

**University of Alberta**

**For All My Relations**

**An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Experiences of One  
Aboriginal Graduate Student**

by

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

Master of Education

in

Indigenous Peoples Education

Department of Educational Policy Studies

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Fall 2010

Edmonton, Alberta

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## **Dedication**

For you: May this story find you just when you need it most.

## **Abstract**

“For All My Relations” is a narrative representation of an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my experiences as an Aboriginal graduate student negotiating the complexities of learning about, and engaging in, Indigenous research. The research puzzle centers on my wonders about the responsibilities of an Aboriginal graduate student choosing to engage in research with Aboriginal peoples in ethically responsible ways. The field texts for the inquiry are my writings over two years: final papers, response journals, assignments, and life writings. Using a narrative inquiry methodology, I identify tensions and bumping points in coming to understand Indigenous research, and in doing so, I have come to a deeper understanding of the impact of these moments on my identity as researcher in the making and on my sense of belonging. I also attend to the social and institutional narratives about Aboriginal people in which my storied experiences are nested. Issues of ethical obligations, relationship, and responsibility are central in my inquiry, and speak to the complexities of wrestling with the questions of “researcher’s right to tell” and “viewing people through a lens.” The findings of my inquiry add to the emerging literature of Indigenous research and narrative inquiry, and their connections. The findings also present insights into the experiences of an Aboriginal graduate, and the notion of identity and belonging. Most importantly, this narrative inquiry enabled me to work through my lived tensions, discomforts, and unease, and to restory my experiences; this process allowed me to grow more confident in my ability to continue to engage in Indigenous research in ethically and relationally responsible

ways. My inquiry begins with my experiences of “not belonging” and “feeling less than,” and concludes, in the midst, with a counterstory to tell. Counterstories are “saving stories” for me and for all my relations, past, present, and future.

## **Acknowledgements**

There is a level of gratitude that I have for my life and how it unfolded, and for all the people who entered into it for a moment, or a lifetime, that is immeasurable. Every single human from my past, my present, and my future needs to know how deeply thankful and grateful I am that even if just for the briefest of moments or for the whole of my life they entered into my world and allowed me into theirs.

From my past, I would like to thank ‘all my relations,’ family and friends included. I am especially grateful for the love and unending support from my brother, my sister, my daughter, and my Mom. Also, I can never thank enough all of the aunties, uncles, cousins, and the friends who extend far and wide. Their love and support has nourished my soul and helped me through the difficult moments. With their strength, their determination, and their unbelievable stories, they have inspired me always.

From my present, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my supervisors Dr. Makere Stewart-Harawira and Dr. D. Jean Clandinin for believing that I could do this and joining me on this grand adventure. They represent to me the two different worlds in which I exist, and the two research methodologies which inform this thesis. From Dr. Makere Stewart-Harawira I learned that sometimes the best learning happens underneath a tree, listening to the rustle of the leaves, or while sitting in a circle sharing stories; this is what Indigenous research means to me. From Dr. D. Jean Clandinin I learned to lovingly world travel more mindful and awake to the stories I tell, to the people I sweep along in the telling, and to all

research that takes place in the midst of lives lived and relationships formed; this I understand narrative inquiry to be.

I must also thank the rest of my supervisory committee, Dr. Vera Caine, and Dr. Randy Wimmer for also being willing to lovingly travel to my world, and through my words see what it is that I saw and to live what it is that I lived as an Aboriginal graduate student in an Indigenous education program. I also express a deep thanks and unending gratitude to everyone who is a part of the Indigenous Peoples Education Program, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, and the larger university as a whole; to the graduate students, the always helpful faculty, and the many people I met along this journey. The support ranged from research opportunities, encouraging conference presentations, financial awards, bursaries, and glowing referrals, to numerous conversations over tea, and speedy replies to endless e-mails. The influence of each and every person, and each and every form of support, is captured within this thesis, and for this I thank you all.

From my future, the greatest gratitude I have is for the inspiration and passion evoked from those littlest members of my world, the children. I am thankful and grateful for little children who share so willingly their dreams, their hopes, and their imagined future of endless possibilities. It is they who sit front and center in my world, and it is they who I cradle closest and dream of a future filled with safe places where their dreams can exist and begin to grow.

I am truly thankful and grateful for each and every person from my past, my present, and my future.





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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

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

“You’re not the Indian I had in mind” (King, 2003, p. 31). I heard this once and I read it a few times; it sticks with me and is hard to shake. It is a part of who I am now; a part of who I story myself to be. I am very likely not the Indian you had in mind. I am often not even the kind of Indian I myself had in mind, and this story to live by (Clandinin, 2006) impacts the way I see the world and my place in it. While I am not the Indian we had in mind, I do find myself very drawn to stories. I live them; I read them and I always find myself telling them. Like King (2003), some stories I tell “to myself, to my friends, sometimes to strangers. Because they make me laugh. Because they are a particular kind of story. Saving stories, if you will. Stories that help keep me alive” (p. 119). This, my autobiographical narrative inquiry, my research text, my thesis, is one of those saving stories King (2003) speaks of.

This saving story that I tell was created from my autobiographical narrative inquiry into my graduate studies experience as an Aboriginal student, learning about and engaging in research with Aboriginal people and trying to understand Aboriginal education. What follows is the process and product of an autobiographical narrative inquiry. I chose to tell the understanding in a narrative format to emulate the Indian I had in mind, the Indian I want to become, and because this heart and mind connection to understanding is coherent with how I view and understand the world. Archibald (2008) reminds us that “As the Elders

say, it is important to listen with ‘three ears: two on the sides of our head and the one that is in our heart’” (p. 8).

Bringing heart and mind together for story listening was necessary if one was to make meaning from a story because often one was not explicitly told what the story’s meanings were. ‘Linking how we feel to what we know was an important pedagogy.’ (p. 76)

Because I, as an Aboriginal person, “come from a tradition of storytelling” as Cuthand (1989) speaks to, I also, as a storyteller, “ have a responsibility to be honest, to transmit our understanding of the world to other people” (p. 54). This is coherent with the relational way I live. “In this process, there is something more than information being transmitted: there’s energy, there’s strength being transmitted from storyteller to the listener and that is what’s important in teaching young people about their identity” (Cuthand 1989, p. 54, as cited in Archibald, 2008, p. 85).

While Archibald (2008) is referring to the oral tradition and the telling of traditional stories, she also writes of how “many First Nations storytellers use their personal life experiences as teaching stories in a manner similar to how they use traditional stories” (p. 112). I am not the Indian who knows her culture. I am not the Indian who has learned the craft of storytelling from her Elders. I am not the Indian who knows traditional stories, nor am I the Indian who knows her own Cree language. Knowing all of this, I also know that I just might not be the Indian we all had in mind when we think of Indigenous research. Much of my learning

about being Indian I learned at school, at university, and through my lived experiences; not through direct teaching from Elders or life on the land. Much of my learning comes not from traditional stories heard in person, but instead from reading text. But I am an Indian and I have a story to tell; this story is the result of an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my life experiences as a graduate student in Educational Policy Studies. I am the Indian who covets a Master's degree in the Indigenous Peoples Education program, and who hopes to someday learn my culture from my Elders, on my land, in my language. While I am certainly not the Indian anyone had in mind, I am an Indian and I do have a story to tell and I do think from this story we can all learn and gain new understandings of education, of research, and of the lived experiences of one who is not the Indian you had in mind and who negotiates life from this position of not belonging. But in this telling, I imagine that my personal life story, my autobiographical narrative inquiry, will teach people about their "own identity" (Cuthand, 1989, p. 54) as they read about how I negotiated mine. I hope it will cause them to pause and rethink their notions of research, and reflect on the process of their becoming in the midst of lived graduate studies experiences so together we can envision multiple sites of safe places for fledgling researchers to test out their newly forming research wings.

### **The Research Puzzle**

My master's thesis research is an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experience as an Aboriginal graduate student negotiating the

complexities of learning about and engaging in Indigenous research. I inquired into my lived experiences through the various writings I engaged in over two years—final papers, response journals, assignments, and personal life writings—and I sought out those tensions and those bumping places so that I could develop a deeper understanding of the impact of these moments on my identity in the making as a researcher and my feelings of belonging. I realize my stories are nested within social and institutional narratives, which often place Aboriginal people in a negative storyline. This realization adds layers of complexity to the issues of ethical obligations, relationship, and responsibility, and makes the questions of a researcher's right to tell and viewing people through a lens increasingly complicated. My research puzzle centers around my wonders about the responsibilities of an Aboriginal student, who chooses to try to represent Aboriginal viewpoints, and the ethics, responsibility, and permission needed when telling personal stories in which others may also be storied in the telling. Through this autobiographical narrative inquiry, I found my way out of those dark days of despair and began to see glimmers of hope and possibility. As you come along with me, and I attempt to show you this journey, I hope to illuminate how narrative inquiry seemed to help me negotiate these issues in ways that felt consistent and coherent with what I was coming to know about Indigenous research, and in ways that allowed me to feel that perhaps I did, after all, belong in this world of research. This narrative inquiry process provided a way for me to work through these tensions, discomfort, and the great unease to restory my



graduate studies in ways that allow the title researcher to sit comfortably with my complex, often conflicted Aboriginal identity, and in ways that built the confidence needed for me to continue to engage in Indigenous research in ethically and relationally responsible ways.

### **“Where are You From?”**

Before I can continue to tell the story, I must attend to my responsibilities as both researcher and as an Aboriginal person. When Aboriginal people meet each other for the first time, “Where are you from?” is the most common question. The question seeks identity through “location of your roots, your family, your ancestors, your relations, your home, your place, your tribe, your Reserve” (MacLeod, 1998, p. 58).

Much of this research text is about negotiating my identity and trying to come up with an answer to this question, which will be coherent with my stories to live by, coherent with my narrative identity<sup>1</sup> (Clandinin, 2006). I imagine this identity consisting of not just one story rather more about a cluster of stories<sup>2</sup> (Anzaldua, 1999b) that others have told me and that I myself now tell. Within these stories that I will tell, other people get storied as well; so answering this question for me is a complex, continuously evolving, and always changing process. I am uneasy in the telling of who I am becoming as I attempt to answer this question

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<sup>1</sup> According to Clandinin (2006), our “life identities” understood “narratively” are “stories to live by” (p. 50).

<sup>2</sup> “Anzaldua (1999b) captured the notion that our identity is constructed by not only our own but also others’ views in an identity-as-clusters-of-stories metaphor. Anzaldua claimed that we are ‘clusters of stories we tell ourselves and others tell about us’” (cited in McCarthy & Moje, 2002, p. 231).

because whatever I write about who I am becomes a written story; a story that is set free upon the handing over to others to read. What happens to it after that no longer remains within my control.<sup>3</sup> But, just as I must introduce myself when I meet other Aboriginal people, so too must I introduce myself in this relationship between you, the reader, and me, the narrative inquirer. As we enter into a relationship through the writing and reading of this research text, you will likely begin to wonder who I am and how I came to be at this place telling these stories. It is my obligation to tell you, and yet in both of these situations, meeting an Aboriginal person or introducing myself in this research text, the answer to the questions “Where are you from?” and “Who are you?” are shifting constantly. My identity wonders are complex; they spiral, build, and evolve, and they are woven constantly throughout the thesis. Nevertheless, I must introduce myself as I have been taught, both as an Aboriginal person and as a researcher. All I ask of you, the reader, is that you not carve me into stone and that you allow me the process of becoming, and that you take with great care the family who gets swept up in this telling and of whom I attempt to keep safe throughout this process; but introduce myself, just as I have been taught, I shall do.

When I am asked, “Where are you from?” I imagine the correct answer to that question is to tell where my mother is from and then where my father is from. But then I then I begin to think about where I spent most of my life, and then I wonder about the place where my daughter grew up. As I try to formulate an

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas King, in *The Truth About Stories*, writes: “Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories that you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (King, 2003, p. 10).

answer, I think about where my family lives now, and it isn't necessarily in any of those places. This then leads me to pondering about where I spent much of my growing-up years and where I call home now, and that answer is also not easy to articulate. Finally, after a slightly awkward, rather long pause, where my face must show a perplexed look at a rather straightforward question, I will eventually reply to whoever has asked the question. It is a complicated process that I engage in when trying to answer this question and trying to introduce myself; a process I shall describe here as part of my introduction to you, the reader.

I usually begin by asking, "What do you mean? Are you asking where my mom's family is from? If you are, then my mom's family is from Wabasca, Alberta. My Mom is a Cardinal." And then I usually begin to list all of the aunts and uncles and cousins who I know of, just to help place our exact family. One of two things happens next, both of which cause me to feel the need to explain further—either they ask, "Do you know so-and-so?" or I start to experience unease saying "my mom's family" instead of "my family." In the first instance, "Do you know so-and-so?" I usually have to say, "No, I have not been home to Wabasca very much since I left at the end of Grade 7." I don't go visit as often as I should. Then feeling guilty and feeling the need to explain further, I add, "I was too shy to go alone because I thought they would mostly speak Cree and I don't understand it or speak it well enough to feel comfortable." Only recently have I begun to realize that many of my generation of cousins don't speak Cree as fluently and exclusively as my memories led me to believe. But still, I usually feel

the need to further explain how I am going home more now but still mostly only for major life events, weddings, and funerals. Then depending on who is doing the asking, I might then begin to ramble on and say how I am hoping to further research my family tree but I just haven't found the time. My voice usually trails off eventually, and either the asker or I begin to search for a means of escape as we both note that I seem to be having trouble answering this question.

In the second instance, where I use the term my mom's family instead of my family, I don't want them to think that I don't consider my mom's family my relatives as well. I clarify 'whose' family in that way because her family is from Wabasca, Alberta, while my dad's family is not, and so I am trying to articulate that. But to make sure they know that, I further explain how my dad's family are the Sinclairs from Slave Lake, Alberta; noting to myself that I don't really know who they are, and that people will assume that we are the Sinclairs who belong to the Sawridge Band,<sup>4</sup> so I further explain that we are not those Sinclairs. The reality is, I am not really sure who we belong to, but I know even that answer is not straightforward. "Where are you from?" always sends my mind spinning, seeking the best story to answer this, depending on who is doing the asking. Often, as I try to formulate an answer as a way of describing my family and my identity, I take a rather long time before I speak, or sometimes I speak too soon

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<sup>4</sup> A First Nations band is an organizational structure defined in the *Indian Act* which represents a particular group of Indians as defined under the *Indian Act*. The Sawridge Band is part of Treaty 8, which was signed at Lesser Slave Lake in 1899 and covers portions of northern Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and part of NWT—23 Alberta First Nations.

and ramble on; either result often leaves me feeling a bit uneasy at what I end up communicating about who I am, who my family is, and where we are from.

Eventually, after a number of long pauses, or a few complicated, rather detailed personal stories I tell as a way to introduce myself, I eventually look again at who asked in the first place. This person is usually a stranger who just wanted to know who I am and where I belong, so they could place me and my family. But by the time I am done answering, I think their eyes have glazed over, they themselves look perplexed, or they are shifting uncomfortably at the “too much information” that I have just revealed. But sometimes they are genuinely interested and ask more, but at that point I think about who I have just storied and how it can be perceived by this stranger, and I might withdraw and change topics or I might begin to tell another story. It always depends on who is asking and what they mean by the question, “Where are you from?”

If I am questioned further about my Aboriginal ancestry, I say that I am Cree/Métis, but explain that I am not status Cree<sup>5</sup> and I don’t belong to a reserve. I am a carded Métis<sup>6</sup> person, a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, but I do not belong to any particular Métis settlement. I further explain that I am Cree but I

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<sup>5</sup> An individual’s legal status as an Indian, as defined by the Indian Act. I am not legally defined as a status Indian by the Indian Act.

<sup>6</sup> I had applied and been approved for a membership with the MNA; I met the requirements of the definition of Métis: “Métis means a person who self-identifies as a Métis, is distinct from other aboriginal peoples, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry, and is accepted by the Métis Nation.” I brought in the following documents to my regional office: “A completed genealogy family tree dating back to the mid-1800s; either a long form birth certificate which includes your parent’s names, OR a baptismal certificate along with a wallet-sized birth certificate; picture ID (e.g., driver’s license, passport, firearms license) for swearing a Statutory Declaration; provide proof you are a current resident of Alberta for 90 consecutive days as per the instructions”—resulting in my being “recently carded.”

don't speak Cree, and I wasn't raised traditionally. Then I pause again, take deep breaths, and picture my mom making dry meat, picking berries, and speaking Cree, and I feel that perhaps this is not a completely accurate story. I wonder why I felt the need to add it, but then I recall that I didn't always live with my mom. At different times throughout my childhood, I lived with a number of my aunts (my mother's sisters), so I wondered if maybe they were not as traditional and that is why I didn't learn the traditional ways I associate with my mother. But then when I return to memories of that early landscape, I see the aunts baking bannock, cooking duck or rabbit stew, and beading moccasins or a variety of other activities I tend to associate with "traditional Cree." I then have to wonder what I mean by "raised traditionally." I also lived with my paternal grandma and my dad's sisters at various times. The sisters were not traditional in the same ways as my mom and her sisters; but then as I reflect more, and recollect (Crites, 1986) more memories of those earliest landscapes, I recall getting packed up with the cousins and heading off on many berry-picking adventures on the land and in the bush. I decide that perhaps I need to clarify my own thoughts around being "raised traditionally" before I go claiming that I am not.

