationships lost and gained and the ones that all of us collectively try to maintain. Through our stories I think of the mothers, the fathers, the grandmothers, the grandfathers, our ancestors in different places and the stories that came before us. I think of the people within our lives, and the relationships that help us in the present, that help us to continue to become (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These relationships that I am thinking of are not limited to people. The relationships are closely linked to the gifts within the places that we have known.

Within each place there are memories that sustain us and that help us remain connected to our home-places. These memories show us the way home that is marked deeply within us (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The stories of Lane, Donovan and Sky help me to remember this as they shared places that they had lived, travelled to, and from and in-between in their lives. I will always be reminded by the trees, the rocks, the running waters in each of their stories, but also in the gifts that they have; gifts which come from places where they have connected. The places are geographic markers, but in many of the stories they are the relations and the gifts that are passed down within these places that are most visible between us.

I believe as I listen to the stories shared with me that gifts come from inter-generational places. They rest within us and some of the stories taught from long ago are embodied in us (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986). There are memories and teachings that come from places that we have travelled to within our lives. I

imagine for a moment the long gravel road and how as a young boy Donovan learned from an Elder within this home- place. The teachings passed on are contextual, they are in the form of language, or the drum, but also in the connection between people, as they walk alongside each other in these places that they have travelled.

These memory markers fill my mind in the present. They help me travel to my own places within memory as I think *with* the stories. I see the landscapes of school and home-places and the stories that come alive when they are shared with me in relation. The stories that are told as we co-created time-lines or annals together helped us to look back at school and life stories. It is also within this space of sharing that I began to understand how certain stories are deeply connected to protocols of relationship. The stories become known over time and relation. The stories emerge as the conversational spaces shift in relation (Clandinin et al., 2006). The youth watched and observed and know within themselves when it is time and when they will tell the stories of the people and places in their lives. The youth continue to teach me, slowly, gently, over time.

## Chapter 7:

### Worlds of Curriculum Making:

#### Familial Curriculum Worlds and School Curriculum Worlds

*As I think about the stories I shared with Elder Bob Cardinal on various theories I was learning at the university, I recall that he asked me questions about school and I excitedly responded. One day, as we worked together on his land preparing for a sweat lodge ceremony, he said, "That is good what you are learning ... but don't forget about my granddaughter when you teach her at the school." My thoughts were, "How could I forget her? I see her all the time." While I wondered what he meant by this, and why he said it in the way, he slowly, carefully, gently started to tell me a story. He began his teaching with questions, like he so often does, his way of getting me to think in a different way. "Sean, when you speak, you talk up and down, how people go from one level to another in their lives. ... Well what if I teach her in a circle? The way I teach my granddaughter is by starting in the South ... where the grandmothers are. It is where wisdom is." He took his hand and, with his finger, began to draw in the air. He painted an imaginary line moving to the west and said, "Sean, in the West, it is where bear and knowledge live ... that is my four directions teachings ... that is how I teach my granddaughter each day."*

*Elder Bob then brought his hand from the point in the west and drew the next part of his circle in the sky, as he moved slowly with his finger to the North. "Sean, in the North, in the North that is where buffalo and responsibility reside ...*



*that is my four directions teachings ... that is how I teach my granddaughter each day.” His hand now moved in a gentle way, in a soft way, slowly and purposefully, he brought his finger down forming that familiar circle shape.*

*“Sean, in the East, in the East that is where eagle and wisdom lives. ... and that is maybe someday where I will go ... that is how I teach my granddaughter each day ... that is my four directions teachings.” At this time he slowly closed the circle ... moving his hand down ... his finger moved to another place on the skyline painting that he was creating in his teaching.*

*“Sean, in the South, in the South we always go back home to the grandmothers ... that is how I teach my granddaughter each day ... it is my four directions teachings ... it is how I think about her identity. It is how I teach her. Now don’t forget about her in school.” ... “Don’t forget about her in school now” he said, as he smiled and looked at me. I think about that story often and I share it when I can because it stays with me as I think about the lives of people, their stories and my stories in relation to them.*

Elder Bob Cardinal and his teachings may be considered just stories from a Cree man. I see his teachings differently. His teachings inform and sustain many people in various ways; they are not just stories. While some might suggest the teachings from Elder Bob Cardinal are just fables, to others, like his granddaughter and people within his community who are taught by looking at the world quite differently than through or with the dominant discourses, his teachings are what matters. His teachings are grounded in his experiences and

how he was taught to live in the world; it is what counts in their lives. I think of the many stories Elder Bob Cardinal and others shared about their lives and experiences in different places. The stories shared are based on inter-generational teachings and are passed on in the present, while always being mindful of the future and what is yet to come.

As I turn, in this last chapter back to my research and the narrative accounts of the youth and their families, I think of Elder Bob Cardinal and how the stories he shared with me have taught me. As I think of the importance of stories and the experiences of youth and their families in schools, I am transported back to school and my life in schools. I have been a teacher in various grade levels in multiple places over time. As I think about my life as a teacher now, I also think about how the stories I heard and lived throughout the research; I lay these stories metaphorically alongside each other. I think about how the resonant threads I wrote about in Chapter six inform my teaching practice. In my current position as a teacher educator, I think about the ways in which I can engage in conversations with teacher education students that include this research. In thinking about how the stories of the youth and families shape my work as a teacher educator, I do so in ways that honour their stories. I wonder with the story of Elder Bob Cardinal and his granddaughter and think about how I had so excitedly shared the theories that I was learning and the subject matter from school places. Elder Bob Cardinal asked me to not forget other ways of thinking about the world and, in particular, to remember his granddaughter and what he

was teaching her in a place outside of school. There is a separation between places ... a great divide. In this moment I can see how much it matters to attend to multiple places; I carefully reflect on what is being asked of me by Elder Bob Cardinal within his teachings.

### **A Curriculum of Lives**

The experiences of the youth and their families are places of wisdom from which I need to continue to learn. The school places where I teach, are places where Elder Bob Cardinal is asking me “to not forget” in what I do. When I think of his words, he is asking me to think of lives, and to honour different ways of knowing, not only when I teach his granddaughter in school but also when I teach other youth. As I look across the narrative accounts, the teachings of Elder Bob Cardinal and Jean Clandinin encourage me to think *with* the stories and the lives of the youth within the research. Jean Clandinin asks me to think about curriculum in a different way, to think about a *curriculum of lives* (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011). At first when she spoke to me of thinking about a curriculum of lives, I was uncertain, as I had not thought of curriculum in this way before. My first response to the word curriculum is that it is the program of studies, the indicators and outcomes of subject matter; it is what I adhere to as a teacher. I think back to earlier conversations around the word curriculum and the tension that lives within me as I think of it as a document that prescribes my teaching; it governs both what and how I am to teach. I think with both the words

of Elder Bob Cardinal and Jean Clandinin as I continue to shift my thinking about what I mean by curriculum as I work to understand some of the experiences that I have lived alongside the youth and their families in the research process. Their words help me to understand the possibilities within curriculum when I think of curriculum from a different vantage point, when I think of curriculum as a course of lives, rather than a course of study.

Drawing on Huber et al.'s (2011) work *Places of Curriculum Making* helps me to further understand the multiple meanings of curriculum and how experience is a way of thinking about curriculum both in and out of school places. It is through the reading and reflection on multiple meanings of curriculum that I find new ways to think of what Elder Bob Cardinal was saying when he asked me “to not forget his granddaughter.” I begin to understand what Jean Clandinin means when she looks at curriculum. She encourages me to think about life making as curriculum.

### **From Within a Tradition of Curriculum Scholarship**

In *Places of Curriculum Making* (2011), Huber et al. took a reflective turn to understand some of the ways curriculum scholars have understood curriculum over time. Earlier Connelly and Clandinin (1988) also looked across the field of curriculum scholarship and did something similar. The tradition of curriculum scholarship in which Connelly and Clandinin engage traces back to the work of Schwab and further back to the work of Dewey. The work in this tradition is

grounded in Dewey's (1938) theory of experience as education. For Dewey, experience, with the two criteria of continuity and interaction, is education. While schooling is sometimes educational, education is so much more than schooling. This distinction between education and schooling that Dewey made so many years ago is central to the ideas of Connelly and Clandinin.

Theorizing on Schwab's (1963, 1973) four curriculum commonplaces, that is, teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) conceptualized curriculum at the intersection of these curriculum commonplaces. They worked from a view of curriculum as a course of life rather than the more common use of curriculum as a course of study. Working from Dewey's fundamental ideas of experience and Schwab's ideas of curriculum, Clandinin and Connelly (1992) conceptualized curriculum as a course of life being composed in schools with teachers and students as their lives met in relation with subject matter and within a nested set of milieus or contexts. Teachers and children made curriculum together, that is, teachers were curriculum makers alongside children in classrooms. These earlier works shaped further studies with both teachers and youth in multiple landscapes providing further understandings of the possibilities for understanding curriculum making within school places. Huber and Clandinin (2005) and Huber et al. (2005) provide a framework to help me understand the experiences within my research as I think with their term "curriculum of lives" and what that might mean to understanding the experiences of the youth and families that I have walked alongside. While in the earlier work, these curriculum

scholars studied the meeting of lives in schools, their focus was firmly on curriculum making as occurring in schools. In 2011, Huber et al. began to realize from their studies alongside children, families, and teachers, both in and out of schools, that curriculum making was not only situated in schools but was also situated in family and community places. As they worked with children, families and teachers they realized that in home-places and in communities, there was also other curriculum making going on, and that it was important to name it as curriculum making. More akin to what Dewey might have seen as education outside of schools, they conceptualized and named this curriculum making as familial curriculum making, a kind of curriculum making that occurs in a different place from school curriculum making.

### **Familial Worlds of Curriculum Making and School Worlds of Curriculum Making**

Huber et al.'s (2011) conceptualization of familial curriculum making follows the tradition of curriculum scholarship that goes back to Dewey's work and to Schwab's work. In order to make explicit the concept of familial curriculum making, I draw on Schwab's four curriculum commonplaces (1969, 1973). Schwab imagined the commonplaces as a set of neutral terms that were always at play in any discussion or argument about curriculum. In Schwab's view the curriculum commonplaces of teacher, learner, subject matter, and milieu frame school curriculum making. For example, in any curriculum situation, there

is always a teacher in relation with one or more learners in relation with subject matter such as biology or history or the knowledge of another discipline. All of these interactions occur within a nested set of milieus in classrooms, schools, school districts and so on. Huber et al. draw on Schwab's four commonplaces to show that they can also be used to think about the curriculum making that happens outside of schools as children and families compose their lives outside of school places. In their study they realized that there was a curriculum being made with families outside of school in different home and community contexts with rich subject matter such as gardening, baking, or sewing to name a few examples. Teachers were parents, grandparents, coaches, or other youth. They also came to realize the importance of intergenerational influences and rhythms that shaped who the children are and were becoming.

As they first did their work they concentrated on understanding that familial curriculum making took place in a different place than school curriculum making, with different teachers, and different subject matters. However, as they continued to engage in their work they realized that from the child or learner's point of view, these different places of curriculum making constituted different worlds in Lugones (1987) sense of worlds and world travelling. In their work they make clear there are two distinct worlds of familial and school curriculum making. Each day, children moved from their familial world of curriculum making to their school world of curriculum making and back again. It is this latter development within this tradition of curriculum scholarship that I bring

forward to think about the work I am engaging in alongside the aboriginal youth and their families.

### **World Travelling Between Worlds of Curriculum Making**

As I thought about the youth and families with whom I worked, I recognized there was a sharp contrast between the worlds of familial curriculum making and the school world of curriculum making for the youth and their families. The youth and their families travelled to school each day on multiple buses with different routes or for many hours from the reserve to the urban setting to the school world of curriculum making. As they physically travelled they began to recognize within themselves the necessary changes required to participate in a place that is different than what they have known, live, and also imagine. The place of school curriculum making is different than the place they left each morning. For them, it constituted a different world. Through the research conversations, their two worlds of curriculum making became more visible to me: I realized the youth and their families are aware of how they construct themselves, and are constructed by others, in these two different worlds of curriculum making. Participating in the world of school curriculum making requires that they give up, or shift who they are, in order to participate. When they return to the world of familial curriculum making, they often had to give up or once again shift from who they were in the school curriculum making world.