For now, I can say that I feel like I wasn't raised traditionally in the same sense as hearing stories at the knee of an Elder, nor did I spend a lot of my days on the land. I myself was inside reading a book or daydreaming, and I couldn't understand the stories my Mosom (grandfather) would tell in Cree. I also left Wabasca as a preteen, left Slave Lake as a young teenager, and didn't stay as

connected to the community, the land, or to the extended family as I wish I would have. I didn't learn Cree, and although I desire it intensely, I can't make bannock. I can't cook stew and I have never beaded a moccasin. Admittedly, this is a really simple and rather stereotypical list for determining my Aboriginal status; I mention it so you can imagine the complex journey my mind takes when this simple request to identify myself comes up, and because they are the stories I tell when I am asked that question. For me, those are the things I wish I had taken the time to learn from my family: to cook traditional Cree foods, to create artistically beautiful beaded crafts, and to speak the Cree that my mother spoke.

Usually, at this point, the intent of the whole question, "Where are you from?" has gotten lost. Either we have run out of time or I have gotten lost within my memories and my own conflicted stories. I have since tried to create a shorter answer to this question, and this shorter answer really only hints at who I am, who I am becoming, and who I hope to be someday. This autobiographical narrative inquiry is about my lived experiences as a graduate student living inside of this narrative where I don't feel as if I have earned the right to call myself traditional Cree or Métis knowing that I am just learning or relearning my own culture. To that long and complex question, "Where are you from?"—a question which essentially is asking "Who are you? And who is your family?"—this is my short answer:

My name is Trudy Michelle Cardinal. I am, at the time of this writing, 37 years old. I have one daughter who is 20 years old, one older sister, and one

younger brother. My mom, my siblings, and I are from Wabasca, Alberta, and are related to the giant, extended Cardinal family. My dad (deceased) was from Slave Lake, Alberta, and comes from the Sinclair family (but I don't think we are part of the Sawridge Band). I grew up moving regularly between the two communities of Slave Lake, Alberta, and Wabasca, Alberta, and between the two extended families, my mom's and my dad's. I had a very transient early landscape where I lived with quite a few different aunties, both maternal and paternal. I also lived for many years with my paternal grandmother as a very young child, then my maternal grandfather (Mosom) during the upper elementary school years. As a teenager, I moved to High Prairie, Alberta, to complete high school; that is where my daughter was born, and where I raised her. We lived in High Prairie until my daughter was in her late teens. I taught there for 13 years, leaving only once in 2004 for a year to Calgary before rushing right back again. I now reside in Edmonton, Alberta, having moved here to work on my Master's degree. Home for me is northern Alberta, and covers any area that contains family members. At this time, my brother lives in Gift Lake, my sister in Edmonton, and my mom in Wabasca. I am Cree/Métis; we were in the past and still are slightly nomadic. I am very pleased to meet you.

I imagine this shorter version being still accurate, but reveals less of the conflicted thought processes I engage as I ponder that question. I realize that my story is not exactly unique. MacLeod (1998) and Donald (2004) both speak to this issue and explain a similar story. Macleod doesn't "come from a reserve, nor do



any of [his] immediate relatives” (p. 58). He doesn’t “have a place in the Aboriginal sense of traditional territory or sacred land” (p. 58). But he admits that he “may have distant relatives on reserves, but [that his] immediate family lost contact with them long ago” p. 58). He too must negotiate his answer and his Aboriginal identity when asked this question.

Donald (2004) also gets asked this very same question, and tells a similar story.

‘Where are you from?’ The question is usually asked with a tone of familiarity and camaraderie that distracts me and leaves me not wanting to answer. “I’m from Edmonton,” I reluctantly reply, and then wait for the response that I have ‘seen’ many times before—this response is rarely verbal. Mostly, I receive nonverbal cues—looks of confusion, uncertainty, the slow, half-hearted nodding of the head. These work together to give one message: “I thought this guy was an Indian, but I guess he’s not... (Donald, 2004, p. 24).

Their stories illustrate that my story will likely not be the first of its kind you hear, yet I do believe there is still a need to tell it. The difference, I think, comes in that I am the one most often talking myself out of an Aboriginal identity and storying myself as not belonging; I wonder where this comes from. Part of this inquiry is looking at that wonder from the adult perspective of a graduate

student while still keeping in mind the earlier memories<sup>7</sup> (Greene, 1995), which led to my deeply ingrained “stories to live by.” This story of my lived experiences in the graduate studies program of Indigenous Peoples education speaks to how I storied myself as researcher, and of how I began to story Aboriginal people when I tried to view them through the theories’ lens. It also speaks to how within the discussions of Aboriginal issues, the story I heard, or that I read, bumped up uncomfortably with the stories I knew of friends and family and of myself. This autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experience was necessary. I needed to understand why I felt uncomfortable at times trying to exist within the institution of University. I needed to inquire into how my very complex, confused, and often conflicting stories to live by bumped up against grand narratives about Aboriginal people, and against my imagined vision of Indigenous research and researcher. I needed to dig deep to inquire carefully to understand. Now I need to tell the understandings I gained from the inquiry because that is the traditional Aboriginal way;<sup>8</sup> and this sharing of knowledge that I gained is something that I can do. I have trouble articulating my identity, but I always identify as Cree/Métis, honouring the many, many women who had a hand in raising me. This sharing of knowledge, through my autobiographical narrative inquiry, is my responsibility as a researcher and most especially as an Aboriginal

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<sup>7</sup> Greene (1995) speaks to the need for reflecting on my first landscapes or what Greene (1995) might describe as my “rememory” (p. 82). “We can only become present to them by reflecting on them” (p. 73).

<sup>8</sup> Smith (1999) speaks to the particular methods within indigenous methodology and the need to choose them carefully with “respect to indigenous ethics, explicitly outlined goals of research, and the considered impact of the outcomes of research on the particular indigenous people. In the process of disseminating of research results, there is a need for reporting back and sharing knowledge” (p. 15).

person<sup>9</sup> (Smith 1999, p. 15). Having now introduced myself both as an Aboriginal person and as a researcher, I will return to the autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences as an Aboriginal graduate student in the Indigenous Peoples Education program.

### **Narrative Beginnings**

#### *A Moment*<sup>10</sup>

*December 13, 2010*

*I have a need to be mindful and respectful and to focus on the positive.*

*There is no benefit to focusing on the negative and what did not work.*

*There is a need to understand and to see and to remove the onus from just the individual but not to rage against the injustice nor despair against the complexity of the task. While wondering and questioning, I must always stop and reframe how I am looking.*

*What I remember and longed for from my family and those who lived closer to a traditional Cree lifestyle was the laughter and the strength and that is what I want to carry on with me.*

*It gets dark and it gets scary and it gets heavy and I feel the weight of the expectations and I worry. It is there in the eyes of the children and in the voices of those who look to me for answers and for insight and for understanding.*

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<sup>9</sup> “In the process of disseminating of research results, there is a need for reporting back and sharing knowledge” (Smith, 1999, p. 15).

<sup>10</sup> Text in italics indicates the field text into which I inquired. This is explained in more detail in the methodology section of this chapter.

*It is my duty as an Indigenous scholar to be mindful, to be respectful and to do something that will directly benefit the children.*

*When all the questions are spinning around in my head, I must take a good, long look in the mirror and the answers will come.*

*Dig a little deeper.*

*Trust and the truth will show itself.*

*—Personal life writing*

This personal writing was written when I hit an all-time low at about a year and a half into my two-year Master's program. I was unable to find the answers to the questions I had about Aboriginal education and research. The task seemed too difficult and unattainable, and I was praying to the Universe, asking for help from someone or something greater than myself, and I was writing it out on paper so that I could believe in the words that I was saying. I gathered words from the movies I was watching, the books I was reading, and from anyone and anything I could. I was trying desperately to remind myself to not stay in that dark pit of despair and hopelessness. I found words telling me trust in my own knowing, and I was praying to be able to do that. And yet, even as I recall that moment, feeling the angst and the weight of that despair, I know that prayer didn't work that day. I remember the tears that pooled in my eyes as I continued to work on a paper about revitalizing Indigenous languages. I could not make the paper say what it needed to because I had no answers to the dilemma. I felt I had no

right to be speaking on it. I didn't speak Cree. I didn't teach my child to speak Cree. I hadn't always lived on a reserve or settlement and so I didn't feel that I could speak for the people who did. Even when I sought out opinions and answers within my own family, the to teach Cree or not to teach Cree question was so very complex. It included feelings of sadness at the loss of our Cree language, guilt at not teaching it to our children, but tempered with relief at knowing our children were saved from memories of "Indian accents" and being laughed at. But it also contained pride within those in the family who could speak, and memories of laughter at jokes only funny when told in Cree. These were the jokes I always longed to understand but have never made enough time to learn the language needed for this understanding. In our family discussion, we could go nowhere and come to no conclusions, and I, who spoke the least Cree of all, was to write a paper on this topic. I felt like a fraud. I felt like I should not and could not speak about saving Indigenous languages when I knew only English.

That moment in time, and those words that I typed through a veil of tears, that plea to something bigger than myself, captures ever so briefly "the stories to live by" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4) I had come to know. And my prayer shows how much I desired to be allowed to be otherwise. I was asking permission from myself and from the Universe and maybe even from the university. At the time, I wasn't aware of these stories to live by, nor was I conscious of how much those stories restricted my ability to see hope and possibility. I knew how I felt, and it felt as if, once again, I didn't belong and that

I was “less than” and “unworthy.” I did not have the qualifications to be this Indigenous researcher I was trying to be and on that dark December day, I thought my days as researcher were numbered; that this too “was not for the likes of me” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 110).<sup>11</sup>

### *A Lifetime*

While it was one topic, and one final paper, it represents a lifetime of feeling as if I didn't belong and did not trust my own knowing. I came to graduate studies from thirteen years of teaching. I arrived feeling already as if I had failed. I wrote about it early in my first semester in one of my first reflection journals.

*The transformation of Trudy, the teacher, to Trudy, the critical scholar, began one frozen February evening in the year of 2008. The proverbial ‘straw that broke the camel’s back’ was placed ever so delicately via email. I was told that a parent meeting was to be held where I would have to prove to a group of parents that I actually did teach the curriculum as deemed essential by the provincial government. This feather-light request, seemingly innocent and routine, landed with a crushing blow and I admitted defeat. After thirteen years of successful teaching, thirteen years of meeting Provincial Achievement Test standards, organizing and implementing recycle programs, running student councils, planning*

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<sup>11</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Bourdieu's (1984) theory of Habitus and the unconscious self-elimination of different groups of people—“not for the likes of us” (p. 110). Habitus is “an unconscious acceptance of social differences and hierarchies, “a sense of one's place” and behaviours of self-exclusion (p. 141). A more thorough discussion of this follows in Chapter 2.

*community fundraisers, and nurturing independent confident student citizens, I still needed to prove that I knew what I was doing. I sat there at my computer and imagined what the witches of Salem must have felt before an unfair trial. There was no way to win. I could possibly come away from this meeting successful with some pride and self-worth still intact, but there would be others. I truly thought what I was doing was the right way and I knew that I was meeting government standards, but I did not feel confident enough to stand in front of a group of people defending theories and ideas that I myself was still investigating and exploring. Ever the lifelong learner, I was always looking for ways to improve, a quest which also left room for doubt. Do I really know the purpose of education? Am I really doing what is best for the children in my care? Is there a better way? I resigned from my position that Monday. I endured the parent meeting, making no changes to the program, and I finished the year. Then I excitedly ran to the university to sit and absorb the knowledge I was missing. Knowledge that would answer the questions and enable me to emerge stronger, smarter, and with skin so thick that no doubts to my professional ability could penetrate. I opened my brain and waited for the pouring in of the wisdom of the ages. Alas, life is never so simple.*

*—EDPS 536 – Critical Pedagogy and Transformative Practices in Indigenous Education, Assignment One, Reflective Essay; October 2008*

As a teacher, my confidence in my ability, instead of growing stronger, became more insecure, and I began to feel less experienced and more unknowing each year that I taught. New theories, new ways of teaching; parents asking for one thing, government for another; homework or no homework; recess or no recess; treats or no treats; detention or consequence; more poetry, too much poetry; book reports or no book reports. I felt like I had to always defend and that no research was ever conclusive; I had no faith, even then, in what I knew intuitively. I never thought to trust my own knowledge gained from thirteen years of experiences as a “teacher.” I searched always for someone or some proof as a backup so I wouldn’t stand alone.

When I quit teaching, I thought it was for good. I gave away thirteen years of “teacher stuff,” and walked away. I did, of course, ask permission from my family to be allowed to quit teaching, as even then I wasn’t sure if my decision was the right one. As I look back on that time again, I am sad for that “me” that I was. I recall my colour-coded schedules (a source of pride), my recycle club kids with keys and clipboards standing at attention ready to go and collect, my burgundy classroom with its comfy couch waiting for hot chocolate and cookies and book club to begin, my Prime Minister seeking votes for election, and our stand at the real town council in support of a cause. And I remember feeling as if I had failed. At the end of those thirteen years, I couldn’t see what I did that was good. I could only see what I lacked, and still this distorted reflection causes me to feel sad for the grown-up teacher who used to be a little girl playing school. I



received permission to quit, and I made the decision to come to university, because my family said I should, because I liked the title “Indigenous Peoples Education,” and because I always wanted to someday do a Master’s degree. I came wanting someone to tell me “the right way to teach” so that I could know once and for all. But a “receiver of knowledge” (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1989) is not what a Master’s student becomes. I didn’t get what I hoped I would. I didn’t get taught how to write a book review or to summarize papers. But what I did learn was likely more valuable.

I was forced to learn to think for myself; this was hard for me and caused endless tears to flow. I was living a storyline of “less than” and “not good enough,” and I wanted someone else to take charge so I could have a rest. I wanted the world to stop so I could get off and breathe. I thought this would happen at university. Was I a good teacher? Is there a list of “good teacher traits” that I can check? What did I think was a good teacher and why did I so readily accept that I was not when so many others disagreed? I told everyone that “university calls my name” and they praised me, wished me luck, and eagerly awaited my return. I wanted to learn and understand, but most of all I wanted to escape the story I lived as “less than” teacher who “quit”—I wanted to live a different story.

I arrived full of mistrust of my own knowing as a teacher, and in this new attempt of mine, wanted to emulate the Indigenous researchers I read about. I wanted to become the ‘analyze and critique, draw on theory and policy first’ kind

of researcher. But the more I tried to be this imagined researcher, the less comfortable I felt and the more I thought once again that “this was not for the likes of me” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 110). I wanted to do research that was hopeful and did not add to the negative storyline of Aboriginal people. I wanted to find the good inside the stories and not just the bad. I wanted to see hope and change and stories of Aboriginal people “becoming otherwise” (Green, 1995). I wanted to see evidence of hope inside my sad, frustrated stories. I wanted to find hope in the written word so that I could believe it to be true.

### **My Less Than/Not Belonging Stories to Live By**

You will hear constantly through this thesis those ingrained stories to live by told around “less than” and “not belonging” plotlines. The source of these is not the topic of my inquiry at this time. It is important to just know they are there. Just as my Aboriginal identity confusion is not a story that is unique to me, I have found through conversations with friends, family, and colleagues that there are others who battle these negative, constricting, heartbreaking plotlines as fiercely as I do. Understanding how those stories to live by developed is most definitely on my “to-do” list. It is my hope that future understandings of how these stories to live by are formed will enable me to become a better educator of children as I watch for those forming moments. I will then be more equipped to remain awake to the stories told to children or about children that weave themselves so tightly to their own stories to live by that they become very powerful and, perhaps, one day they too might have “rock-bottom” moments. That place, rock bottom, is no place

to imagine for the future of our children. I will note here that some of the stories I heard about what it means to be “Indian” I heard as a very young child. They were not stories of hope and possibility, and I can almost, just barely, remember when my head started to drop down to look at the floor and avoid the gaze of those who saw me as “less than” and “not worthy” because of their preconceived notions of what the lived experiences of being an “Indian” are. The inquiry I engaged in this research project always kept those moments in mind, but what was more important for me right now was to understand the lived experienced of myself as a graduate student who came in feeling a lifetime of “less than” and “not belonging,” and how I lived from this perspective. It was important for me because those stories are powerful and they are firmly embodied; I may not ever truly be free, but what I can do is try to understand my lived experiences in ways that allow all of us, through my stories, to remain more awake to these same kinds of moments that creep into the lived experiences of adults, who were as children told through stories, through books, through lived experience, and even through looks that they just might be “less than,” and that they just might not belong.

### **Restorying—The Beginnings**

I had storied myself in a way that I wasn’t able to see, and I was living a story that was making it very hard for me to imagine myself as a researcher. But at about the same time as I handed in that paper dripping with the tears of defeat, I also began to be introduced to a way of research that seemed to fit a bit better. It was at this time that I was introduced to narrative inquiry, and began to attend

Research Issues table discussions<sup>12</sup> where other researchers expressed many of the same worries and wonders that I had about research in general. I felt little stirrings of hope and possibility, and the sun began to poke its way into the darkness I had fallen into.

Narrative inquiry, as “both a phenomena under study and a method of study ” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 4), seemed to offer me a way to negotiate the researcher I wanted to be.

The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world. (p. 2)

If I was to survive as a graduate student, then I needed to understand how I came to experience graduate studies in such a way that I felt like I didn’t belong. I needed to begin to understand what “stories to live by” really meant, and how I was “living” the stories I had come to know. As Heilbrun (1988) explains:

What matters is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically; or come to us, like

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<sup>12</sup> The Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED) was established in 1991 as a faculty-wide centre for research for teacher education. The Centre draws together diverse people, including graduate students from across campus, faculty, research assistants, principals, social workers, medical personnel, and teachers. One of the objectives is supporting research through ongoing weekly conversations into issues surrounding research, and seminars for graduate students, faculty, and visiting professors to share and receive response to their research.

the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand.

Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives. (p. 37)

And so my early introductions through the Research Issues table and the narrative inquiry course gave me an opportunity to begin to look back and study these stories that formed me so that I could begin to make “new fictions” and “new narratives” as an Indigenous researcher. In the narrative inquiry course, I engaged in the “works in progress”<sup>13</sup> group, where each week I tried to recollect memories and understand my research wonderings so that I could position myself and thus begin to wonder about others. This was deemed necessary to all research, this understanding of our own biases and through what lens each of us views the wondering. I went way back and began to study my own lived experiences from before I could even read. I searched to inquire into the stories that seemed to have formed me. I made much progress, and I began to see how I might form the image of me as a researcher that I sought. Yet, I still was not quite convinced. In a paper I presented for a research conference much closer to the end of the two-year Master’s program, I was still struggling to figure out who I was, to develop faith in my own knowing, and to position myself within my own research project.

*The title of this paper, “Through the Literature Looking Glass” seemed appropriate because much of my existence in this world and especially in*

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<sup>13</sup> Works in Progress groups are groups formed in the class that remain constant, enabling sustained conversations through listening and responding to each other’s stories and writing.

*our current Education system has left me feeling very much like Lewis Carroll's Alice who is lost in Wonderland trying desperately to make sense of a nonsense world. The one piece of Alice's story which most resonates with me is when Alice has a conversation with the caterpillar. The caterpillar asks Alice "Who are you?" to which Alice replies, "Why, I hardly know, sir. I've changed so much since this morning, you see ...." The caterpillar interrupts irritably and says, "No, I do not C, explain yourself." Alice then replies, "I'm afraid I can't explain myself, you see, because I'm not myself, you know." To which the caterpillar replies, "I do not know." And a very confused, slightly weary Alice says, "I can't put it any more clearly, sir, because it isn't clear to me." (IMDb Web site, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0043274/quotes>)*

*This is a good story to begin with because that is exactly how I feel when I am trying to explain my research and it is exactly what I wonder and the answers are not yet clear to me. I still do not know who I am and I too often feel "not quite myself" and so it is that very question, "Who are you?" this question of identity which drives my research and fuels my passion that things just might need to be just a little different for our next generation of Métis/Cree children. And so I am trying to use a narrative inquiry methodology to recollect (Crites, 1971) memories about my experience as an Aboriginal girl reader and attempt to understand the impact of children's literature and stories on my identities. I say identities*

*because I am quickly realizing that I don't have just one. I too am a work in progress.*

*Of course, I must try, in good conscience, to begin the way I have been taught. And I have been taught that "all good researchers must first position themselves within the research" and know where it is they are coming from and know who they are. While I am still "not quite myself," I can safely say that I am a self-identified, recently carded, Métis/Cree woman who might be able to claim Bill C31<sup>14</sup> status depending on the outcome of her mother's petition for her own upgrade to full status. I grew up in the area of northern Alberta, in the '70s and '80s, and I can also assuredly state that from the moment I stepped foot into the education system as we know it, I have felt like Alice who is, often, "not quite herself." But still, "narrative inquiry, very often begins with the researcher's autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41), and so as a narrative inquirer, this question, this positioning and this understanding of the self, this understanding of my own story, becomes even more*

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<sup>14</sup> Important changes were made to Canada's *Indian Act* on June 28, 1985, when Parliament passed Bill C-31, an *Act to Amend the Indian Act*. Bill C-31 brought the Act into line with the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. C-31 changed the registration system so that entitlement was no longer based on sexually discriminatory rules. My mother could restore her own Indian status with Bill C31, as the loss in her ancestry had been through discrimination or enfranchisement, but my siblings and I were not eligible. However, there have been developments that may be further changing this rule, which may create a space for our own application for Indian status. See [www.ainc-inac.gc.ca](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca), Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, for more information.

*important and yet it is exactly this question I struggle with most: “Who am I” and when did I first begin to be “not quite myself?” I invite you to peer into my world, fall through the looking glass, and come alongside to see what it is that I think I saw and seek with me ways to understand why “I am not quite myself” and hopefully, unlike the caterpillar, we will begin to see and we will begin to know and I can position myself in the research and begin to wonder about others.*

*—Paper presented at CSSE Conference in Montreal, May 29, 2010*

The paper quoted above was presented at the end of May 2010—my thesis was to be completed within the next few months and I was still stuck at trying to position myself in the research. How could I even begin? How could I wonder about others when much of my writing, much of my wondering, and much of my energy was spent on trying to prove to myself that I had the right to be an Indigenous researcher researching Aboriginal education and working alongside Aboriginal youth?

I began to understand that my Master’s study needed to continue what I had been searching for these two years. I needed to engage in my own autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I needed to understand where and why I am so uncomfortable at times in the journey to becoming a researcher. I had to probe into the silences and the secret stories, and I had to face my fears because once I ask for others to share their stories with me,



to hand them over into my care<sup>15</sup> (Lopez, 1990), I need to know that I am ready and that I am capable. I need to trust and have confidence in what I am doing. To do otherwise, to drag other humans along with me on an adventure to which I have fears of failure hovering from the very beginning, is something I just can't live with. If I can't find the confidence and belief in myself, and a way of being a "researcher" and a way of doing research that feels authentic and ethical and loving, then I can't live as a "researcher." Narrative inquiry as a process and a product seems to allow me the space I need to be the kind of researcher I envision, but I need to understand where this belief came from and what about this way of research soothes the angst that troubles me.

### **Narrative Inquiry as Methodology**

Quoting from Clandinin and Rosiek (2007):

Narrative inquiry is an old practice that may feel new to us for a variety of reasons. Human beings have lived out and told stories about that living for as long as we could talk. And then we have talked about the stories we tell for almost as long. These lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning, and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities. What feels new is the emergence of narrative methodologies in the field of social science research. (p. 35)

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<sup>15</sup> "Remember only this one thing. The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. 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" (the Badger in Barry Lopez, *Crow and Weasel*, North Point Press, San Francisco, CA, 1990).

It is this idea of “human beings [having] lived out and told stories about that living” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 35) that draws me to narrative inquiry. It is coherent with my “narrative ways of knowing” in the way that Bruner<sup>16</sup> describes, and my belief that “telling stories is an astonishing thing.” It makes sense to me when I hear how, as a species, our “main purpose is to tell each other about the expected and the surprises that upset the expected, and we do that through the stories we tell” (Bruner, cited in Charon, 2002, p. 8). The need for “narrative revolution” (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 1) as a methodological response to positivist paradigms also feels coherent and soothes the angst that arises when I find myself imagining research using a more positivist approach. It is the references to story, to personal experiences, and now to a narrative revolution that began to feel coherent with my way of being, and my way of understanding that convinced me this methodology was how I needed to engage in research at this time to gain the understanding that I was seeking.

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) further explain how “narrative inquirers study experience” and how “arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry are inspired by a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p. 37). Connelly & Clandinin, (2006) also make the following comment:

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

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<sup>16</sup> Bruner, quoted in “Narratives of Human Plight: A Conversation with Jerome Bruner” in Charon, 2002.

idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as 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. 479)

This methodology is a study of lived experiences, and it was my lived experience that I felt I needed to understand before I could focus on wondering about the lived experiences of others. Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) refer to Dewey (1938), and argue that “a pragmatic ontology of experience [is] a well-suited theoretical framework for narrative inquiries, [because] narrative inquiry is an approach to research that enacts many if not all of the principles of a Deweyan theory of inquiry” (p. 42). Dewey’s two criteria of experience are used to then develop a narrative view of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The first criteria—interaction—refers to how “people are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context” (p. 2). The second criterion of Dewey’s—continuity—is explained as follows (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000):

Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences. Wherever one positions oneself in that continuum—the

imagined now, some imagined past, or some imagined future—each point has a past experiential base and leads to an experiential future. (p. 2)

To further describe this narrative inquiry methodology that I engaged in for this research project, I return again to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and the metaphor developed as they conceptualized narrative inquiry from this Deweyan theory of experience. A metaphor of a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space is developed, which draws on Dewey's criteria of continuity and interaction, as well as his notion of situation. "The three dimensions of the metaphoric narrative inquiry space are: the personal and social (interaction) along one dimension; past, present, and future (continuity) along a second dimension; place (situation) along a third dimension" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47).

Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters, they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry, and they occur in specific places or sequences of places (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 54, as cited in Clandinin 2006, p. 47).

It is within this three-dimensional space that narrative inquirers engage and work throughout the duration of their inquiry. "As research puzzles are framed, research fields and participants selected, as field texts are collected, written and composed, and as research texts are written and negotiated, narrative inquirers work within that space with their participants" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47).

There is also a relational dimension to narrative inquiry that is highlighted by this three-dimensional inquiry space. Quoting Clandinin (2006):

Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry, but rather, need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences, as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process. This makes clear that, as narrative inquirers, inquirers, too, are part of the metaphoric parade (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). They too live on the landscape and are complicit in the world they study (p. 47).

Clandinin (2006) describes what this would actually look like when one engages in a narrative inquiry with participants. Always working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, the inquiry can begin "either with engaging with participants through telling stories or through coming alongside participants in the living out of stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The narrative inquiry always begins by entering into the midst of stories, whether it be telling or living. "Participants' stories, inquirers' stories, social, cultural, and institutional stories are all ongoing as narrative inquiries begin. Being in the field, that is, engaging with participants, is walking into the midst of stories" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 48).

Engaging in narrative inquiry also means entering into narrative inquiry relationships and involves ongoing negotiations from beginning to end. "We negotiate relationships, research purposes, transitions, as well as how we are going to be useful in those relationships" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 48). These

negotiations occur sometimes in ways that we are not awake to, and other times in intentional, wide-awake ways, moment to moment and within each encounter, throughout the inquiry process. The narrative inquiry researcher lives in the field with their participants, and “whether the field is a classroom, a hospital room or a meeting place where stories are told” and in that field they begin to “compose field texts” (p. 48). Field texts according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000) can range from “photographs, field notes, and conversation transcripts to interview transcripts,” and narrative inquirers “need to be open to the myriad of imaginative possibilities for composing field texts” as they work alongside their participants. Whichever field texts are chosen, the inquirer needs to “be attentive to situating field texts within the three dimensional narrative inquiry space, that is, positioning field texts with attention to the temporal, the personal and social, and place” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 49).

Always negotiating relationships with participants, the researcher must eventually leave the field to begin to compose research text. This leaving process is not linear and instead may “occur and reoccur as there is a fluidity and recursiveness as inquirers compose research texts, negotiate them with participants, compose further field texts and recompose research texts” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 49). These transitions are not easy and are often tension-filled; “some tensions are created by the concerns about audiences; others are created by concerns about our participants; still others by issues of form” (p. 49). The tensions are written about in detail in Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and

often “emerge and reemerge as narrative inquirers attend to their experiences of moving from the close relational work with participants to beginning to represent their inquiries for a larger audience” (p. 49).

While this methodology feels relatively new, it is becoming better known, and is showing up in a myriad of research fields. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) speak to this.

We are also struck by the enthusiasm for narrative ways of thinking, for narrative ways of understanding knowledge and identity that cuts across disciplines and professions. As Rita Charon (2006), a leader in bringing narrative practices to medicine, writes:

We search the horizon—astronomers, oceanographers, artists, musicians, doctors, novelists, geneticists—seeking ways to recognize ourselves and those who surround us, yearning to place ourselves within space and time (and infinity), dramatizing our stubborn beliefs that life means something and that we ourselves matter. (p. 69)

What Charon draws our attention to is that stories matter and that, increasingly, we are interested in knowing the stories that all people live and tell. As we, and other narrative inquirers now know, inquiry, narrative inquiry, into those stories that people live and tell, also matters. (p. 71)

This description of the methodology of narrative inquiry is brief. It is offered here as an introduction; so as you read through my own autobiographical

narrative inquiry, you are aware of the methodology I use. It is the process of inquiring narratively that I attempt to illustrate by representing my understandings in a more narrative form.

### **My Own Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry Methods**

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) state:

Beginning with a respect for ordinary lived experience, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only a valorizing of individuals' experience, but also an exploration of the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted—but in a way that begins and ends that inquiry in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study an individual's experience in the world and, through the study, seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others. (p. 42)

My own autobiographical narrative inquiry did not include participants outside of myself, but I still felt it was a methodology suited to my need to deepen my understanding of my lived experiences as a graduate student engaging in learning to become a researcher. I was also aware of my need to understand my own lived experiences, as I was increasingly aware of the impact of the researcher who is always a part of the 'metaphorical parade' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). My research puzzle is centered on my need to deepen my understandings of my own individual "experience in the world, and [I was seeking,] through [this]



study, ways of enriching and transforming that experience for [myself] and [for others]”(Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42).<sup>17</sup>

Narrative inquiry, as we have read, must always consider the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 54). The inquirer enters in the midst of stories lived and told. I began this inquiry at the end of my graduate studies, having changed my topic numerous times. Each new topic was difficult for me to begin to try to inquire into because I was consumed with understanding the process of research and the complexities of being an Aboriginal person who felt that she was “not the Indian [anyone] had in mind” (King, 2003, p. 31). I needed to understand the impact of these doubts and wonders on my future research projects. I needed to deal with the intense unease and insecurities that invaded my ability to see myself as researcher before I could fully attend to another research project on my own.

The three-dimensional inquiry space I entered, as described by Clandinin (2006), included the personal and social (interaction) along one dimension. I was uneasy with the title Indigenous Researcher yet I desired it, and so the inquiry is personal, and begins with me and my stories. However, this “Indian” identity I was trying to negotiate is one that is full of contradictions and complexities, and I am aware of the larger social world in which identity is shaped through interactions with others. I began with a desire to understand both the

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<sup>17</sup> The research puzzle will just be highlighted and broken apart to explain the methods I engaged in during the process of inquiring narratively. Throughout this thesis, I put in italics the field text (research data) that I gathered for interpretation and analysis.

personal and the social interactions that impacted my lived experiences as a graduate student. This space included also the second dimension, “past, present, and future (continuity)” (p. 47). The moment that I decided this inquiry had to take place before I could do research with others I was near the end of my two-year program. I needed to look back over my experiences of graduate studies and retell those experiences through the writing I engaged in over that time period; writing that was constantly reflecting this wondering about research and my own place within it. The writing often (and especially) reflected the tensions I experienced trying to become an Indigenous researcher when I was living a story of feeling not Indian enough to have the right, or not having the knowledge or the ability, to engage in research with Aboriginal people.

I also knew that I came into graduate studies with thirty-seven years of life experiences; that, too, would impact how I storied those two years of lived experiences as a Master’s student. All this needed to be considered as I pondered a future as researcher. The inquiry space of my autobiographical narrative inquiry would take place in the past, the present, and the future, and would begin to also impact future possibilities and the way I could see education and research. The third-dimension, “place (situation)” (p. 47), includes the university, from the fall of 2008 to the summer of 2010, where I attended as an Aboriginal student in an Indigenous Peoples Education program after having quit my teaching job with thirteen years’ experience in northern Alberta. All the places, and situations, within that time, also needed to be considered to fully understand the graduate

studies experiences I lived, as a way for me to understand and restory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and also for others to learn from.

I inquired into my lived experiences through the various writings I engaged in over the two years: final papers, response journals, assignments and personal life writings and I sought out those tensions, and those bumping places so that I could develop a deeper understanding of the impact of these moments on my identity in the making as researcher and my feelings of belonging.

I recalled often writing about the unease I felt in this university setting and my fears of being discovered as a fraud who didn't really belong. I recalled often wondering about my own identity, and becoming more and more reluctant to claim the title Indigenous, especially when I felt that I hadn't dedicated the time I needed to learning about my own Cree/Métis culture. I recalled an angst being written about often in the assignments I was creating for the different classes I enrolled in during my Master's program. I knew that to engage in this narrative inquiry, I had to be methodical in choosing the field texts from this database of written works I had created over the two years. I would not be creating the field texts as much as I would be choosing from existing writing. My lived experiences and developing thoughts had been documented over the two years in various assignments, which included journal responses and final papers or projects. My

data were there, and I had to be very precise and careful in how I was going to begin this inquiry process.

The timeframe consisted of the months from September 2008 to June 2010. The data I chose to begin to search through were all of the final products of writing that I engaged in over the two-year program. There is one personal writing written for no eyes or ears but my own; another piece of writing that was written not for a course but to share in a response group setting;<sup>18</sup> and numerous assignments that had been handed in and marked. I went back to the original unmarked version, as I wanted to reread and relive those moments without the comments of professors; the marks earned distracted me from my own thoughts, ideas, and lived experiences that were revealed in those documents. As I revisited and reread these documents, I wanted to relive the moment of writing rather than the moment of receiving the marked copy back.

Once I identified the *dénouement*, I had to begin to work directly with the data elements. Polkinghorne (1995) describes the first step as “configuring the data into a story is to arrange the data elements chronologically” (p. 18). The next step was “to identify which elements are contributors to the outcome. Then the researcher looks for connections of cause and influence among the events” (p. 18). These connections are usually not simple one-to-one connections but are rather “combinations and accumulations of events that influence a response or provide sufficient reason for an action (p. 18).

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<sup>18</sup> “We encourage narrative inquirers to establish response communities, ongoing places where they can give accounts of their developing work over time. As the explaining takes place, clarification and shaping of purpose occurs” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 7).