Some youth and families can metaphorically travel with more ease between these curriculum making worlds because they understand the two places more clearly. Perhaps, it is through their own experiences or hearing the stories of experience of family members that helps them in their negotiation of the school world of curriculum making. Sky's mother's stories help me make sense of the negotiation between these two worlds of curriculum making, these worlds created by the two places of curriculum making. Sky's mother explained that her girls act differently in a city school and that it is different than the community where they grew up. She prepares her children to understand how the city, people and schools are different than what they know within their home-community. Her mother's sharing and through the stories of experiences of her older sisters who participated in urban schools created a space for Sky to understand these differences and to respond otherwise in these different places. Understanding what counts in this new urban school place, what can be shared and what should be held close in terms of what is important within their family are what they have come to know through their experiences. Sky's mom says it clearly when she says that "for our family, school is for learning the subjects." She also speaks to her knowing of different places when she gathers her family at the end of the school year to travel on the pow wow trail, sharing what they know and spending time together in relation amongst other people who understand what is also important in their lives. Together as a family they negotiate the travel between

home, community and school worlds. They continue to learn how to negotiate and take care of each other as they travel between worlds and within them.

Through the experiences shared alongside Skye, Lane, and Donovan and their families I heard stories of dis-ease and discomfort (Lugones, 1987) in the travel between the familial and school curriculum making worlds. I learned of their dis-ease within their world travel as they shared their stories but also as I saw them hold on to certain stories that are *sacred* and *secret* (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995; Crites, 1971). For Lane, school is a place where he meets friends but does not know the teachers or many other students. School is a place that he negotiates with the help of friends. When Lane goes to his home, experiences in his school curriculum making world are rarely discussed. School as a place and as a curriculum making world for Lane is clearly separated from his home place and his familial curriculum making world. He has recognized the place of school as a place that he needs to attend, but not as a place to share. It is a temporary holding spot that is uncomfortable. He lives with dis-ease in this school curriculum making world. Lane has gifts in the arts and within music. He can play and create but rarely does he share these gifts within the place of school. He recognizes the school landscape as an institutional space; it is recognizable through his experiences and through the stories of his family. However, it is a place of dis-ease (Lugones, 1987) and he holds his most intimate gifts close to him because of what he knows of school. School is a temporary place that he

attends for now. It is a place that will not take him away from the stories he knows.

Many stories that are shared with me are stories of families sustaining each other and negotiating the familial and school curriculum making worlds. I am reminded of how the youth held stories close of leaving school, missing school, struggling at home ... at times there was no water, no money, no transportation. It is within the complexity of their lives that they have learned to take care of their stories and their stories within their families and their home places. I too wondered if it was safe to share some of their experiences at school. It is over time that these stories became more visible to me as I began to understand the ongoing negotiations between the two worlds of home and school. The travel the youth and their families did between these two worlds made visible that there are parts of their family stories that are held closely and not shared so as to not have to give up more of themselves in the school worlds. What keeping silent and secret in the school curriculum making world *cost* each family and each youth varied, these costs are evidenced in the tensions that exist.

By trying to hold on and value who they are in their familial curriculum making worlds, I believe they recognize that the school curriculum making world is a “for now” world but the stories from their familial curriculum making worlds will remain long after they leave the school curriculum making world. Perhaps when Elder Bob Cardinal spoke about his granddaughter, he too knew the temporality of schools. Stories of the familial curriculum making worlds are

etched on the arms of the youth with tattoos of belonging and family. They at time appear within the regalia. They emerge in the stories shared of life in different places. They too emerge in the words of Elder Bob Cardinal when he says “don’t forget my granddaughter”; a reminder that his granddaughter carried and lived multiple intergenerational teachings always.

### **Learning to Travel to Their Worlds Through Travelling to Mine**

As I write and I reflect I often travel within myself to places within my own familial curriculum making worlds. I reflect on stories of my experiences as I have lived in different places over time to help me think of how I may be “arrogantly perceiving” (Lugones, 1987, p. 4) the stories of the youth and families. My life has been composed through my experiences on a farm surrounded by wheat fields and the prairie grasses that I used to recognize. I am Woodland Cree but I grew up in a place with a non-aboriginal family. My life is filled with the complexity of multiple worlds, which I continue to travel within. My early beginnings are situated within rural places, which are significantly different than the world that I continue to come to know in the present within my reserve home-place. I now travel in my life physically and metaphorically through imagined landscapes to my home-places. In my ancestral home-place, my stories are connected with names that are connected to stories of the past. My names on the reserve and within the community include the stories of my family name within this place. These stories that I have come to know in this place help

me as I continue to think about identity, language, culture, family stories, and who I am in relation to these stories. These stories within me, and that I continue to learn from, also shape who my daughters are and how they are composing their lives in the present, and how they might compose their lives in the future. My daughters and I are Woodland Cree. We have multiple families and within these multiple worlds we live and tell multiple stories that will continue to reach across different places over time.

The importance of these identifying markers and the ability to travel within, and to, other worlds is significant as I engaged alongside aboriginal youth and their families. I think of the rhythm the youth know within themselves, the names they have received in ceremony. I think of what the youth know from the early landscapes in their lives and even before this time. I can imagine the drum playing voices calling and how the youth heard these songs and recognize them deeply within (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). There are rhythms and certain stories that I will never be able to know in the same way as the youth, because they have experienced the richness in their surroundings. The sights and sounds ... drums and dancing ... but also the contemporary strumming of guitars and teachings helped shape who the youth are becoming. I believe it is important to try and understand beyond the experiences that I have lived and to continue to think about who I am and where I am from, as it creates spaces within me to understand what I do not know. At school with what I teach and how I teach, I, at times, have difficulty hearing or travelling to unfamiliar places (Lugones, 1987).

It is difficult to understand the stories that are different than the ones I have lived. It is uncomfortable and hard work to travel to another person's world because it is different than my own and, through the travel, I am challenged, I am put into states of dis-ease as I try to make sense of what I do not know. I wonder how the stories I have come to know about the rhythms of different places within the youth and the families will shape my future teaching and how I can create spaces for what I do not know.

As I look across the three narrative accounts within my research I continue to respond in light of the curriculum commonplaces in Schwab's work (1969, 1973) to help me further understand the experiences of the aboriginal youth and their families in urban school settings. Reflecting on Schwab's four curriculum commonplaces alongside the experiences of the youth and their families helps makes visible the familial curriculum making worlds within their lives.