After the dénouement is identified, the researcher can work directly with the data elements. A first step in configuring the data into a story is to arrange the data elements chronologically. The next step is to identify which elements are contributors to the outcome. Then the researcher looks for connections of cause and influence among the events and begins to identify action elements by providing the “because of” and “in order to” reasons (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) for which they were undertaken. Often these connections are not simply one-to-one, but are combinations and accumulations of events that influence a response or provide sufficient reason for an action.

Because I was becoming aware of the importance of stories and narrative to my way of understanding, I tried to keep in mind the story of my lived experiences, and began by first arranging the courses I had taken over the two years in chronological order according to which semester of study they occurred. The groupings were as follows. Semester One in the fall of 2008 (September to December) includes the following three courses: EDPS 536 Critical Pedagogies and Transformative Practices in Indigenous Education, EDPS 580 Contemporary Issues in Education: Perspectives on Policy and Practice, and EDPS 581 Introduction to Evaluating Educational Research. Semester Two in the winter of 2008 (January to April) includes the following three courses: EDPS 601 Indigenous Research Methodologies, EDPS 562 Social Theory and Education, and EDPS 655 Politics of Education I. During the spring of 2009, I took a single class: EDPS 501 Accountability for Public Education, which was actually an extra

course; not required for my degree but was of interest to me, so I included it in my initial gathering of data. The fall semester, 2009 (my second year) included only one course: EDPS 539 Revitalising Indigenous Language. During that time, I was also working on furthering my thesis topic, and engaging in a research assistant position. I began to also be introduced to narrative inquiry through professors I had been referred to, through the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED) research issues weekly meeting that I began to attend, and especially through the narrative inquiry course I had been referred to by my supervisor, who recognized the narrative slant of much of my writing and research wonders. My winter 2010 semester consisted of another course extra to my degree, the EDES 601 Narrative Inquiry, in addition to my research assistant position. I also continued my search for literature to further develop the research topic I was contemplating at the time; a topic that was constantly evolving and rearranging itself, requiring even more reading. This left one last core course which I needed to complete to meet the course requirements of my Master's program. My spring 2010 semester consisted of EDPS 537 Issues in Indigenous Education. The boundaries had been set, the courses chosen, and now I had to move on to the specific documents.

From within each course, I had saved an electronic version of the original assignments which had been handed in at some point during the course. I also had many of the printed, marked copies; however, I wanted to read them in their original state without being directly influenced by the mark received or the

comments written by the professor. I had also moved twice in the two-year span of time, and some of the hard copies were not readily accessible. I included in the research data a few other key writing pieces that had impacted me in some way; a personal prayer written in December 2009, and a paper presented at a CSSE conference<sup>19</sup> in Montreal at the end of May 2010. This completed the initial collecting and organizing of my research data.

With my first rereading of my past writings and assignments, I wanted to note the evolution of my thinking, and be able to place the writing within the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each piece of writing took place at a certain time “temporally,” and focused both on “the personal and the social” as I tried always to make sense of the theoretical concepts I was learning through my own lived experiences, even before I knew what narrative inquiry was. They were written in a specific place, for a specific purpose, and they often referred to other events that occurred in their own “specific place or sequence of places” (p. 54). I needed to carefully collect and organize the data, the field texts that I chose, because I needed to be aware of this inquiry space always and the “midst” within which they were created. I made very brief notes, noting initial thoughts that arose as I revisited past writings, noting the tone, voice, and general topic in each document. I had to make further decisions about which field texts related more directly to my research wonderings

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<sup>19</sup> The CSSE (Canadian Society for the Study of Education) Annual Conference is held in conjunction with the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. This bilingual conference provides an opportunity for the discussion of educational issues among educational scholars from across the nation.

about my lived experiences as an Aboriginal student in the Indigenous Peoples Education program, and about becoming the Indigenous researcher I imagined. I sought out pieces which contained more of my own voice and thoughts. A few pieces were very technical, containing mostly literature relating specifically to the course and very little of my lived experiences or personal thoughts in the final product—those pieces I chose to leave out of the deeper analysis and interpretation phase of the inquiry, as they didn't provide an insight or glimpse into the world I lived during those two years. And it was the lived experience that I wanted to understand through the field texts I chose. As a whole, the field texts highlighted an awkwardness in my writing style in those technical pieces that lacked narrative elements, and they contained little of the voice I begin to recognize as the voice of "Trudy."

Perhaps it is just my way of understanding the world that is very much tied to narrative and story, and in those early pieces I was trying to emulate a style of writing that was not coherent with my world view. It is only now in reflecting back that this becomes more evident. At the time, I thought it was my inability and lack of skill that produced the awkwardness, of which some parts are true; however, it is more than that. It appears to be a process that I needed to engage in, a more narrative writing process that would lead to a deeper understanding of the concepts and result in more fluid pieces of writing. Nonetheless, in that initial reading, I read to gain a feel for the research data and to begin to compile a tighter database of field texts from which to begin my analysis.



The next reading of this field texts that I engaged in I had to read more carefully and with specific intentions. I began to analyse my field texts in a way that I was beginning to, and I continue to be, in the early stages of learning about. I attempted the analytic process Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) refer to as “the three-dimensional space approach” (p. 339).

This structure for analysis is based on Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) approach identified in their text *Narrative Inquiry*. The basis for this approach is Dewey’s philosophy of experience, which is conceptualized as both personal and social. This means that, according to Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002), to understand people (e.g., teachers, students, and administrators),

... one examines their personal experiences as well as their interactions with other people. Continuity is related to learning about these experiences, and experiences grow out of other experiences and lead to new experiences. Furthermore, these interactions occur in a place or context, such as a school classroom or a teacher’s lounge.... This lens becomes a primary means for analyzing [as well as thinking about] data [field texts] gathered and transcribed in a research study. (p. 339)

This narrative approach consists of three aspects: “interaction, continuity, and situation” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 339). I tried to look at each piece of writing, keeping the idea of interaction and how it involves:

... both the personal and social. The researcher analyzes a transcript or text for the personal experiences of the storyteller as well as for the

interaction of the individual with other people. These other people may have different intentions, purposes, and points of view on the topic of the story. (p. 339)

Inside my writing, I often included lived experiences which regularly brought others into the story, so I was able to seek those moments of interaction as I tried to understand the lived experiences they spoke to in those various assignments. Much of my lived experiences, documented in the field texts, consisted of my personal interactions with the literature I was reading more so than with other humans, but my stories always brought others along for the ride with me. As I carefully attended to each piece of text I tried keep in mind those three aspects: “interaction, continuity, and situation” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 339).

I tried to focus carefully on the idea of “continuity or temporality,” as it “is central to narrative research” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 339). As researcher, I analyzed “the text for information about past experiences of the storyteller” (p. 139)—of myself. I also “analyzed [the text] for present experiences illustrated in actions of an event or actions to occur in the future” (p. 139) and tried to remain awake to the present thoughts and feelings that arose as I relived these past moments through the rereading of the text. “In this way, [I], the analyst consider[s] the past, present, and future” (p. 139). I also analyzed the “situation or place” in each “transcript or text” (p. 139) because narrative

researchers must “look for specific situations in the storyteller’s landscape. This involves the physical places or the sequence of the storyteller’s places” (p. 339).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) note the complexity of this three-dimensional approach, and describe this “analysis process as reading and rereading through the field texts, considering interaction, continuity or temporality, and situation through personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape of the individual.”

As I tried to attend to the interaction, the personal I looked “inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions” and note them as I reread and read. I also tried to attend to the social by looking also “outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions and points of view.” (Adapted from Clandinin and Connelly [2000] as cited in Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 340)

As I reread each piece of text multiple times, I especially tried to be awake to the dimension of continuity. I was seeking to understand where I developed the “stories to live by” that I had developed.

This concept of “stories to live by” is, according to Clandinin (2006), our “life identities” understood “narratively as stories to live by” (p. 50). My life identity—my “stories to live by”—were creating tensions and bumping places which was creating such unease and insecurity that I began to story myself out of research altogether, despite my growing love of it and my desire to continue. I knew that I had to look to my past as well as my present to understand and see

how the stories to live by that I lived had developed. So to account for my past, while rereading I would “look backward to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times.” I also noted the present by looking “at current experiences, feelings and stories relating to actions of an event” and I especially tried to look to the future. I strained to look “forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines.” As I delved into my lived experiences, through the field text, I would also “look at context, time, and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters’ intentions, purposes, and different points of view.” (Adapted from Clandinin & Connelly [2000], as cited in Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 340)

Some of the earliest pieces of field texts I looked at, I wrote extensively about each dimension in relation to the writing. I studied it intently and tried to understand my lived experiences as I analyzed it using the three-dimensional inquiry space, (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This analysis definitely allowed me to begin to understand and see more than I did while I was living the experiences. I felt that I needed to focus even more closely on the tensions and moments of unease that I was increasingly aware of in the rereading, and which I knew were of interest to me when I began the inquiry. I continued to return repeatedly to the field texts, this time specifically looking more closely for those moments of tension and unease—for those bumping points<sup>20</sup> (Huber, Huber, & Clandinin,

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<sup>20</sup> Huber et al. (2004) refer to the “moments of tension where children’s and teachers’ stories to live by are seen to be resisting stories of school” and “tensions between children’s and teacher researchers’ stories to live by and the stories of school in which they were embedded,” but the

2004). It was these moments that I needed to understand. It was this unease that needed to be restored (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) if I was to be able to continue as a researcher. I needed to achieve a narrative coherence; I needed to make sense of my lived experiences to find a way to see possibilities of continued research.

Carr (1986) explores continuity in terms of narrative coherence, a fragile achievement he describes as a process of “telling and retelling, to ourselves and to others, the story about what we are about and what we are” (p. 97). He goes on to say that coherence “seems to be a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense” (p. 97).

I tried to articulate this in the research puzzle I initially created, and I needed to go back into the analysis to dig a little deeper.

I realize my stories are nested within social and institutional narratives which often place Aboriginal people in a negative storyline. This realization adds layers of complexity to the issues of ethical obligations, relationship, and responsibility, and makes the questions of researchers’ right to tell and viewing people through a lens increasingly complicated. My research puzzle centers around my wonders about the responsibilities of an Aboriginal student who chooses to try to represent Aboriginal viewpoints, and the ethics, responsibility and permission needed, when telling personal stories in which others may also be

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same concept can be applied to the tensions I experienced as a graduate student, my “stories to live by” and the university in which they are embedded.

storied in the telling. As I inquired into my own lived experience and sought out those moments of tensions, I wondered what it is that is being asked of researchers and Aboriginal students.

The writings of Indigenous researcher Jo-Anne Archibald (2008) and her descriptions of learning from story seem to compliment, and build on, the idea of Carr (1986) and the narrative coherence I was seeking. Archibald (2008) refers to her conversations with “skilled storyteller/educator” Dr. Ellen White (p. 129) who talks about how the story itself becoming the teacher (p. 138).

Archibald (2008), quoting Dr. Ellen White, speaks to the importance of this idea:

Having the story take on the role of the teacher resonates with my learning about the power of some stories. They can help one to learn, heal, take action, and then reflect on this action. However, if these stories are learned within contexts where the principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and reverence are not practiced, then their “power diminishes” and goes “to sleep” until awakened by those who can use the story power appropriately. (p. 138)

I was intuitively aware of the importance of stories as a teacher, and began to understand the complexities of this idea, especially when viewed from an Indigenous standpoint where the power and responsibility of telling stories is embedded deep within many Indigenous cultures. I needed to take my analysis

from the stage of seeking understanding to the telling of my story, but I needed to do so carefully with those principles in mind. Knowing the importance of the process of storytelling and story listening, I had to undertake this task with much thought and care. I needed the retelling of my graduate-student-lived experiences, the story itself, to become the teacher so that I could learn and understand my lived experiences; and through the telling, hopefully teach others as well. Bruner (2004) adds:

Life stories must mesh, so to speak, within a community of life stories; tellers and listeners must share some “deep structure” about the nature of a “life,” for if the rules of life-telling are altogether arbitrary, tellers and listeners will surely be alienated by a failure to grasp what the other is saying or what he thinks the other is hearing. (p. 699)

I had to move from the field texts, the analysis and the writing I engaged in during that process, towards a creation of research text. I needed to begin to find and create this narrative coherence that I was seeking through writing. I also looked to the writings of Elliot G. Mishler (1999) and his book titled *Storylines*. In the section, “Identities in Process: Devising a Research Strategy,” he argues the “critical importance of change and discontinuity in the formation, reformation, and transformation of adult identities over the life course” (p. 80). Without fully comprehending what it would entail, I knew that I wanted to become this Indigenous researcher that I was beginning to imagine. With the stories to live by that I felt were so difficult at times to even see around, I knew this might require a

transformation of the current life identities, the stories to live by (Clandinin, 2006) that I had developed. I needed to figure out a way to create this story, this research text, in a way that would create space for this transformation process to occur, allowing the story to become the teacher (Archibald, 2008).

Mishler (1999) explains:

We can easily extract chronologies from [my] accounts, the sequential ordering of events and episodes linked together by familiar narrative conjunction “and then.” But it would be misleading to read them as progressive, that is, as linear, continuous movement through developmental stages. Rather, chance events and encounters, the omnipresent contingencies of life, loom large.... If our stories are to represent our lives with any adequacy, then they must leave room for the complex interplay of multiple, and sometimes competing, plot lines. (p. 80)

The next stage of the research process was even more complex, as the story I was attempting to tell was not linear and spiralled back often to earlier writings, built upon learning revisited repeatedly in different writings and reappeared at different times, in different courses, and definitely exemplified a “complex interplay of multiple, and sometimes competing plot lines” (Mishler, 1999, p. 80 ).

The narrative inquiry research methodology I chose was more suited to my inquiry into my life experiences—Mishler (1999) **speaks to** a need for a



method that would “provide a way to ‘see’ the relevant features” (p. 82), and a way to “collect, describe, and analyze individual life histories that is sensitive to process and temporal ordering of life events” (p. 82). The “two levels of analysis and interpretation” that was possible with this methodology, “the interactive production of narrative accounts and the larger sociocultural contexts of respondents lives” (p. 82) is specified in this contextualization component of the research strategy I chose. The result of choosing this strategy I hoped would be to “open up possibilities for observing both change and continuity” in my own stories to live by that might have been “closed off by traditional methods” (p. 82).

I also believed that it was the whole process that was very important to my deepening understanding of my lived experience. I needed to look at the field texts in a more holistic manner. I wanted to begin the process of “restorying” as described by Clandinin and Connelly in Ollerenshaw & Creswell (2002):

The holistic-content analysis of field texts [e.g., transcripts, documents, and observational field notes] includes more than description and thematic development as found in many qualitative studies. It involves a complex set of analysis steps based on the central feature of “restorying” a story from the original raw data. The process of restorying includes reading the transcript, analyzing this story to understand the lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and then retelling the story.” (p. 330)

As I moved towards the creation of research text, I began to wonder about how to begin this process of “restorying” and to demonstrate the understandings I

was coming to in this inquiry into of my lived experiences; understandings which I wanted to retell in narrative format.

Through this autobiographical narrative inquiry, the rereading and retelling of my own stories, I found my way out of those dark days of despair and began to see glimmers of hope and possibility. As you come along with me and I attempt to show you this journey, I hope to illuminate how narrative inquiry seemed to help me negotiate these issues in ways that felt consistent and coherent with what I was coming to know about Indigenous research, and in ways that allowed me to feel that perhaps I did, after all, belong to this world of research. This narrative inquiry process provided a way for me to work through these tensions, this discomfort and the great unease, to restory my graduate studies in ways that allow the title “researcher” to sit comfortably with my “Aboriginal” identity, and in ways that built the confidence needed for me to continue to engage in Indigenous research in ethically and relationally responsible ways.

The restorying process Clandinin and Connelly (2000) involves stories retold and relived, that is, restorying the plotlines under composition. “The researcher writes interim texts to find a narrative text that promotes an account of participants’ lived experiences” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 342) or in this case of my own lived experiences. I began this process, creating interim texts and then revisiting them repeatedly and each time they changed or grew and added more understanding that I gained through the process. Just as in the three-

dimensional space approach, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) encouraged a returning to field texts and interim texts “again and again” in a process “layered in complexity” (p. 132). “In restorying, the researcher might begin with a chronology of events [i.e., continuity], then proceed to the situation, followed by the interaction details” (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p. 343). However, the revisiting of texts, repeatedly creates a process which is less linear as the interim texts is “situated in the spaces between field texts and final published research texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133) a space filled with possibilities of trying out another way and seeing new possibilities.

I had spent much time in the analysis, and I needed to now begin the restorying process. It was not exactly a structured linear process; rather, it involved repeatedly rereading and revisiting the field texts, repeatedly spiralling back again and again, until slowly the stories began to emerge.

Bruner (1990) notes that “people do not deal with the world event by event or with text sentence by sentence. They frame events and sentences in larger structures” (p. 64). Plot is the narrative structure through which people understand and describe the relationship among the events and choices of their lives. Plots (Polkinghorne, 1995) function to compose or configure events into a story by:

- (a) delimiting a temporal range which marks the beginning and end of the story;

- (b) providing criteria for the selection of events to be included in the story;
- (c) temporally ordering events into an unfolding movement, culminating in a conclusion; and
- (d) clarifying or making explicit the meaning events have as contributors to the story as a unified whole. (p. 7)

The plot began to emerge and a narrative began to be formed; the research text was in process. The story began to be the teacher just as Archibald (2008) spoke about.