### **Subject Matter**

I look across the narrative accounts and reflect on the subject matter in the lives of the youth as I think of the familial curriculum making that they have experienced and how subject matter can be looked at with different vantage points. Subject matter as thought of by Schwab links more clearly to the disciplinary knowledge of physics, biology, history, literature and mathematics (1973). However, subject matter in Donovan's familial curriculum making world revolves around his life experiences. I learned through the sharing of his stories

what it is was like for him to attend Cree ceremonies at a very young age and how he understood what it meant to live in this way, within these places of teaching. The subject matters were the ceremonies but also the way of living within the ceremonies which included the language and protocols of working in relation with people from his community. The experience of receiving the name First Thunder in ceremony is also subject matter in his familial curriculum making world as was drumming, picking berries, gathering medicines, and the cartography of different places.

For Lane the subject matter of his familial curriculum making world was music making with the piano and guitar as well as the places where his early learning took place. The subject matter of the guitar moved beyond playing a song in Lane's familial curriculum making world. The familial curriculum making in his life included the careful and purposeful process of learning through intergenerational teachers. Lane continues to compose music despite the complexities of world travelling (Lugones, 1987) as he moves/was moved from place to place. The subject matter of his familial curriculum making world is a different subject matter than the subject matter in his school curriculum making world and moves beyond art class or school band. The subject matter and the intimate knowledge learned in his familial curriculum making world are the deep connections to honouring and living in a good way. It is through the understanding within himself that relationships are foremost and an ethic to live by as he composes his life.

Sky's dance and the beat that she follows as she weaves between worlds may be the subject matter that is most important in her world of familial curriculum making. Her subject matter comes in the shape and form of the ancestors' stories and teachings that are deeply connected to land, place, and language. Her stories learned in her familial curriculum making world cannot be learned through an Aboriginal Studies class, a culture club, or Cree teaching hour within a school curriculum making world. The subject matter of her familial curriculum making world that she slowly makes visible to me is present in the places of honouring and celebrating alongside others as a young female learner. The subject matter of her familial curriculum making world is situated within the pow wow trails and the drives between places. The learning about the dance through the stories shared inter-generationally are part of the subject matter of her familial curriculum making world. The stories of this subject matter are told seasonally and within the relational spaces of understanding who she is in relation to the subject matter being taken up in her familial curriculum making world. There is ongoing growth in this subject matter where every detail is significant and the sharing of the outcomes in this subject matter are measured through the people who participate alongside her. The subject matter is alive and animate, it is taught alongside others.

There are silences in the spaces of subject matter between the familial and school curriculum making worlds. Unspoken stories of familial curriculum making are held closely within the youth and their families as they recognize the



places where they can share stories. Often their stories of subject matter from the familial curriculum making worlds are not shared or made visible in school curriculum making worlds.

### **Teacher**

The teacher in Schwab's conceptualization of curricular commonplaces are those who teach (1969, 1973). When curriculum making is situated in schools, often teachers and administrators are seen to be the teachers. Rarely are other students seen to be teachers. In familial curriculum making worlds there are many more teachers. As I reflect on the narrative accounts it was rare that conversations with teachers and schools were considered, that is, rarely were teachers and school curriculum making mentioned. The teachers in the familial curriculum making worlds of the youth and their families were intergenerational knowledge keepers. I have images of teachers in my mind of Kookum Muriel, Elder Francis Whiskeyjack and the teachers from the home-place community within Donovan's familial curriculum making world.

The teachers in the stories of familial curriculum making became visible to me through what was shared. Many stories were connected to places outside of school landscapes. As the youth moved between schools, at times their school curriculum making worlds shifted. Donovan changed schools between Grades 8 and 9 as he moved to Beaver Hill School, a place where culture is an important part of the school curriculum making. The focus of the school curriculum making

is different within this school place. Elder Francis Whiskeyjack is a teacher and someone who teaches what is often also taught in familial curriculum making worlds. He works alongside youth and engages in Cree teachings. He does not have a specific subject matter that is mandated by the province, the district or the school. His teaching starts at the beginning of each day as he leads the school alongside youth in a morning song to give thanks to the Creator. In this way Donovan continues to find a space to learn from his teacher Elder Francis Whiskeyjack. In some ways Elder Francis Whiskeyjack is a teacher akin to Donovan's Kookum Muriel, an important teacher in Donovan's familial curriculum making world. Donovan and Elder Francis Whiskeyjack are seen often walking side by side in the school and drumming side by side with their own beat on the drum that they made together. The teacher in Donovan's story is someone who helps him stay connected to his home-place as he negotiated an unfamiliar school curriculum making world. It is a teacher that is an Elder that works in relation alongside youth by creating, drumming and sharing stories of teachings from places familiar to Donovan and his early beginnings. These stories come from a place of experience and from a teacher that works outside classroom spaces. It is through the drum and the teachings alongside Elder Francis Whiskeyjack that a space is created where Donovan travels home to his community and to earlier memories within this place that are important in who he is becoming, and to how he is composing his life in a world of school curriculum making.

The teachers in Lane's familial curriculum making include those people storied in his memories of the reserve of his mother's home-place where he connected with both the place and the people within it. His teachers also included his uncle who reminded him of how to participate respectfully in ceremony and pay attention to the teachings being shared. His earlier memories also include the teaching of music through the stories and experiences of his grandfather who also played the guitar. There are teachers within these places that look different than those who are seen as teachers in his school curriculum making world. The teachings from his familial curriculum making world are nested deeply within him as these teachers sustain him in places outside his school curriculum making world. The teachers within Lane's familial curriculum making world have taught him values situated in place and what is important in a family. The values passed on are mostly present in the stories shared and his reaction to life changing situations alongside his little brother. Lane carefully invited his little brother to events at school and took care of him as he entered the place of school. His little brother was a teacher to Lane in his familial curriculum making world and he knew within himself that he should take care of him, it was what he was taught. Through Lane's junior high year his little brother was removed from their home and removed from the place within his family. His little brother was relocated outside of town on a farm where Lane could not reach him with ease. Lane's demeanor shifted after this event happened. In some ways it seemed as if there was no one left to share the room; there was no one left to take care of as he had

learned to do. The experience of losing a teacher, his brother and best friend within the familial curriculum making world cannot be minimized nor can it be completely understood through the narrative accounts that we co-composed. The experience of loss in relationship and the taking care of a brother as a teacher to Lane was most noticeable in the sadness through sharing these stories of his family. Teachers in his familial curriculum making world included both the people within his life at home and the responsibilities to these relationships that he had learned along the way.

Sky in her familial curriculum making world shared stories of being taught at an early age through the experiences shared within her family. The sister stories of negotiating a school landscape and how this lives out in the lives of the women in this family are sustaining stories that ease her travel within the world of school curriculum making. They shared stories with me often of the Elder within their family. Their Kookum rarely spoke English and had taught them about language, protocols, and values of what is important in their lives as Cree women. The dancing, beading, and the adherence to teachings within their lives is learned in familial curriculum making worlds alongside her. I have a sense of the sharing of knowledge and how each sister in the family has been taught through her grandmother's stories and their mother's stories. The girls within the family shared stories of school they had experienced. The classes, subject, teachers and milieu are discussed in their own ways and carried forward between the sisters as they negotiate the school landscape together. The teachers in the familial

curriculum making world are the siblings who share alongside one another. The process of teaching and sharing has been learned from places within their community alongside teachers who have shared with them in a similar way. The teachings they have learned in community places are sustaining stories for the family as they negotiate the experiences within the urban school landscape. Their stories are inter-generational teachings where the women in a family continue to learn from each other.

I look back at the stories shared of teachers in the lives of the youth and their families. The two worlds of school curriculum making and familial curriculum making are in sharp contrast. I continue to learn by reflecting on my own experiences of teaching as I listen to the stories of different types of teachers outside the place of school. I recognize that I need to listen closely to the stories of the youth as they share stories of their teachers within their lives from different places. In many ways I have privileged the commonplace of teacher in school as the person who is responsible for the curriculum and, to a larger extent, the learning and teaching of the youth. I begin to understand through the experience of youth and families that the teachers within their lives move far beyond those named as teachers in the place of school. It is the teachers and the interaction between the youth and their teachers in out of school places (Huber et al., 2011) that helps me understand what might be most important in the lives of youth and their families.

**Milieu**

Milieu is the place of school within Schwab's commonplaces of curriculum that includes the dominant institutional, linguistic, and social forces that structure school (1969, 1973). As Huber et al. (2011) describe the milieu in familial curriculum making worlds, they include both home and community places and individual family members that shape it. Milieu is important in the lives of the youth, it includes many home-places across time. The milieu is connected to place and the memories and experiences within the places that the youth shared with me. The stories include people and the relations that live within these places. They also include the stories that live within the memories of the youth. Milieu is composed in each one of the youth's lives differently. Donovan's milieu is the kitchen table where he played board games with his Kookum and the back and forth negotiation between his place in the city and his ancestral home land. The stories of gathering times at pow wows and taking care of his relations, as he was taken care of by his extended family, are present in the stories. Donovan's story includes an ongoing negotiation with how milieu is composed within multiple places. The conceptualization of milieu in the familial curriculum making world is not static or fixed, it involves multiple meanings and places within Donovan's stories. Many stories become visible to me as I continued to think of milieu in a familial sense and how this is composed in Donovan's life. The milieu in his familial curriculum making world are quite different than the milieu in the dominant narratives of school curriculum making.

His life and the people within his life are family compositions that are not as recognizable or familiar in the world of school curriculum making. Within the subject matter and in the books or posters that hang on the walls of schools the family unit and the places where families live are far different than the experiences Donovan continues to live on the landscapes he knows intimately. The milieu in his experiences are connected to the rhythm and the response of his family and how they negotiate the *for now* in their stories. His family takes care of each other and holds on to each other's stories within shifting plotlines and on multiple landscapes. The milieu in the familial curriculum making world is the composition of family and how it is connected to the multiplicity within places over time. There are fibres within these stories that weave and stretch out over and across time and place. Milieu in Donovan's stories includes how he honours his family stories and the places that he has lived alongside family members. His stories are different than what I have known and are sustaining stories in his life of who he is and who he wants to be both in school and outside of school places (Huber et al., 2011).

Lane's stories are of flowing waters of rapids and memories situated within places where he has lived. His familial curriculum making world includes the longing for the calm waters where it is more recognizable to see where he might be going or where he might be living. Milieu is connected in his stories to the back and forth negotiation between reserve and urban places; between what he is presently living and the memories he holds of earlier times. Milieu for Lane is

resisting the dominant narratives of school and the classroom. Lane, in an effort to hold on to stories of his early memories, often resists and moves against the school rhythm. He recognizes the landscape and he also knows within his stories that schools and classrooms are not places that can capture or allow him to understand the complexity in his life. It is in his ability to resist imposition and to keep moving that also sustains memories from the different places and people from whom he has learned. It is the rocks and waters calling in these places that keep his memory of what is possible in relation alive.

I am reminded of the milieu of his familial curriculum making world and how Lane has been shaped through the experiences in his life. Life events that included his brother being moved out of his home and away from him had deep and lasting effects on the story that he was composing. In many ways this life event changed him. Milieu in a school curriculum making world could not begin to understand what this part of his life looked like or felt, nor how it would affect him. School and the classroom became even more removed than it already was in his life. Lane was experiencing a growing void of relationships and a classroom that was a holding place for the moments when he would stop by.

Lane's life grew more complex as he found friends that would take care of him on different landscapes and as he moved between places on a nightly basis. Many nights he told me he slept outside and found comfort and warmth with what he could find. The milieu in his life in this moment is far removed from a classroom or a school and the environment within these places. His familial



curriculum making world is connected to this experience as a boy who is reaching out for the calm waters of family and finds himself suddenly between places, reaching out for a place that is sustaining or comforting. It is in what is not present in the stories that I understand something of how this might look in his life. I learn through conversations of the memories and the longing for a home-place that shapes how milieu is composed in his life. The environments in his life includes family and the difficult places of family as he negotiates who he is. There are strong relationships and memories of earlier times in his life as he looks back and tells me through his stories. There is also a resistance and breaking away from the family unit that he struggles with, at times played out in anger or in pushing away the temporary solutions. This paradox in Lane's life is evident in the present where he is now with a different family on the road with his job in the carnival. Each week he travels with his road crew family from city to city unloading, setting up, staying for a week and then taking down, only to move down the road to another location and the same routine. It is an example of how his experiences bump up against the milieu of the dominant narratives of school curriculum making world. When the milieu in the life of youth is in constant motion it becomes increasingly difficult to understand the complexity in what might be happening. The resistances in Lane's stories are manifested in the creation of worlds that he can live within and travel between but it is also in how he can manage to negotiate each world with skill (Lugones, 1987). A smile ... a performance ... a short song that he can play with ease emerges from time to time

in school places satisfying those who are moved with the showmanship that covers over the complexity within a life. In school places some people yearn for more. Perhaps they might want to coax more out of him; one more song might direct the potential. The ability to create a space to truly hear his songs from the deeper places within may never be possible within the place of school.