I must admit, there were moments of doubt when others would ask about my research and the progress I was making. As I attempted to try to describe narrative inquiry, at times I felt like I couldn't quite capture the words I needed. The person who asked usually didn't have the time to hear the whole story, and I couldn't encapsulate the process in a few sentences. Polkinghorne (1995) does it for me here, so I look to his words as a way of trying to articulate the process that I am attempting to illustrate in the research text:

In research that employs narrative analysis as distinguished from analysis of narratives, the result is an emplotted narrative. The outcome of a narrative analysis is a story.... In this type of analysis, the researcher's task is to configure the data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or purpose. The analytic task requires the researcher to develop or discover a plot that displays the

linkage among the data elements as parts of an unfolding temporal development culminating in the denouement. (p. 15)

In the analysis process, I reread and revisited my field text multiple times, and I analyzed the field text in a way that felt, to me, coherent with the process of narrative analysis that I was just learning about. I attempted more of a “synthesizing of the data rather than a separation of it into its constituent parts” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). I pondered other ways of analysis, color-coding, categorizing, seeking difference and similarities in concepts; however, I returned always to a narrative analysis. I maintain that analysis is what occurred. “The term *analysis* has been extended in qualitative research to cover any treatment of the data” and it is “*analysis* when referring to the configuration of the data into a coherent whole” (p. 16).

The evaluation of the configurative analytic work of the researcher is based on the generated story’s production of coherence among the situated, contextual, and particular elements of the data; that is, on its explanatory power (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and plausibility. “The evaluation of the story has a pragmatic dimension in the sense that its value depends on its capacity to provide the reader with insight and understanding” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 20).

What follows this chapter is the research text created from the carefully chosen field texts, which I repeatedly read, reread, and retold. It is the story of my autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences as an Aboriginal student in an Indigenous Educational program, striving to attain a “Master’s

degree” but yearning to become the Indigenous researcher only imagined and not yet attained.

### **Listen with Three Ears**

Clandinin & Rosiek (2007) describe listening:

For the narrative inquirer, a person’s experience needs to be listened to on its own terms first, without the presumption of deficit or flaw. Critique of that experience needs to be motivated by the problematic elements within that experience. For the critical scholar drawn into the borderland with narrative inquiry, such commitments do not come easily. It requires that they simultaneously acknowledge that an individual’s experience is shaped by macrosocial processes of which she or he is often unaware and that the same individual’s experience is more than the living out of a socially determined script. (p. 62)

That critical scholar resides a little bit within me as well. It is part of the reason why tension and unease arise when the narrative understandings from which I view my world, bump up against the theories and macrosocial processes I strive to understand. And so I ask that those who come to this inquiry, from that critical scholar position, which includes sometimes myself, to first read my autobiographical narrative inquiry, listening to my experiences on its own terms. Do not look first from inside of a theory and see me as “living out a socially predetermined script” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 62). Instead, come inside the narrative, live the story as I tell and retell it, and try to understand and try to listen

with all three ears; listen with the “two on the sides of [your] head and the one that is in [your] heart... Linking how we feel to what we know [is] an important pedagogy” (Archibald, 2008, p. 8).

## CHAPTER TWO: THE NARRATIVE—A SCHOLAR OR A TRAGEDY?

### Theories as Lens

People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others, including the young and those such as researchers who are new to their communities. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi)

I was living and telling stories and trying to create new ones, but things were not turning out as I had hoped or imagined. Knowing that I needed to understand, seeking relief from the doubts that plagued me, and searching for my place to belong within the research world, I began to look back to recollect<sup>21</sup> (Crites, 1986) those early lived experiences of being a Master's student.

I can recall my initial research wonderings centering on standardised testing and accountability. I was trying to understand my teaching experiences through what I was learning as a graduate student. I also began to formulate some early understanding of the issues surrounding Aboriginal education as it was being written about in the readings I was assigned. In those early papers, I attempted to apply the theories I had read and use the ideas given to my wonders about standardized testing and what that really meant in lives of the humans who lived it. I can recall working on those first major assignments and feeling so afraid. The process of creating a final product was long and difficult, as I would

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<sup>21</sup> See Crites (1986) "Storytime: Recollecting the past and projecting the future."



circle around it over and over, afraid to commit my own words to paper. I needed to find the theme that resonated with me and my understanding; until that happened, I spun in circles feeling like I was going nowhere. I had to try to connect the dots somehow, with my own experiences, and the process was lengthy with repeated readings and rereading of articles, and finding those perfect quotes. The final product was always tinged with this angst that had permeated the creation of it; in the end, I was never able to objectively judge the quality of the final document. I never knew if the understandings that I had come to were “correct.”

As I now read those early assignments, I remember struggling to try to merge what I knew from living as an Aboriginal student, teacher, and parent with the theories and statistics I was reading. I remember also feeling very uncomfortable when I tried to fit my family and friends into that same “theory.” But at the same time, trying to understand the theories without people and lived experiences felt almost impossible. I felt as if I wasn’t really getting any closer to the answers. It was difficult to find my place inside of those ideas in ways that felt authentic to me.

I understood the importance of theory in research, and the need to “look under the bed”<sup>22</sup> to see what else was lurking and what ‘assumptions’ one is making. I was especially drawn to the following quote from Zita (1988), which speaks to this essential need to understand theories:

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<sup>22</sup> A phrase I heard at the Accountability Symposium and graduate studies class in Winter and Spring of 2009 alluding to the need to look carefully at each theory or idea to see what other hidden implications there may be.

Theories are word-tools for navigating history, directing movements, defining enemies, predicting the future, getting specific, exploring connections, and moving through the hard places. Theories are word-tools for saying what you mean and meaning what you say. Theories are community builders—some divide and exclude, and some invite and incite. Theories also have smaller journeys between lovers, between minds. Some theories are deadly ... which theories do you live in? (p. 208)

I began to try to view my life, and my understanding through the lens the theories were providing. As I inquired into my field texts, a paper I wrote for one of my Educational Policy classes, I reread my writings about hunting for theories trying to understand politics, power, and Aboriginal Education, and I wrote about my worries in the conclusions. In this journal entry, I was trying to understand how my thinking was beginning to change:

*Most people blindly navigate through life assuming they are making informed and intellectual judgements all on their own, yet if they stopped a moment and thought about the reasons behind such decisions they would be amazed to find they do ascribe to some sort of theory. What a teacher thinks is the ultimate purpose of education determines what they decide to “do” in that classroom and what “results” they are looking for. If the idea is that education is about caring for the whole child and nurturing*

*independent, confident, well adjusted individuals, then the activities provided will be different than if one ascribes to the theory that education is about the amount of 'facts' and 'knowledge' that can be stuffed into brains. The Accountability Pillar and standardized testing is a side effect of one of those views. As a teacher, I could not reconcile the two different theories and worked to balance my need to make learning fun with my assumption, my theory, that to learn to write standardized tests the students needed mostly paper-and-pencil type of work. Society as a whole also seemed to place more and more emphasis on the need for numbers to prove that learning had occurred and I felt constricted by the need to produce good results. I began to view myself not as an agent of change but rather as an oppressed individual who needed to escape before being crushed. The theories I subscribed to were unconscious, sometimes not in my best interest and very powerful. The idea of deadly theories strikes very close to home because these conflicting theories were absolutely deadly for my career as a teacher.*

*—Politics of Education Course, Reflection Journal Assignment;*

*February 2009*

As I read this paper now, I begin to more clearly see the “stories to live by” that were prevalent in the way I was able to view or story myself and the impact of those accountability policies on my “lived experience.” Understanding

the importance of theory did not make my search any easier. Instead it seemed to raise the stakes, as I put more pressure on myself to understand these deadly theories in ways that would be practical and helpful. I recall choosing quotes that seemed to capture a piece of a theory that intrigued me and then studying it to try and see my lived experiences and those of my colleagues, friends, and family through that theoretical lens. Sometimes, the view distorted what I thought I knew to a degree that frustrated me further. “Trust in my own knowing” was something I could not yet do, so the theories and how I storied them just had to be right, if my faith in the written word was to remain true. And if they were right, then there were some ‘under the bed’ hidden assumptions that I was having difficulties reconciling with the humans I knew. My early views of each theory, and of theory in general, are simplistic and, because I am attempting to understand my lived experience of these theories, I do not go into an in-depth study; instead, I show how I was beginning to story people as I tried to place them inside of a theory.

### **What Does Bourdieu Have To Do With It?**

Early in my graduate studies experiences, I was introduced to Bourdieu (1992) and his theory of “habitus,” and I was intrigued and disturbed. He hovers around my thesis making regular appearance because his theories are something that I keep in mind as I ponder the complexities of Aboriginal education. There is something in his concept of “unconscious reproduction ... not for the likes of us” (Bourdieu, 1977) that I acquaint with the idea of “stories to live by” (Clandinin, 2006). The focus of the thesis is not on Bourdieu’s theories nor did I analyze my

lived experiences through the lens he creates with his idea of habitus and unconscious self-elimination; however, there are moments in my lived experiences when his words pop into my thoughts. Just as Thomas King's words, "not the Indian you had in mind," now arrive when I have moments of doubt about my right to an Indigenous claim, so too do Bourdieu's words, "not for the likes of us," show up when my ability to dream and imagine possibilities is squashed under the weight of frustration, and the "not belonging" and "less than" stories to live by. However, this thesis is not an exploration of "habitus" and "stories to live by." Rather, I include Bourdieu because his words regularly visit my thoughts and my lived experiences. His words and his theories did colour the way I began to view the world, but never felt coherent to my narrative way of understanding. He influenced me and will continue to do so; however, in this research text, my autobiographical narrative inquiry, he plays a supporting role. I will take a moment to explain my tentative, very simplistic understanding of his complex and intricate theories; theories which continue to intrigue and yet disturb.

I begin by trying to explain Bourdieu's (1992) theory "habitus," described as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (p. 53); further explained as "principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (p. 53). It is described as a very unconscious process; "objectively 'regulated' and

‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor (p. 53). Habitus then is (as Marsh [2006] wrote):

a set of dispositions created in an individual over time and shaped by structural elements in society, such as the family or schools. These dispositions, in turn, influence the subsequent attitudes and behaviour of individuals and thus perpetuate long-standing discourses. In other words, we absorb the ideologies and practices that are a part of our everyday lives and these become habitual, shaping our future choices. (p. 164)

His theories are often used to explain the way in which schooling contributes to social reproduction. I became interested in the theory when I began learning about the statistics in Aboriginal education. An example of a report which speaks to this is “Aboriginal peoples and postsecondary education in Canada” where Mendelson (2006) speaks to the “success of Aboriginal people in our postsecondary education (PSE) system” and how this success or lack of success “is, or should be, of vital interest to all Canadians” (p. 1). The report presents an “assessment of what the empirical data tells us about how Aboriginal peoples are doing in the postsecondary system, and what the data suggests about strategies to improve these results” (p. 1). I will only speak briefly to some of the data as an example of where discomfort was emerging and why Bourdieu still claims some of my attention. In the words of Mendelson (2006):

An astonishing 43 percent of Aboriginal people aged 20 through 24 reported in 2001 having less than high school education. This is the age group that would have been in high school in the 1990s, not in some distant past of discredited old policies and old programs. Moreover, the comparative figure for Canada as a whole is 16 percent. This figure indicates a huge gap between the young Aboriginal population and that of the population as a whole. (p. 11)

These figures worried me immensely, as I had many young relatives who I imagined had a whole future full of possibilities waiting for them. Seeing this research and thinking statistically about what could be in store for them, I became very nervous. Mendelson's report (2006) also notes:

The proportion of the Aboriginal and general population aged 20 to 24 group that completed university and obtained a degree. The rate within both the Aboriginal and the general population has fallen, in the case of the Aboriginal population to the very low level of 2 percent. (pp. 12–13)

The report further compared and described the rates broken down into a variety of categories, showing both improvements and declines in results.

Mendelson (2006) agrees that “doubtless there has been improvement, but there is no reason to be sanguine. Rather, there is good reason for every Canadian to be deeply concerned” (p. 24). He goes on to further describe how “there are huge numbers of Aboriginal students who are simply not completing high school. Yet the economy is evolving, and almost any job, even a minimum wage job, already

demands or soon will require a higher level of numeracy and literacy than today” (p. 24). In today’s economy, it is not as easy to get and keep a reasonable job with less than high school, so “failing to get through high school makes a lifetime of poverty increasingly probable” (p. 24). The statistics also show how “Aboriginal students are falling further behind. And this is not just about high school; it also directly affects PSE [postsecondary educational] attainment” (p. 24).

Mendelson (2006) reiterates how these statistics should be of concern to everyone, because educational attainment is

... absolutely critical for ... economic success and for social well being for all of Canada. If we end up entrenching a racially defined underclass, the consequences will be felt throughout the country, changing who we are and the kind of society we live in. (p. 24)

For me, the faces I put to that “lifetime of poverty” were those of ones I loved, my Aboriginal friends and family, and that made the need for concern much higher and much closer to home. I needed to understand why these statistics were occurring and why this gap existed. But this understanding was very complex and elusive. The words of Satzewich and Wotherspoon (2000) in their chapter entitled, “Political Economy Versus the Chicago School and Internal Colonization,” speak to this complexity:

Even though it is readily acknowledged that as a collectivity, Aboriginal peoples occupy disadvantaged positions within social, economic, and political relations in Canada, there is little agreement as to why there are



such inequities and social differences between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples. (p. 1)

This thesis is not an inquiry into this question; rather, it is an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences as an Aboriginal graduate student engaging in these studies, reading these reports, and knowing that they are speaking of me and mine; leaving me feeling very much uneasy and uncomfortable at being storied as “disadvantaged,” yet seeing some truth to the statistics. The anxiety this knowledge caused steadily built with every new report I read, and I never felt closer to understanding in ways that I could imagine myself standing in front of family and friends and storying them as disadvantaged with futures statistically leaning towards a lifetime of poverty.

I tried to understand this educational gap through my own lived experiences as well as trying to understand them theoretically. I recall many moments of trying to fit in and feeling a sense of belonging in the institution of education which I loved, and yet I recall just as many moments of feeling very much a fish out of water. In those moments of doubt, where I feel I don't belong in this university setting or even in the Indigenous world, I wonder about the influence of habitus on the creation of those feelings. I am, however, very uncomfortable with the restriction of this theory as well. That I “perpetuate long-standing discourse” (Marsh, 2006, p. 164) and that my habits so strongly impact my future choices in a way which isn't in my best interest, stories me again in ways that I don't want to be storied, and yet Bourdieu's (1977) words “not for the

likes of us” continue to resonate. So while I ponder his theories and other theories, I continue to seek explanations and ways of negotiating these doubts, these stories to live by, so that I can become awake to their source and begin to restory.

I return to Marsh (2006) and his description of Bourdieu’s work to help me deepen my understanding and to explain his theory to you:

It is possible, from a reading of Bourdieu’s work across decades (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984, 1990b; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), to suggest that habitus can establish itself as the dominant discourse on the termination of PA [pedagogic action], thus becoming a self-perpetuating system that needs no external reinforcement. The arbitrary nature of the cultural values transmitted in the curriculum is internalized by individuals over time and subsequently perceived as natural (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Habitus, then, and the concept of the “internalized arbitrary” are important to the development of an understanding of how practices are perpetuated across time and can account for the process by which individuals develop learned behaviours and attitudes that uphold dominant discourses. (p. 164)

While Marsh (2006) speaks about pedagogic action in this work, the description of habitus as the process “by which individuals develop learned behaviours and attitudes that uphold dominant discourses” (p. 164) resonates with my wonders about my own stories to live by. I wanted to understand my lived experiences, this development of my “less than” and “not belonging” stories to

live by so that I could have hope of becoming otherwise; becoming an Indigenous researcher confident in her right to belong and her abilities to engage in research with Aboriginal people.

The words “not for the likes of us” captures in a simple phrase so much angst and hopelessness, and restrictions and limitations. Because those moments of doubt regularly worm their way into my head I know Bourdieu has coloured my world, but I am not sure I like the colour that was created. I think of this theory when I want to quit graduate studies, and when I think I don’t belong in Indigenous research. When I begin to inhibit my demand “for access to the higher reaches of education by defining it as ‘not for the likes of us,’” I do see how it is possible that I am doing as Bourdieu’s theories suggest. “At every rung of the educational ladder [I] will tend to eliminate [myself]” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 113). I hear it and I wonder about it, but then I don’t quit. I stay the course. I wipe my tears. I pick up the discarded article and I begin to write again. I haven’t yet found anything in Bourdieu’s theory that feels coherent with this “get back up” story to live by that I slowly realize is also within my lived experiences. Nash (2002) explains:

In the *habitus* theory, people internalise their ‘life chances’, in such a way that they are able to read off whether or not ‘this is for the likes of us’.

That being so, the evidence must be found through ethnographic studies in the taken-for-granted knowledge people have of the courses of action open (and closed) to them. Fowler (1996, p. 10) argues that as ‘the consequence

of people's material experience and early socialisation,' *habitus* 'provides the basic or meta-dispositions towards ways of perceiving, knowing and appreciating the world' and suggests that it should be possible to see people 'cutting their coat according to their cloth.'" (p. 281)

Bourdieu's theories both intrigue and disturb me, but most of all they worry me and cause more unease as they bump up against my stories to live, particularly of not belonging. How can I begin to "cut my coat" when I can't decide on the "cloth" to which I belong? Bourdieu and his "below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 466) theory of habitus is not coherent with my stories to live by.

Bourdieu will visit and he will return often in this narrative, but he cannot yet stay, for the unease he creates, the disruption to the coherence of my stories is not yet fully understood and is not the subject of my inquiry at this time. I introduce him here because he demands it and not yet because I invite him. He too creates the context to which you must know to understand the narrative I tell.