Sky and her familial curriculum making is the in-betweenness of places travelled as she moves with a rhythm and purpose in mind on the pow wow trail. The milieu within her stories are the family stories within this place, and how they sustain relationships and memories on the long roads of the summer celebration time. There is dance and movement and the stories within these places of honouring and celebration. Her stories are sustaining stories, passed down inter-generationally, emerging in the present telling, always imagining a future. Her milieu is her family side by side in solidarity; this is how I write about her familial curriculum making world.

The milieu within her familial curriculum making world stretches back to earlier times when her ancestors lived and told certain stories within seasonal rhythms. The milieu is part Cree and part Stoney and includes teachings connected to a home-place and the rhythms and stories shared in these places. As Sky's mom shared the early moments of their name and where their family name came from, she shared the importance of tradition, spirituality and language in her family stories. Perhaps it is through the dance and the movement that these

stories remain visible and alive. Keeping the stories moving forward is important in their lives. The grandmothers within their stories ask this of them.

The milieu in Sky's familial curriculum making are the outside places and teachings that come alive when listening for the wind or paying attention to the movement of the trees. The teachings become more visible to me when I reflect on the stories that Sky and her family shared. I imagine the classroom place and her place within it and how she negotiates this place. I have a picture in my mind of the walls of the classroom place suddenly being pushed back like a cardboard cut-out and in its place the grass begins to flow and the trees become the walls of where she learns. The milieu in a familial curriculum making world is all around her, and it is a classroom and a teacher in a different place; the subject matters and the learning are different here.

The milieu in Sky's familial curriculum making world are most recognizable in the movement and stories of the dance. The pow wow stories are weekly experiences for the family where teachers come together from different places. There is knowledge in observation and spending time alongside each other in the dance and movement. There is knowledge that is contextual as movement between different geographical locations also requires moving and responding in different ways to not only the drum, but also to the protocols and inter-generational teachings that are present during these times. The responding and moving alongside each other by recognizing the intricacies and the stories that have been woven in each place are important. This milieu is different than in

the school curriculum making world that suggests a certain course or pathway within a school place. The milieu in her school curriculum making world is in the place of classrooms during the specific times of school. It is through Sky's stories of her life in different places that I recognize the rhythm of the milieu within her familial curriculum making world. The stories that are nested deeply within her (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and that are most visible outside of school places continue to shape who she is becoming. As I listen to her, she shares stories of knowing who she is because of what others in her family continue to teach her. The place of school and the milieu in her school curriculum making world is a place where she has learned to negotiate through the stories shared with her of her sisters who have been there before and learned to negotiate these places. Classrooms, schools, subjects and teachers are stories that have been shared between Sky's family. They recognize that within the place of school you transform yourself to be able to move within it, but you also do not lose yourself when it asks too much of you.

This separation of two worlds of curriculum making plays out in Sky's story as she excels in school and has learned to move with more ease (Lugones, 1987) within her school curriculum making world. She has also learned that in this place of school that she needs to hold on to certain parts of who she is. It becomes important within her life to not share all of who she is. In many ways holding on to the stories protects her, sustains her within this institutional landscape. Sky and her family actively negotiate their lives around the rhythm of

school but within this larger institutional rhythm they find spaces where they hold on to who they are and how they are composing their lives. The school is a place for learning, it is a relationship that is needed, but not one that is going to write over who they are, or might become.

### **Learner**

Learners, the children and youth within Schwab's curriculum commonplaces, are in relation to the teacher and subject matter in school (1969, 1973). Learning is dependent and determined by the relationship between the commonplaces. It is a framework for understanding how knowledge is delivered to students in schools but it fails to create possibilities to think of how learning and other ways of learning are possible in places outside of school.

Huber et al.'s (2011) understanding of learner as shifting, moving, and creating in multiple places alongside others provides another perspective in how learning can be considered. The familial curriculum making world leaves open the possibilities for the learner and honours the people and places within experiences that go beyond school and classrooms. There is multiplicity and hope with this understanding of learner as it suggests that learners are not static within this process and that there is possibility in who they are becoming beyond places of school and beyond how school might assess what has been learned.

As I consider learner in the familial curriculum making worlds of the youth I see them as aware and guided by the places of wisdom within themselves.

As learners they move in relation to what they are aware of from different places. I believe the learner in the familial curriculum making world cannot be considered without thinking about the embodied knowing (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986). There is learning that occurs through the sharing of stories differently than the ways a school might conceptualize or measure learning. There is learning that takes place through observation in multiple places that occurs in the youths' familial curriculum making worlds. Who they are as learners and what they learn are connected to the inter-generational teachings that are passed on over time and within the context of place.

I reflect on the conversations with youth and family members in different places over the past three years. I have heard stories that move beyond my own experiences as I think about what they teach me. It is difficult to assess the learning that comes from the connection to a home-place or the stories that are passed on through the teachings that come from inter-generational places. It is difficult to assess the wind and the rain, the stones and the water, and the stories that are taught with these elements in mind. The learning that occurs within different places that guides the youth in the present is difficult to articulate with words, but it is more visible within the stories that I have listened to in relationship over time.