### **What Did I See?**

I reread the field texts, one of my final assignments surrounding Aboriginal education trying to understand Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and his ideas of "cultural, economic and social capital" as essential to success. I recall trying to understand this theory and applying it to why I had been successful in my own education and in my teaching career. Rereading my words, I cringe at some of the

naivety and negative assumptions I made. In this next writing excerpt, I was trying on Bourdieu to see how he fit and, while the fit wasn't perfect, I was drawn to his ideas.

*The first thing I had to do was explore why I was successful in school despite the fact that I didn't feel as if I belonged or that I fit in. What drove me to succeed in a setting that brought about failure in so many others that I knew? When discovering the theories presented by Pierre Bourdieu and his idea of 'capital' I began to see both why I struggled and why I was successful. Cultural capital, economic capital, and social capital are such small words yet these words removed the blinders from my eyes and allowed me to emerge fully from my bubble and view what was really going on. Bourdieu (1984) asserts that "the primary differences distinguishing the major classes of conditions of existence derive from the overall volume of capital possessed by an individual." Capital being "the set of actually useable resources and powers"(pg 114). He believed that schools are not socially neutral and transmit the culture of the dominant class. Children from higher social backgrounds, who come to school already equipped with the cultural capital gained from home, do very well. The rest spend their time trying to receive and decode the culture, a skill which is not taught. Due to my ability early on to recognize that the dominant culture was not Aboriginal, I surrounded myself with white,*

*European friends and spent endless weekends immersed in their lives soaking up what cultural capital I could. There was not much that I could do about my economic situation; however, due to my hard work and dedication, as well as some luck, I had teachers who believed in me and insisted that I could be successful in school and that I should aim my sights higher....*

*Bourdieu had provided me with some insight into my history and a way of understanding what went on, and the idea that if I could beg, borrow, steal, and earn enough 'capital' to be successful in the educational system as we now know it, then perhaps I should figure out how to enable other Aboriginal students to do the same. I thought this was a worthy goal and I began to enthusiastically explore the idea. As I discussed it further, other, more critical thinkers began to ask some questions. Did I really believe that the fault lay within the Aboriginal people? Were they lacking in some ways which lead to their limited success in school? Why didn't I want to look at the policies and institutions and see where they were failing the Aboriginal student? I am sure I gasped at the implications of these questions. Had I spent so long trying to be 'white' that I blamed the Aboriginal people for their situation? Did I feel slightly superior because I thought I had figured out the system and could essentially beat it? Life as a Master's student, revealing assumptions and bringing dark little secrets to the harsh light*

*and exposing them, was beginning to get complicated. It was here also that I discovered a bit of what Bourdieu called “habitus” (1984, p. 110) that unconscious beliefs of self that constricts what possibilities one can envision. I did not think I was capable of changing policies and the fundamental structures of the institutions of school. If others like me had not discovered a way by now who was I to undertake such a huge task? ‘That is not for the likes of us’ was my thought.*

—*Critical Pedagogy and Transformative Practices in Indigenous Education Course, Reflective Essay; October 2008*

If I accepted this theory and these ideas, then I storied myself and other Aboriginal people as lacking in some essential ‘capital’ and I was giving my unconscious, full responsibility for my feeling helpless and hopeless to make any substantial change to this situation.

The ‘conscientization’<sup>23</sup> (Freire, 2000, p. 63) process I was engaged in as I read about Indigenous education, theories, and research had me feeling outraged, helpless, and angry at a set of ‘humans’ who in the past and who continued now, to oppress Aboriginal people. I spoke early on in my studies about this dilemma and continued to speak about it for the rest of the year as I tried to sort it out and understand. In this next writing selection, I speak about it again.

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<sup>23</sup> “But since, as we have seen, men’s consciousness is conditioned by reality, conscientization is first of all the effort to enlighten men about the obstacles preventing them from a clear perception of reality. In this role, conscientization effects the ejection of cultural myths that confuse people’s awareness and make them ambiguous beings” (Freire, 1985, p. 89).

*When I tried to begin with theory and place me and mine inside, I was uncomfortable with what I thought was being said. If I took this view, then I was to accept that Aboriginal people had the wrong kind of capital and would need to acquire the right kind. This was a theory that I was not sure I wanted to take home to my family. In some ways, it gave us something to aim for but in others it 'storied' Aboriginal people as lacking and I knew that story was not something I wanted to stand up and proclaim as part of my own thinking.*

*—Critical Pedagogy and Transformative Practices in Indigenous  
Education Course, Reflective Essay; October 2008*

As I reread my struggles about trying to understand, I recall the early stirrings of an 'anti-middle class white' feeling developing as I tried to understand what the implications were if I tried to use other scholars' frameworks or their theoretical lenses. I recall the depth of my angst (for lack of a better word) as I noted the unfairness of an educational system to which I had been a part, as teacher, for thirteen years and a place, while I often felt uncomfortable, I had not wanted to leave. The theories I tried to understand seemed to place Aboriginal people in a 'victim' state lacking power, or being non-elite. The reasons these theories gave for why students were not doing as well were much like a 'grand conspiracy theory' and I could see very little hope for what I, as a teacher or as a



parent, could really do. I had no intentions of over throwing a whole education system or society as a whole. I liked trying to see the issues from a different vantage point and trying to see the issues in Aboriginal education from a larger, more complete, vantage point, but it was very difficult to see a way out, or a way forward. I even said to one close, forgiving non-Aboriginal friend while I was in the midst of this struggle, how I was starting to dislike that group of “middle-class white.” She kindly pointed out it was these very same “middle-class white” who were my closest friends and who opened their homes and their ‘credit ratings’ to give me a leg up in the world; helping me buy my first car and my first home, always supporting me. I was glad then for this reminder that in my lived experience I could not story “middle-class white” people as conspiring to hold Aboriginal people down, but I was still perplexed as to how to understand the issues in ways that would be productive and create hope and possibilities for the future.

As I looked back at these early writings, looking for tensions and bumping points, I know I tried hard to see my world, as an Aboriginal student, teacher, and parent through these theories and lenses, and they didn’t sit comfortably with me. Was it because they were true? Or was it because it painted me and mine in a way I didn’t like, that is, as non-elite, and powerless. I am not sure, but I know the theories didn’t speak to me in ways that left me feeling hopeful. They niggled their way into my highly anxious way of viewing the world, and made the world seem hostile to all those who wear the title “Aboriginal” and they overwhelmed

me. My vivid imagination pictured the weight of society and a giant historic education system pushing down upon me and I didn't see a way of pushing back or even seeing around it. The weight was heavy. Trying to view the world and understand research in this way I began to speak about and write about repression, destruction and assimilation as I tried to write about Aboriginal topics. And I wasn't able to see how transformative practices, ideas, Indigenous pedagogy and epistemology would not forever be repressed by those who hold the power; and those who held the power were usually not Aboriginal.

### **Indigenous Research**

In this next journal entry, I wonder if I have the qualifications needed to even begin to understand or study these complex issues in Aboriginal education from an Aboriginal perspective.

*Being given this great privilege of stepping out of the picture and hovering over it, I began to see that perhaps things were not as I had perceived and perhaps there were deeper underlying issues that I had not been aware of. Now my eyes are opened and I look forward to learning the language I need to express what I could not as a teacher, and I hope to figure out what it is that is needed from me to improve the future for all Aboriginal people. My goal this term is to listen and to hear and to hopefully solidify my beginning understanding of Indigenous epistemology, pedagogy, and research. I still waver in my confidence, as*

*most of my years in school as a student, a teacher, and then again as a student I felt that I was an imposter and that someone would find out that I really had no idea what I was doing and did not belong. I drag this baggage in with me as I study the idea of Indigenous Research. I begin the course with questions already rambling around in my brain. What is Indigenous research? Who is an Indigenous Researcher? Am I Aboriginal enough to be considered one? Can those of us trapped somewhere in the middle between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal be a valuable resource, or do we end up not understanding either culture? If I decide I am or that I will follow the methods of an Indigenous researcher, will I find a question that will benefit Aboriginal people?*

*—Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal;*

*February 2009*

This autobiographical narrative inquiry is about my lived experiences, my stories, told, retold, lived and relived and eventually restoried. Within this narrative, I try to come to an understanding of what Indigenous research means to me and why there were times I didn't feel that I had the right nor was I capable. I am not yet confident enough to claim that I am an Indigenous researcher and that I engaged in this as Indigenous research. However, as much as I could, I incorporated my beginning understandings of what this Indigenous research meant to me. Again, I am not the Indian we had in mind when we imagine

Indigenous research. I am very much aware of this, and that my learning has been through reading more than lived experiences, but that what I read, and what I live, and perhaps even what I intuitively know creates what I imagine this Indigenous research should be.

Because this thesis is an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences as an Aboriginal student in an Indigenous Peoples Education program and is centered on the tensions and unease I negotiated while living within the story of “not the Indian I had in mind,” I tentatively offer descriptions of key concepts and understandings about my coming to know Indigenous research. These concepts will reappear again within the narrative itself. I give a brief introduction, to put the research text that follows in context and not to claim this as my methodology or my theoretical framework.

First and foremost, “Indigenous peoples’ interests, knowledge and experiences must be at the centre of research methodologies and construction of knowledge about Indigenous peoples” (Rigney, 1999, p. 119). This concept seems to capture the principle which most needs to be considered when contemplating research with Aboriginal people or on Aboriginal topics. I refer in this section to Porsanger (2004) because her description of “the indigenous approaches to research on indigenous issues” (p. 104) is coherent with how I understand them. Porsanger (2004) describes how

... the indigenous approaches to research on indigenous issues are not meant to compete with, or replace, the Western research paradigm; rather,

to challenge it and contribute to the body of knowledge of indigenous peoples about themselves and for themselves, and for their own needs as peoples, rather than as objects of investigation. (p. 104)

The definition of Indigenous research is complex and multifaceted, and I will only just begin to touch on it in the space provided here.

An aspect of Indigenous research that is often spoken to and makes me somewhat uneasy with what it implies, is the “quest for the decolonization of research and, indeed, of the human mind” especially “among those who belong to the growing generation of indigenous researchers” (Porsanger, 2004, p. 107). This decolonization process “requires new, critically evaluated methodologies and new, ethically and culturally acceptable approaches to the study of indigenous issues” (p. 107). This decolonization research method is “about centering our concepts and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (Smith, 1999, p. 39). The indigenous researcher must engage in a process of breaking free of the frames of Western epistemologies, “which are in most cases very different from the indigenous ones and are, indeed, suited to Western academic thought, but which are nevertheless foreign to indigenous ways of thinking” (p. 107). This decolonization through research is somewhat intimidating to me. It requires that I stand up, go against the grain, and swim upstream in the academic world. However, in the end, I find that I was not able to do research any other way. I needed to do it narratively, in a way that was coherent with how I viewed and

understood the world. As I reflect back, the words of Smith begin to take on a whole new meaning. In the research method I chose it really was “about centering [my] concepts and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from [my] own perspectives and for our [my] own purposes” (Smith, 1999, p. 39). It is possible, that in the retelling, reliving and restorying that this, my autobiographical narrative inquiry, did become a “decolonizing methodology” (p. 39).

Indigenous peoples’ purpose and perspective as described by Porsanger (2004) include:

... indigenous approaches that allow Indigenous scholars to decolonize theories, develop indigenous methodologies and use indigenous epistemology; these approaches allow indigenous scholars to make visible what is special and needed, what is meaningful and logical in respect of Indigenous peoples’ own understanding of themselves and the world. This whole process allows Indigenous research to break free from the frames of Western epistemologies. (p. 107)

For me, this breaking free was a difficult, tension-fraught process, and I experienced numerous moment of doubts. But now, nearing the end of my autobiographical narrative inquiry, I see how this process of “making visible” (Porsanger, 2004, p. 107) what I think is “special and needed, what is meaningful and logical” (p. 107) in respect to my own “understanding of myself and the world” (p. 107) has forced me to dig deep and to be still and to learn to trust in my

own knowing and trust that I am creating something that is meaningful and logical to the concepts of research and Indigenous researchers.

Porsanger (2004) goes on to describe how in our attempts to imagine what this looks like we must acknowledge that “indigenous methodology is a body of indigenous and theoretical approaches and methods, rules and postulates employed by Indigenous research in the study of Indigenous peoples” (p. 107). Indigenous methodologies main goal is always to ensure that “research on Indigenous issues can be carried out in a more respectful, ethical, correct, sympathetic, useful, and beneficial fashion, seen from the point of view of Indigenous peoples (p. 108). This seeing from the point of view of Indigenous peoples is very much what I am trying to articulate in this research text, as I try to describe, through story, what it is that I experienced.

The question of how indigenous one must be to engage in indigenous research regularly appears, especially in my own wonders, and yet it is somewhat of a misconception. “Indigenous methodologies do not reject non-Indigenous researchers, nor do they reject Western canons of academic work (see Chippewa American Indian scholar D. Champagne [1998], for example; see also Porsanger [2002] as cited in Porsanger, 2004, p. 109). Neither does it privilege the indigenous person as researcher. For me, an Aboriginal person, it just added layers upon layers of complexity to an already complex situation. In Porsanger, (2004), Mihesuah, and Bishop, and Glynn explain how

... insider research has to take seriously the notion of accountability, which is an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility, as well as the notion of respect and—most of all—the notion of a thorough knowledge of indigenous traditions and languages by so-called “insider researchers. (p. 108)

Within my autobiographical narrative inquiry, this notion of “thorough knowledge of indigenous traditions and language” (Porsanger, 2004, p. 108) comes up often in my lived experience, as my lack causes me great unease when I try to negotiate this welcoming yet ethically and methodologically rigorous way of engaging in research that I imagine Indigenous research to be.

Rigney (1999) speaks to how

... at its core Indigenous methodologies promote principles which all researchers, should and likely do consider as they engage in research. ‘Indigenous methodologies require scholars to think critically about their research processes and outcomes, bearing in mind that indigenous peoples’ interests, experiences and knowledge must be at the centre of research methodologies and the construction of knowledge concerning indigenous peoples.’ (p. 119)

Throughout my studies over the two years, this idea of centering the indigenous person prominently within the research project, and honouring their stories comes up repeatedly and it is one that feels very coherent with the way I hope to live as researcher. I am uneasy placing me in the center of research, and my needs as



taking precedence, so I like this idea of honouring stories and centering indigenous peoples. However, in this autobiographical narrative inquiry which does center my story, I feel as if I have honoured my story in ways that allowed me to begin to restory in the telling, retelling, and reliving process.

The specific methods one employs within an indigenous research paradigm are not scripted and laid out in detail; rather, there is the freedom to choose methods coherent with your own way of understanding—methods which honour indigenous ways of knowing and that keep the principles of respect and benefitting the indigenous peoples first and foremost. It does, however, entail a discussion of the theorizing and measuring and what is considered to be “scientifically acceptable.” Much of traditional research is based on Western philosophy and “imply a notion of objective research, which was recently, questioned by—among others—feminist and indigenous researchers who articulate different epistemologies [e.g., Heshusius, 1994; Rigney, 1999]” (cited in Porsanger, 2004, p. 110). The quest for objective research often leads one to attempt to remain “outside of the research as researcher, investigating through observation and discovery,” and “drawing conclusions based on those observations” as is required by the scientific method, but seen from an indigenous viewpoint, is not a guarantee for objectivity” (Crazy Bull, 1997, p. 18). It is more important that “theoretical,” ready-to-use” methods be reconsidered and reworked in indigenous research” (p. 110). The many tensions I experienced trying to view my lived experience through theory, and my narrative ways of understanding the

world and of doing research, is soothed by the writings of Kanagluk (2001) and Kawagley (1995) who speak to the idea that the researcher should start from indigenous ethical protocol rather than from a theoretical point. Starting from a theoretical point continues to bump up uncomfortably with my stories to live by to such a degree that made it very difficult to see and gain understanding. Not knowing the proper Indigenous protocol also causes unease; however, starting from Indigenous ethical protocol is more coherent with how I imagine myself as a researcher.

From Smith's (1999) writing, we are reminded to choose very carefully the particular methods within indigenous methodology in "respect to indigenous ethics, explicitly outlined goals of research, and the considered impact of the outcomes of research on the particular indigenous people"(p. 15). A researcher who chooses to engage in Indigenous research must consider carefully the impact of that research. My lived experiencing in graduate studies speaks to how the process of research can at times cause moments of tension and unease that must be accounted for. Smith (1999) also writes of the importance of "reporting back and sharing knowledge" (p. 15) as part of "the process of disseminating of research results" (p. 15). Making sure Indigenous people are not forgotten once the research relationship has ended also honours the needs of the people themselves. The respect shown in reporting back is key to indigenous research and an important consideration for all those who engage in research with Aboriginal people. It also remains an important consideration for me, as my

friends and family have supported me constantly in this journey; so despite my numerous moments of doubt and my intense fears and my occasional desire to give up, I couldn't, because in the back of mind, I imagine my audience, "all my relations" (Wilson, 2008, p. 77) waiting to hear the understanding that I come to. Quitting was not an option when viewed from this perspective.

The lack of specific restrictions and outlines of what Indigenous research is exactly leaves a much more open and broad definition, but some scholars (such as Wilson, 2001) argue that Indigenous people need to do Indigenous research because of the

... lifelong learning and relationship that goes into it. You are not just gaining information from people; you are sharing your information. You are analyzing and you are building ideas and relationships as well.

Research is not just something that's out there: it's something that you're building for yourself and for your community. (p. 179)

This too bumps up uncomfortably with my inability to locate geographically my own community. Community, of course, can have a variety of definitions and yet, the concept of importance of land and place to Indigenous peoples has me always searching for where my own connection is. This idea of "lifelong learning and relationship" (Wilson, 2001, p. 179) scrapes raw those old wounds of mine that resulted in my having left and not returned to my mom's homeland and the disconnect that results from a lack of contact with those I call extended family members.

Linda T. Smith (1999) offers a list of questions a researcher must ask when considering engaging in indigenous research, which will help enable researchers to ensure they are meeting the principles of indigenous research:

Whose research is this? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will the results be disseminated? (p. 10)

All these questions must be asked while considering also how the project will promote healing, mobilization, transformation, and decolonization on many levels. These questions are quite difficult for a beginning researcher to articulate and yet essential to ensuring ethical research alongside of Indigenous people on topics which impact their lives. While there is a lack of very specific definitions of what Indigenous research is and what it is not, these questions offer a way of negotiating your own research project in ways that are respectful of Indigenous principles.

As I inquire into my lived experience, looking carefully at the moments of tension I realize that Indigenous research is not an exclusive club to which I was not invited but that it is different from the Western paradigms that I was attempting to understand and emulate; paradigms not coherent with my narrative ways of understanding the world. Wilson (2001) speaks to this concept of Indigenous paradigms in opposition to the dominant ones, and speaks to the idea of Indigenous knowledge being relational:

One major difference between those dominant paradigms [positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, action research, and constructivism theory] and an Indigenous paradigm is that those dominant paradigms build on the fundamental belief that knowledge is an individual entity: the researcher is an individual in search of knowledge, knowledge is something that is gained, and therefore, knowledge may be owned by an individual. An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, or just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge. (p. 177)

In this autobiographical narrative inquiry, as I inquire into those moments of tension, I see how it is this idea of reporting back the knowledge that begins to create the unease. Each time a new concept is introduced, each time I read more on the topic of Aboriginal education or Aboriginal people, I imagine standing in front of family and friends sharing the knowledge. Looking to my early landscape, recalling the many aunties who raised me and my drifting away from them, I am uneasy at the thought of being potentially viewed as knowing when I story myself as lacking the cultural knowledge and even the connection to my own land and people that I imagine a knowing Indigenous researcher to be. The

concept of relational knowledge required me to try to remain awake to the impact of research on all who will come across my research text, and in the writing and reporting, I am trying to keep in mind all who may get storied in the research text; wary of my dichotomous tendency to “othering” and creating an us-versus-them storyline. It is this more relational way of knowing that the concept that the dichotomous trap bumps up against creating tension, requiring me to think more deeply and carefully about what I am saying.

Wilson (2008) says, “Right or wrong; validity; statistically significant; worthy or unworthy: value judgements lose their meaning. What is more important and meaningful is fulfilling a role and obligations in the research relationship—that is, being accountable to your relations” (p. 77). The Indigenous research that I imagine includes most important of all being accountable to my relations. This principle I hold the closest and this is the one I most desire to uphold. To become the Indigenous researcher that I imagine, I keep in mind always my relations, my family; I do so now, in every story I tell and every word I speak or I write. I strive to remain awake to the stories I tell of them, but occasionally find myself still asleep and needing reminding. My family includes both those related by blood and those who entered my life and became like family. To learn to become this researcher that I imagine, I need to rebuild relationships and I need to maintain and honour the ones that exist now—from them comes the knowledge I will need to become the Indigenous researcher I imagine.

“Indigenous research methodologies are those that enable and permit Indigenous researchers to be who they are while engaging actively as participants in research processes that create new knowledge and transform who they are and where they are” (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, p. 174). In this autobiographical narrative inquiry, I attempt to be accountable to my relations in the telling and the leaving out of certain stories. I attempt to create new knowledge while transforming who I am through the process of inquiring into my lived experiences in ways that I hope to be able to restory those lived experiences, which is essential to my imagining the possibility of becoming the Indigenous researcher I desire to be. It is a necessary and vitally important step; only a small piece but one which I feel must happen now, in the midst of the reconnecting to who I am and who I want to become through relationship with family.

I include this to set the context for the research text that follows, so that as you read you can keep these ideals also in mind and recall them when they appear. Just as a child plays house, pretends to cook, and creates fabulous mud pies not meant for real consumption, I too play with the concepts of Indigenous research, practicing and building skills so that when I fully understand, and I am ready, and my confidence is such that I see the possibility that I too can and will engage in Indigenous research. There will someday be a moment when I do submit a future project as Indigenous research, fit for consumption by one and all. Until then, allow me the process of becoming, through this autobiographical narrative inquiry, and together we can explore my lived experiences as an

Aboriginal student in an Indigenous program, living as “not the Indian we all had in mind,” knowing that I am still in the process of becoming.

### **Storied as Unattainable**

Returning to my field texts, to the writing I had been engaging in during the living-out of graduate studies, I try to keep in mind the principles of Indigenous research I was using to create the imagined Indigenous researcher that I so desired to emulate. Not only was I wrestling with theories and attempting to find humans inside of them, or to put the humans inside, I was also worrying constantly about my right to be this Indigenous researcher that I was reading about. I was storying Indigenous Research in ways that I felt as if it were a club to which I could not belong.

*The one question that stood out most in my mind as I read Linda Smith (1999) is the question of whom does this research benefit and who is the audience? The book also helped me to think about how those who I am trying to research are not mere objects and are real live people and people whom I am likely to know. This truly does make this a whole different issue.... So while I would love to research and be directly involved in potential changes in a school my nieces and nephews attend, it appears, especially after reading Linda Smith's book, that there is a multitude of things I did not yet consider; including the issue of reporting my findings and to whom? I would not want to research something that*



would not then improve the future of Aboriginal education and/or people. There is also a need for concern that what I research and report does not add to the mountain of research done about the “Indian Problem” where we view every issue as a “problem” that society at large must solve, a job which society appears to be incapable of succeeding at anyway.... The question though does boil down to whether I am Indigenous enough to be considered an Indigenous researcher. This was discussed in class, the question of who is and how we are defined as Aboriginal. A classmate said something about “which skin feels best?” but I wondered if for a number of students, especially ones who have enough “White” capital to be successful in the education system, if neither skin fits. Some parts of me think that is a good place to be as a researcher because you can see into both worlds and perhaps see a path for Indigenous people that cannot be seen from one or the other worldviews. However, it could also be dangerous as an Indigenous researcher as one tries to navigate the protocols and tries to understand a culture they are not really a part of. As we continue to explore Indigenous research, I will be searching for an answer to this critical question, “To engage in Indigenous research, how Indigenous must one be?”

—Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal;

February 2009

Indigenous research was asking hard questions and promoting even more rigorous ethical standards for research, which I believed was exactly as it should be, especially considering how uncomfortable I felt when I considered research with theories leading the way. Indigenous research seemed to hold one accountable to the people who were being ‘researched’ and putting humans back into center stage. This, too, felt exactly as it should be, but how I was placing the humans, whose lived educational experience I was trying to understand, was also taking a turn in a direction in which I didn’t want to go.

*... as I felt a sense of outrage at all of the oppression which continues and the disadvantages and road blocks Indigenous students face regularly. I began to view those privileged ‘white’ with a bit of resentment and a feeling that ‘they’ (non-Indigenous) should be more knowledgeable and also work towards solutions to the continued education gap instead of just ignoring it as not their problem.... This statement caused me to again stop and re-evaluate where my thoughts and feelings were going, and it gave ‘white’ people a face again—faces of many of my friends.... I began to rethink my position and stop feeling ‘oppressed and/or repressed’ by ‘middle class white’ and I tried then to just look at the problem itself and withhold ‘blame.’ Perhaps by suspending judgment on who is in the wrong and focus more on the policies in place and the reasons given for why they exist, I can overcome the block that is preventing me from developing a*

*potential topic and remove the issue of 'blame' from the table and instead look at deepening understanding of a system so as to allow room for creative problem solving to occur and some thought outside of the box to take place.*

*—Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal;*

*February 2009*

In those early response journals, I began to try to put together a picture of what I believed Indigenous education and pedagogy entailed so that I could feel like an expert in the area, and I could engage in Indigenous research feeling like I was armed with the knowledge I needed. I was always recalling the disconnect I felt from my extended family and my desire to know more about my culture, both for my own personal growth but also to become the Indigenous researcher that I imagined. I was trying to make coherent my lived experiences from my early landscapes, and my stories to live by with what I imagined my future could be as a researcher. I wasn't able to find that coherence at the time, and only in the reflecting back am I beginning to be aware of the space created within the principles of Indigenous research that might allow one who feels "not the Indian we had in mind" to engage relationally and ethically in ways that honours the humans.

There were writings about this relational ontology in relation to Indigenous research, but on the same topic, at the same time, I was learning also

about the many theorists writing about the possible need for overt conflict. I was trying to negotiate this relational methodology that privileged the people also with talks of uprisings needed.

*In his article, "The German Ideology," Marx (1970) speaks of the idea that overt conflict might be necessary to create an uprising which would be needed for the oppressed to change the status quo was one that again brought me back to the problems in education and specifically Aboriginal education. Teachers and Aboriginal people seem to have been unable to gather the masses to end "class relations.*

*—Politics of Education Course, Reflection Journal Assignment;*

*February 2009*

In this field text notes how in this writing I then tried to imagine how we could begin to try to take control:

*Weber (1991) talks about different types of legitimate leadership. Some of them included ideas like authority of internal yesterday (traditional); gift of grace (charisma), and virtue of legality (law, constitution and parliament). We discussed the charisma of [President] Obama and how he has appealed to a different class of people. The example I recall best is how he and his wife share one vehicle while his opponent had an obscene*

*amount, so not only is he nice looking, charismatic, but he is also “one of the people” and not a rich man ruling over the poor masses. He definitely seems to have gathered a group of people who feel he is a leader and so should be followed. I dream then of one day having a similar leader in Aboriginal education. One so charismatic that they will be able to influence tradition and change it and influence the law to allow the freedom for other forms, style, and ideas to take hold in the education process.*

*—Politics of Education Course, Reflection Journal Assignment;*

*February 2009*

In this writing, I was trying to envision a way that I could make the goals of needing an uprising to take control (Marx, 1970) more coherent with my stories to live by of avoiding conflict. Conflict, since I was a little girl, was something that caused anxiety, and I would do whatever it took to smooth the waters, or I would just avoid the situation. Either way, I was attempting to be a scholar, to deepen my understanding and to find a way to make these theories coherent with the stories to live by that I lived. I no longer felt able to just look away and not attempt to be a part of the imagined future of our Aboriginal children. Not wanting overt conflict, I imagined a charismatic leader who would inspire change rather than create an uprising to force it; that image was more coherent with my way of being.

As I reread, relived, and now retell those lived experiences through these field texts, I am trying to understand how my writing reflects the thought processes I was going through and how thoughts were creating moments of tension and unease. In the following field text, I began to talk about a totally separate education system as the solution for Aboriginal people:

*Durkheim (1933) discusses the role of education as satisfying society's needs. Society at this time values standardized testing for its gatekeeping, accountability, and instructional diagnosis abilities. When looking at it through this view, when Aboriginal students fail or do not excel at these standardized tests, then the tests fulfill their gatekeeping role and keeps them out of higher education. The failure on the tests also labels their schools and their teachers as no good, thus holding them accountable and fulfilling the accountability role. Most importantly of all, this failure of Aboriginal students labels the instruction given to them as inadequate or flawed, which fulfills the instructional diagnosis role. Much time and money has been spent on these tests which are supposed to show how to improve instruction, and yet not much progress has been made in instructions. Instead the tests seem to be best at keeping Aboriginal people out of higher education and proving that the educational systems are failing. What are the implications of that on Indigenous pedagogy and improving Aboriginal education? The lack of improvement attained from*

*this type of testing seems to show how little value these scores are to educators. The fact that schools are failing Aboriginal students as shown by the low scores could be beneficial to shining light upon this much ignored issue; however, the public view seems to be, not that the education system has failed our Aboriginal students, rather that Aboriginal students are failing our education system. The blame continues to fall on the deficits of the people. This theory also raises the question about what is society's real need and how are standardized tests involved?*

*—Politics of Education Course, Reflection Journal Assignment;*

*February 2009*

I was trying to look at theories of power<sup>24</sup> and apply them to the lived experiences of Aboriginal education. I saw the standardized testing regime as a tool used in this power struggle. This can also be labelled as a bumping point, a moment when what I knew intuitively—what I lived was not feeling coherent with the ideas of power and the image that teachers, fellow colleagues, were somehow complicit, whether consciously or not, in the continued oppression of Aboriginal people. Educators, who were some of my closest friends, were essentially being storied as enemies. It was a very disconcerting place to be, trying to understand without storying others in ways that they too might not want

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<sup>24</sup> See Barret, M. (1991). *The politics of truth from Marx to Foucault*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. Power is exercised through techniques, strategies, power 'flows,' we are 'constituted by' power and finally that we don't use power nor are we necessarily oppressed by it. We're just 'in it.' Instead of continuing to be afraid of it or repressed by it, we must remember that "power is exercised rather than possessed" (p. 135).

to be storied. I constantly wondered how others in my family would view these same theories. We would sometimes discuss them, but it essentially boiled down to just wanting a better future for our children and a decision about how to achieve that or who was responsible for the potential “lifetime of poverty” (Mendelson, 2006) could never be articulated by any of us. I did not want to ignore the historical oppressive past that is a part of the lived experiences of Aboriginal people, nor did I want to ignore the potentially unfair, educational system suited more to a group of people to which I and my loved ones did not belong, but neither did I want to create a dichotomy between us and them, as I was never quite understanding who “them” really were.

*Power also enters the discussion when you look at how many Aboriginal people are beginning to take control of their education and are creating systems which follow a Red Pedagogy<sup>25</sup> (Grande, 2004, p. 355), as is more suited to the culture of Aboriginal people. The dominators (white middle class) allow these attempts but insist that the Aboriginal students must still pass the tests created in the Eurocentric system. Generally, Aboriginal students fail the test. This leads the dominators to conclude that Red Pedagogy is not working. The concern raised here is that any Indigenous program following Indigenous pedagogy is not necessarily going to do*

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<sup>25</sup> Red Pedagogy, as proposed by Grande (2004), describes four characteristics: (a) politically, it maintains “a quest for sovereignty, and the dismantling of global capitalism” (p. 355); (b) epistemologically, it privileges indigenous knowledge; (c) the earth is its “spiritual center” (p. 355); (d) socioculturally, it is grounded in “tribal and traditional ways of life” (p. 355).



*well on standardized multiple choice tests written by middle class white people based on their curriculum. Is this an issue of power over Aboriginal people? Standardized tests are assumed to prove good teaching, good curriculum, and good students? What does that say when a huge population of Canada's students (Aboriginal specifically) fail? Does it mean there is bad teaching, bad curriculum, and bad students? Or could there be a problem with the tests?*

*—Perspective on Policy & Practice Education Policy Studies Course,  
Final Paper; December 2008*

As I read this piece of text, I recall trying to understand the bigger-picture feeling as if through that I could develop some understanding of why teaching became so very difficult for me, as well as to understand why so many Aboriginal people across the globe statistically do not do well in the educational system as we know it. My eyes were being opened to the inequalities I was not seeing. Still, I was very uncomfortable with the positioning of me and my Aboriginal relations as “failing” and “being controlled” and in need of being “roused” up to fight. I was increasingly saddened, frustrated, and angered. I even began trying to emulate those writers who called for more fighting back. For this moment, in this particular writing, I wanted to make it known that I was on the side of the Aboriginal people, even if it meant positioning myself opposite my non-Aboriginal friends. Reading these words now, I am mildly amused at the dramatic

nature and ‘rise to arms’ attitude that I, a middle child, people pleaser, run-from-conflict type of person was trying to write and think about. I wrote introductions that storied us, Aboriginal people, as versus them, Western Colonizers.

*Hot off the press! Indigenous people everywhere rejoice! White liberal guilt from a heritage of colonialism has resulted in the formation of a radical idea—Moral Relativism! The Western colonizers have looked back into history and discovered that perhaps they were wrong in judging tribal people to be less civilized, more barbaric, and in need of salvation. To ease their guilt, they turn to the idea of moral relativism and proclaim, “Who are we to judge other cultures?” (p xi). Perhaps centuries of oppression and discrimination will end for the Indigenous peoples of the world as the mainstream thought becomes one of nonjudgement and acceptance.*

*—Introduction to Evaluating Educational Research Course, “Moral Relativism” Book Review; November 2008*

I also spoke of control and weapons and tools for forces of good and evil:

*Who exerts control over the future of Aboriginal Education is an important question and are standardized tests one of those practices contributing to the continuation of oppressive schooling for marginalized*

*groups? What role do standardized tests play in keeping Aboriginal people oppressed and marginalized, and more importantly, what will we as Indigenous Scholars do to ensure this question begins to take center stage and enters into all discussions regarding the future of our Aboriginal children? Standardized tests, are they an oppressive tool or a beacon of light finally illuminating a problem so many allow to remain in the dark? Is it a tool used for the forces of good to guide the creation of a transformative education, or is it wielded as a weapon for the forces of evil and the continued oppression of Aboriginal people?*

*—Perspective on Policy & Practice Education Policy Studies Course,*

*Final Paper; December 2008*

As I inquire into those moments, I recall those early landscapes where someone looked at me or told me stories of being “less than” because I was an Indian; as I reflected on the many moments of tension and unease as a teacher and then in this university setting, I imagine that this attempt at fighting back with ferocity could perhaps been an early attempt at restorying. Perhaps I didn’t always want to be seen as passive, unknowing, needing to be roused up. Perhaps I wanted it known that I am aware, through my lived experiences of what it is to be Aboriginal in this society and in this education system, and that I am not complacently sitting by allowing the world to decide my fate. But perhaps I was just playing with the theories of Indigenous research and trying them on in their

different forms to see how they fit. Either way, it is evident that I had passion and a desire to seek answers, but I was seeing things dichotomously and envisioning battles between two sets of different people—the oppressors and the oppressed (Foucault, 1982; King, 1957). Having run from conflict my whole life, I wasn't sure if I was up for this latest battle between Aboriginal people and society over the education system of choice. I was so often immersed in internal battles with my “stories to live by” and trying to navigate this academic world despite them or with them alongside, that I wasn't ready then, nor do I feel as ready now, to take on a more external battle.