Learner in the familial curriculum making world of Donovan's stories is ongoing and alongside people and the stories within places that he knows. There is knowledge in his stories, as he understands the details and protocols in helping

the Elder at his school prepare for the sweatlodge ceremony that occurs each month. There is knowledge in being alongside an Elder that is guiding him in his life in and outside of school places (Huber et al., 2011) helping him negotiate the complexities within this landscape. His learning is active and animate as he tells stories of creation and shares them with me as he teaches me in these moments of relationship. I did not know many of the creation stories that he shared. The learning through the stories becomes visible over time and through the relationship emerging. Donovan's stories held the intimate knowledge he knows of the medicines from within his community and what it means for him to smudge each morning; cleansing himself in a way that he has been taught in a different place. His life rhythm includes those moments when he is at home by himself smudging both in the morning and at night but also in the moments when he is having difficulties and wants to think in a different way. The stories and teachings he learned from different places continue to become visible. As we sat together, he shifted back to earlier memories of his family and, in particular, his Kookum Muriel a significant teacher in his life. He explained some of her stories and how what she taught him long ago makes more sense to him now. She was an Elder to everyone and through these teachings he continues to make sense of who he is in relation to what has been shared with him. The story of First Thunder and when he received his name at a very young age to honour the passing of a sibling is becoming more prominent in his life and how he is living it. He now thinks of songs as he now knows words and honour songs that he did not

previously know. Donovan is now in a place in his life where the teachings are continuing to shift who he is becoming in and outside of school places (Huber et al., 2011). His teachings and how he is learning is connected to earlier experiences that will not become visible in the place of school or through the subject matter in a class; it emerges through who he is becoming in relationship with the people around him and the stories that he has been taught in earlier times.

Sky as a learner cannot be defined through the lens of school. Learning includes relationships that sustain her in school and learning that takes place outside of school that helps her arrive and stay in school. The intimate knowledge of multiple landscapes are present in her stories. She knows the details of places travelled and relationships formed in multiple places over time. Her stories of learning include the teachings she receives outside of school and on the pow wow trail where she learns new teachings from different places. Her learning is ongoing; fluid and responsive to the people around her and the places where they are learning alongside one another. The teachings from the women in her life are made visible over time and shared in the intimacy of relationship and protocols that are different than what can be learned in the place of school. It is learning through relationship that is connected to home-community places and the intergenerational teachings that come from living within these places. Sky's stories of school have often resulted in excellent marks and awards as a top student in school subjects. However, it is the teachings outside of school places where she continues to learn about family and relationships that assist in her



negotiation in the world of school curriculum making. Her learning is across time in many places with the people that are held closely within the life she is currently composing.

Lane as a learner is not determined by the knowledge he receives in schools, rather it is the knowledge from different places that is important in his life. Lane's stories are filled with ongoing negotiations within home and schools as he, as a young man, continues to struggle to find a place of comfort in these worlds. Lane's knowledge comes from places of experience in what counts as he tries to compose a life filled with values that he has been taught. His stories of his brothers and the stories of how the older ones taught him music at an early age have been passed on to him. He understood these in the same way as he spent time with his younger brother teaching and taking care of him with what he has learned. Who Lane is as learner in his familial curriculum making world becomes visible when he tells stories and makes music. His stories of what is important in his life and his memories of different landscapes and times before are visible when he paints and creates colours that dance. It is magic to watch him as he paints a picture with the most magnificent blues and a soaring eagle. The painting is a gift that he holds close but the beauty in what he does is in the presentation of his painting in the form of a gift to Elder Francis Whiskeyjack that he has come to know and who has helped him in his life. He moves with an intimate knowledge of what he has been taught and what he has learned from other places that this is what he should do in relation. The stories Lane shared with me are filled with

teachings from different places and from what he has learned beyond school subject matters. He has learned to live and survive outside of school. It is outside of school that he has learned to lead with his heart and to hold an ethic in relationship alongside people that is filled with wisdom from other places. He is a leader and his story of a learner includes the complexity in relationships that he negotiates and the spirit of a person who truly understands what counts when composing a life.

### **The Importance of Attending to Youth as World Travellers Among Worlds of Curriculum Making**

The experiences of the youth and their families continue to teach me about the knowledge that exists within different landscapes. I reflect on both Schwab's curriculum commonplaces (1969, 1973) and Huber et al. (2011) in their concept of familial curriculum making to help me understand the layers within the stories. The world of school curriculum making is an important part of life and the youth and families recognize the importance of school within their lives as they share stories of hopes and dreams in their lives. The process of writing about school curriculum making and, in particular, Schwab's curriculum commonplaces is not meant to be a criticism of the important work within schools. As a person who has taught in schools for a number of years and who has assisted in provincial curriculum development, I take seriously the work done in schools. Through the reflection process and by listening to the stories and co-composing narrative

accounts alongside the aboriginal youth and their families I have often been left with more wonders and more questions as I consider the work that I have been engaged in over the course of my adult life. I have listened to youth and families share their stories with me, as they share with me they take me to many of my own stories. Some stories I had not considered before. As I develop my ideas alongside Huber et al. (2011) and their work in familial curriculum making I look to find the more hopeful spaces between the worlds of familial and school curriculum making to help me further understand the possibilities within each world. I do not think it is helpful to concentrate solely on parts of a life or the separation of worlds when I consider conversations on curriculum and schools. The world of familial curriculum making helps me understand the lives of youth and their stories of who they are becoming. The youth and the families in their wholeness are more visible to me when I think about the lives they are composing on multiple landscapes across time. I learn to become more responsive through the youths' stories. The youth and their families are teaching me in this way to become more attentive within the school landscape, as I try to find spaces within myself to slow down, pay attention, and listen to the stories that they are sharing with me.

I recognize the important place school curriculum making holds within the lives of children. Despite a history with schools that is complicated, the families I have walked alongside in my research value what school is teaching their children. In many cases they privilege the world of school curriculum making as

opposed to their own familial curriculum making worlds. The families have learned to be silent and not question what is being taught in the world of school curriculum making. It is an uneven and disconnected relationship and I wonder about the word relationship within this description. It is my hope through the process of writing and sharing the stories of the youth and their families that I will continue to create spaces within places of school that honour and respond in respectful ways to the familial curriculum making worlds of youth and their families. I am not looking to change the provincial curriculum or design a new aboriginal studies course or school that will try to more fully meet the *needs* of aboriginal youth and their families in school. Through this work my hope is continued conversations and a further understanding of the multiplicity within the lives of aboriginal youth and their families inside and outside of school places.

The familial curriculum making world moves beyond the stories of the aboriginal youth and their families that I have come to know in relation. The relational inquiry process also reaches out into different places within me as I begin to understand stories that are nested deep within myself. I continue to travel back (Lugones, 1987) to my own experiences within multiple worlds to help me understand this shift in how I am considering a curriculum of lives within the place of school. I am reminded often of the many ways of thinking about 'world-travelling' (Lugones, 1987) and in particular when I sit alongside Elders that I have come to know in relation. I turn back to the beginning story as I think more deeply about what Elder Bob Cardinal is asking me to do when I teach his

granddaughter ... "to not forget her". His teachings shape me. I begin to understand in different ways what he is asking from me: to value the knowledge in school places but also to value the knowledge that is composed and taught in familial curriculum making places outside of school. The teachings that he has passed on to his family are situated in place and through relationships over time. His teachings as he shares them with me include multiple landscapes, with different teachers that have shared with him ways of thinking about the world as he composes a life for his family. I think with what Elder Bob Cardinal is saying as I have Donovan, Lane and Sky on my mind.

I took a walk out on Elder Bob Cardinal's land today, it is a place where we spend time together. It is a teaching and knowledge place that he shares with me. The trees surrounding and the wild grasses blowing, they were dancing in the wind and one might consider them the teachers within this place. If I listen to the sounds on the landscape and pay careful attention I can understand differently with what it is I am hearing. The rocks ... the water ... the details of the landscape can also be considered subject matter when I think of them in this way, within this place. As I walked outside today the animate and living was all around me, as I could hear when I let myself go to the silent places of reflection and turning inward. It is in this place within myself that I begin to also notice the possibilities and richness in this type of milieu. The teachers to me, in this place that I enjoy, are the wind calling and the birds communicating. I sit in this place and time is no longer a consideration as I let the sun fill my spirit and give me energy as it

shines its way down and lifts me up. It is beautiful to think of the stories that are situated in the places that I need to continue to listen to and listen for. Listening and observing, paying attention to the details of the landscape is what I so often am missing.

As I continue to write I think about the experiences in different places alongside the youth and families that I have come to know. I can see Donovan walking down the gravel road to remember the stories that his Kookum taught him ... these stories keep him going, they sustain him as he continues to bring them alive through his drum and the songs he is learning. I have a vision of Sky as she moves alongside her family; the inter-generational stories are alive as the women within the family are all dancing alongside one another through the multiplicity of the worlds that they travel. From place to place ... beyond geography these stories they have come to know are shared through the movement and creative forces that are nested deeply within.

Finally in this moment of thinking and reflection time, I looked up to the trees surrounding and watched the leaves move, pushing back and forth through the hush of the wind. I can imagine Lane as he is on the road again. I understand through his stories something of the landscapes of his youth and the imagery that is etched deeply within him. He has stories of places in memory where the water and the rocks combine ... white waters moving ... splashing on the rock faces. It is the images of places that he has travelled in and between that sustain his stories and continue to remind him of what is important in his life. These stories hold his

memories. They are his teachers. He is taking care of the stories with kindness and not forgetting about these early moments of experience where the water flows and fills the landscape in different ways than I have known.

## References

- Alberta Learning. (2003). *A profile of Alberta's Aboriginal population: Census data 2001* (PowerPoint presentation). Edmonton, AB, Canada: Author.
- Basso, K. H. (1996). *Wisdom sits in places: Landscape and language among the Western Apache*. New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press.
- Bateson, M. C. (1989). *Composing a life*. New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Bateson, M. C. (1994). *Peripheral visions: Learning along the way*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1986). Rhythms in teaching: The narrative study of teachers' personal practical knowledge of classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 2(4), 377–387.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1992). Teacher as curriculum maker. In P. W. Jackson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on curriculum* (pp. 363–401). New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (1995). *Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (1998). Stories to live by: Narrative understandings of school reform. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 28(2), 149–164.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Clandinin, D. J., Davies, A., Hogan, P., & Kennard, B. (1993). *Learning to teach, teaching to learn: Stories of collaboration in teacher education*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Clandinin, D. J., Huber, J., Huber, M., Murphy, M. S., Murray-Orr, A., Pearce, M., & Steeves, P. (2006). *Composing diverse identities: Narrative inquiries into the interwoven lives of children and teachers*. London/New York, NY: Routledge.
- Clandinin, D. J., Steeves, P., Li, Y., Mickelson, J. R., Buck, G., Pearce, M., . . . Huber, M. (2010). *Composing lives: A narrative account into the experiences of youth who left school early*. Edmonton, Canada: Alberta Centre for Child, Family, & Community Research.



- Clandinin, D. J., Steeves, P., & Caine, V. (2013). *Composing lives in transition: A narrative inquiry into the experiences of youth who left school early*. London: Emerald Publishing
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners: Narratives of experience*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1990). Stories of experience and narrative inquiry *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2–14.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1999). *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative Inquiry. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. B. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 477–487). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Crites, S. (1971). The narrative quality of experience. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 39(3), 291–311.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: Collier.
- Friere, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Geertz, C. (1995). *After the fact: Two countries, four decades, one anthropologist*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Heilbrun, C. (1999). *Women's lives: The view from the threshold*. Toronto, ON, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- Huber, J., & Clandinin, D. J. (2002). Ethical dilemmas in relational narrative inquiry with children. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(6), 785–803.
- Huber, J., & Clandinin, D. J. (2005). Living in tension: Negotiating a curriculum of lives on the professional knowledge landscape. In J. Brophy & S.

- Pinnegar (Eds.), *Learning from research on teaching: Perspective, methodology and representation* (pp. 313–336). Oxford: Elsevier Ltd.
- Huber, J., Murphy, M. S., & Clandinin, D. J. (2011). *Places of curriculum making: Narrative inquiries into children's lives in motion*. London: Emerald.
- King, T. (2003). *The truth about stories: A Native narrative*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lessard, S. (2010). "Two-Stones Stories": *Shared teachings through the narrative experiences of early school leavers*. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.
- Lindemann Nelson, H. (1995) Resistance and Insubordination, *Hypatia*, 10(2), 23–43.
- Lopez, B.(1990). *Crow and weasel*. Berkeley, CA: North Point.
- Lugones, M. (1987). Playfulness, "world" - travelling, and loving perception. *Hypatia*, 2(2), 3–37.
- Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York, NY: Orchard Books.
- Schwab, J. J. (1969). The practical: A language for curriculum. *The School Review*, 78(1), 1–23.
- Schwab, J. J. (1973). The practical 3: Translation into curriculum. *The School Review*, 81(4), 501–522.
- Silko, L. M. (1981). "Yellow Woman." *Storyteller*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Young, M., Chester, J., Flett, B. M., Foe, L., Marshall, L., Moore, D. et al. (2010). Becoming 'real' Aboriginal teachers: Attending to intergenerational narrative reverberations and responsibilities. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 16(3), 285–305.