*We are in a time of great transition and potential crisis. The continued survival of Indigenous people is being threatened. The dismal results of our youth in schools and in society are heartbreaking. There are many advocates fighting to heal what centuries of oppression has done and as history illustrates schools and education are the places for such revolutionary changes to occur. Some educational practices can also, as Freire<sup>26</sup> states, play a role in sustaining an oppressive schooling for marginalized groups. Knowledge can have political as well as practical content, and those in positions of power claim what forms of knowledge are valid. Who exerts control over the future of Aboriginal Education is an important question.*

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<sup>26</sup> See Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. NY: The Continuum Publishing Corporation.

—*Perspective on Policy & Practice Education Policy Studies Course,*  
*Final Paper; December 2008*

Rereading this field text, trying to understand my lived experience through the words I was writing, I am aware of how the words “oppression” and “marginalized” continue to bump up uncomfortably, even now, when I imagine reporting my learning back. It isn’t that I don’t understand or agree that the legacy of a history of oppression did not occur. It is just that I don’t find this understanding coherent with my need to find ways to now story the future of Aboriginal people through this storyline. As I attempted, then, to address this call to do battle to help save “generations of lost children”<sup>27</sup> and to create a different future for Aboriginal people of the world, or at least here in Canada, I recall desperately needing heroes and leaders to show me the way, a way that was more coherent with the lived experienced of me, of my loved ones, and of other Aboriginal people whose stories I had at some point in my life been told. I recall that in my readings I was introduced to some fascinating Indigenous scholars who both inspired and spun me into a whirlpool of despair. I was inspired and intrigued by the ideas of Indigenous Pedagogy and knowledge and a different way of ‘educating’ that I was coming to know. The Indigenous scholars I read spoke

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<sup>27</sup> “The bottom line is the education of students is suffering and we can’t risk losing a generation of young people”—a quote from Alberta’s Educational Minister Dave Hancock referring to a decision to dismiss the entire Northland’s School Division School Board and the resulting media coverage of the event; a statement which storied Aboriginal people and especially their children as ‘lost.’

about a way of being in the world, always in relation, that connected deeply to something within my soul, and I longed to be a part of that kind of knowing. I did not want us versus them; rather, I wanted a more loving negotiation and attempts at being awake to each other's lived experiences in ways that allowed all to grow and become. I was trying to write as if I was in a position of knowing, but in the writing, I was uneasy with the understanding I was coming to; I was hearing the relational ontology in Indigenous research but it wasn't coherent with the "rise up and fight oppressor" storyline I was also hearing.

As I reflect back, I recall constantly wondering if I could become the Indigenous researcher I imagined. I knew I was Métis, and would imagine the "colonizers'" blood flowing through my veins from an ancestry documented well enough to allow me to be what I call a "recently carded Métis." As I recalled the awareness of not knowing my Métis culture, becoming disconnected from my Mom's homeland and my extended family as a young girl, and my inability to believe that I knew enough of my Cree culture, I recall how this bumped up against my vision of who I wanted to become. I wasn't certain that I had that same "blood memory" of which Holmes (2000) spoke. With my nomadic, transient lifestyle and my feelings of not belonging, I wondered if I had the same connections to land and people of which the Indigenous scholars spoke. Would I have the "heart knowledge" that would "link knowledge to connection with identity, values and relationships" that I needed? Would I be able to hear the "voices of the land" which spoke of the teaching I needed to return to (Holmes,

2000)? I felt that I was lacking this ancestry of experience that “shapes dreams, desires, intentions, and purposeful activities” (p. 47) that I as an Indigenous person, should have. I recalled the sadness of quitting teaching because it was no longer a good fit, then finding this different way of being and of educating, and wondering and worrying if that too was “not for the likes of me.” As I seek out the stories of my lived experiences, I try to understand these many moments of tensions and to find coherent stories as way of understanding those lived experiences. The checklist of my imagined Indigenous researcher required qualities was not coherent with who I was and yet I was the one choosing qualities which made the cut and which didn't. My stories to live by and those early landscape memories of not belonging were being re-enacted here in graduate studies in ways that once again I saw myself as “less than” and not worthy of the title. In the retelling and reliving, I am able to see from a different perspective and to hear what I might not have been hearing in the lived experience.

My lived experiences, gleaned from stories I heard, stories I read, and stories I tell myself and others, were not coherent with how I was storying Indigenous research. My “not belonging” stories to live by were equally as powerful as my “less than” stories and my desire to belong. The desire to be able to lift my head and gaze into the approving eyes of someone, evoked such a longing to make my stories coherent with Indigenous research that the tensions evoked when I couldn't find that coherence strengthened even more those “less

than” and “not belonging” stories that I lived. I was a Master’s student, and if I was to become what others imagined as “expert,” what I was learning, coloured always by these stories to live by, was that I still didn’t quite belong in either world—Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

Looking back to my early landscapes in this autobiographical narrative inquiry is, as Greene (1995) describes, necessary to understanding lived experiences. In reflecting back, I recall moments as a child when I sought out approval from both worlds, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. I recall moments of being irritably told that I was “acting white,” or other moments where words were spit out in disgust in reaction, I imagine, to some escapade or other that I had engaged in, that I was a “dirty rotten Indian.” I imagine I didn’t find that approval in either world then; and now, as an Aboriginal graduate student studying Indigenous Peoples education, I was beginning to realize that approval from either world might not be given now either. However, through this process of narrative inquiry, the process of seeking coherence and understanding, and attempting to restory, I wonder if then, and now, that approval had been there, but that the other, less accepting stories were louder and drowned out the ones that were likely told more lovingly and more gently.

I am also slowing coming to look within, for that approval, and to seek a way of being that is coherent with my stories to live by that allows me to visit all those whom I care about and love, to travel lovingly<sup>28</sup> (Lugones, 1987) to all of

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<sup>28</sup> Lugones (1987): “... a particular feature of the outsider’s existence. The outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where she is constructed as



their worlds and explain how my world needs to be more open and needs to encompass all of the landscapes in which my loved ones belong. I exist in this world relationally; when I meet another human and we exchange stories, even if just for a moment, I am connected. It is difficult in that relational space to see them and their ancestors as oppressors, yet I am aware that there is the education gap and statistically the future of my littlest loved ones is not as full of potential as I desire. Coherence in this place of knowing the grand narrative and seeing the faces of the humans who live them out is difficult for me to imagine, even now in this narrative inquiry into my lived experiences through the writings I engaged in. However, taking the time to reflect, to engage in narrative analysis, seeking storylines and coherence, and attempting to unpack those moments of tension does allow me to see a broader view than what I was able to see in the living-out of those moments.

As I reread my chosen field texts, I retell them now and I relive them. I recall wanting to find solutions and seeking out someone who spoke of hope for my imagined future and the imagined future of all Aboriginal children. During the time of this writing early in my graduate studies, I pondered the need for resistance, and felt constricted by the box I was putting myself and other Aboriginal people in. Resisting with conflict wasn't coherent with my more relational way of being in the world, yet I thought in order to be a good Indigenous researcher, I needed to resist.

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an outsider to other constructions of life where she is more or less 'at home'...I recommend this wilful exercise which I call "world" –travelling and I also recommend that the wilful exercise be animated by an attitude I describe as playful" (p. 3).

*“There is hope, however timid, on the street corners, a hope in each and every one of us... Hope is an ontological need” [Freire & Freire, 2004, p. 2).] This phrase from the reading is one that I always am drawn to. The situation many aboriginal families and Indigenous people as a whole, is often filled with struggle and despair, so this statement holds an important key to what the future needs to look like.... Some of the social theories also mention something about the need for intellectuals to begin to conscientize the people and have them become an active part of the resistance. In discussions with family and friends, I see that we truly have been colonized so greatly and it is so ingrained and internal that we cannot see another way other than what the Eurocentric education system proposes. So we continue to struggle to fit the ‘box’ they deem as the right ‘box’ to fit in and we continue not to fit. There is the need for the hope in each and every one of us to be encouraged and then perhaps we can begin to envision another way.*

*—Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal;*

*February 2009*

As I reread the above journal entry, I am filled with unease that I, for a moment, storied myself and my family as colonized. I was storying the Aboriginal person, me, my family and friends, as passive and unknowing and in need of

being ‘made aware of reality’ so that we could begin to fight against our oppressors (Freire, 1970).<sup>29</sup> Whether this is a true statement or not, it was very damaging in how I was storying self and others, in ways that are negative and unflattering. These moments of tension and bumping were alarm bells rung to try to get my attention; to alert me that this understanding of my lived experience through the new knowledge I was gaining was not coherent. Even now in the retelling of this lived experience, as I ponder this way of thinking of Aboriginal people and of myself, I am unable to create a story that I could imagine living.

I pictured myself standing in front of a room full of friends and family, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. I wanted to imagine an understanding that would reach both worlds, but an understanding that, in the end, we would all be friends rather than on oppressed and oppressors. I could not stand in front of my sister and my brother whom I would both describe as being confident and firm in their beliefs; who always speak up for what they believe in, as “passive and unknowing.” This truly was not what I envisioned when I dreamed of the Master’s thesis I would one day write, and was not what I thought I wanted to become. Describing myself as “passive and unknowing” was more coherent, as I am a gentler, more passive, sort with my “less than” and “not belonging” stories to live by. And I really am more likely to hide from conflict but I could not do the

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<sup>29</sup> In his works, Freire (1970) speaks of the need for the oppressed to become aware of reality to begin to fight for their own emancipation. Otherwise, they will acquire a naive consciousness where they are aware of their situation but don’t do anything to try and change it; they consider their situation as normal and conform or even support it. Others can construct their own reality and liberate themselves from oppression, just to go to the other extreme and become the antithesis of what they were fighting against.

same for even just my small, immediate family. I needed to understand the world through story, with story, and these theories and readings were not coherent with any of the stories that I currently lived, and not coherent with the stories I was trying to imagine of who I could become and of a possible future as Indigenous scholar or educator.

As I reread more of my writings from that two-year process of graduate studies, I recall also how in the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008) wrote a conclusion called “Turning the Table on the Colonizers.” There I found the phrase, “human subject research practices that really do respect human rights, protocols of informed consent that inform and do not deceive, research projects that do not harm, and projects that in fact benefit human communities” (p. 15). I wanted to benefit human communities with respect and not harm, and yet I wrote about the non-‘others’ as if they were my prey. I now wonder where I imagined the respect was in that story.

*Turning the table on the colonizers I think ... entails understanding them. For does a hunter not learn the behaviours of his prey in order to outsmart and overtake it. So then this project would enable the hunters (Indigenous people) ... to comprehend their prey (non-Indigenous with power over us) ... and thus use the information gained to plan their mode of attack. Research done on the policies created and the power those*

*policies hold and the ways of resisting or reacting by the 'subjects' of the policy should enable indigenous educators to 'plan their mode of attack' and work towards conquering the education system which seems to have conquered them.*

*—Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal;*

*February 2009*

In this Indigenous research I felt was calling me, I saw and read about it as a model that directed “scholars to take up moral projects that respect and reclaim indigenous cultural practices. Such work produces spiritual, social, and psychological healing. Healing in turn leads to multiple forms of transformation at the personal and social levels” (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 16). I wanted to be a part of this group of scholars that subscribed to the “Indigenous Code” which “connects its moral model to a set of political and ethical actions that will increase the well being of the culture” (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008, p. 14). This healing, and transformation and well being of the culture, was something that was coherent with my way of understanding. I did live a statistically accurate Aboriginal life. It really was a life of poverty and contained a lived experience coherent with what a life of poverty creates, and I did imagine something more and something different for the next generations of Aboriginal children. I wanted a loving way to restory and to imagine a future; a different future than what I lived. When I imagined oppressors coming for our children through an unfair

educational system, I tried to imagine being the fighter that is needed to protect those youngest Aboriginal peoples. I imagined being the fighter that I story my siblings and my mother to be. But anyone who knows me, knows that isn't coherent with who I am at all; I usually wait for backup and call in the recruits, my made-of-sterner-stuff friends and family. I am usually standing with heartbroken tears streaming down my face, anxiety-ridden and slightly frantic rather than actually ready to engage in a fight myself. But at the time of the writing of that piece of field text, I was trying to restory myself as a hunter when really I would be more comfortable at home creating a loving, nurturing caring environment, telling healing stories to those I loved. I yearned to become this kind of researcher who would fight to not allow a "lifetime of poverty" (Mendelson, 2006) to be the norm, but I was also writing about how I really didn't understand what this meant, and didn't believe I had the criteria I needed to join in the battle or even fully comprehend it. It created tensions within myself and anxiety to rise when I felt that was letting down a generation of children. The stories to live by that I lived, the ones about not knowing my culture, bumped up against what I thought was needed in Indigenous research, causing tension and unease.

*Some of the ideas are so broad and vague, I have difficulty thinking about them. I am further stifled by the fact that I do not know my culture very well. Sometimes I think I did this backwards and that I need to 'research'*

*my own culture before I can do any research which will increase its well being!*

*—Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal;*

*February 2009*

Rereading Smith (2005), *On Tricky Ground: Researching the Native in the Age of Uncertainty*, I tried then (and I try now) to understand what she is saying, and try to negotiate this “tricky ground” of which she writes. I often fall, slip, and remain face down in the mud, not able to see my original destination. But it is through the process of pausing and inquiring narratively, retelling and reliving those experiences, that it is possible to see what caused that moment, that tension which resulted in a face-down, face-full-of-mud kind of moment.

*This article gave some troublesome definitions of who exactly are Indigenous people. Sometimes, I feel as if we are researching the research introduced by a Maori culture that appears more united than the many Aboriginal people in Canada. It feels as if we would have much greater difficulty creating a standard for Indigenous research similar to what they have, because we don't seem to have a 'standard' culture. I wonder if the same principles can apply to indigenous peoples of Canada and specifically to the Métis people.... Métis people ... seem torn between not identifying with their 'status' cousins but still remaining separate from*

*'white' people, while also remaining separate from other Métis communities in the area. We end up having to "prove" to each other who is and who is not Indigenous enough to be called Indigenous. This concerns me greatly with regards to Métis people in general and especially—me! After having had to fight so hard to be recognized as their own nation, Métis people are understandably very reluctant to give up this combined culture in favour of one more traditionally 'Indigenous.' The question becomes where does this leaves us when trying to create 'Indigenous research methodology' for those community and those people.*

*—Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal;*

*February 2009*

Over and over in my journal entries, I worry at who I am becoming and how it did not feel like the image I was imagining for myself as researcher and especially as "Indigenous Researcher." I wasn't able to create a coherent story. I could not imagine a possible future with the storylines I was developing as "Indigenous researcher." I was feeling very uneasy with the way I was imagining others through my Indigenous researcher lens; a lens I realize was coloured strongly by my own "less than," "not belonging" stories to live by. I jump from field text to field text trying to understand, because that too is how I lived the experience—returning over and over again to the moments when my story of Indigenous research bumped up uncomfortably with the stories to live by that I



lived. It is hard to focus on the understanding when always searching for coherence and never finding it.

*Becoming an Indigenous researcher: “Through resistance in the course of their becoming. Through naming what stood in their way. Through coming together in their efforts to overcome. People are likely to find out about the kinds of selves they are creating” (Smith, 2005, p. 24).*

*What resistance have I had to overcome to arrive at this stage? What did stand in my way? Who am I joining up with? What kind of self am I creating? These things I pause at and wonder at. I am always conflicted by the feeling that I am not really Indigenous because I don't really know much about my culture. Then as I try to learn about my culture, I am further confused by what my culture is. I am Métis, so does that eliminate me from Traditional Cree culture to which I feel more drawn, too? Is there not a balance of both worlds? Should we not honour that which is Indigenous in us while accepting and using the gifts the mixing of races produces within us? Perhaps I need to find Métis researchers and listen to them speak, and learn from them, and then finally decide where I belong, finally decide which “skin feels right” on me. Or ... maybe I will sew myself a new skin and make some for my friends then together we can feel like we belong!*

—*Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection*

*Journal; February 2009*

In this autobiographical narrative inquiry, I seek to understand these lived experiences so that when others come as brand new students to this research world, I can describe my own experience; in the storyies, we can find understandings and an awareness of the need to be more awake to these moments of tension and bumping points, for they are telling us something. They are telling us that perhaps we need to retell, relive, and restory; perhaps we need to sew ourselves a ‘skin that feels right.’ But whatever it is that we need to do, the tensions are calling for us to look again, to try to unpack those moments more carefully; to retell, to relive, and to deepen understandings, because something just isn’t right.

I will end the chapter reliving the moments which were the most uncomfortable to me then, and continue to create the most tension in me now; the repeated moments when I engage in ‘othering’ anyone who is not “Indigenous” and even how I ‘other’ my own self. I was, then, creating a story to live by in which the characters were not going to be friends, and where I was sitting out there somewhere all alone; this wasn’t coherent with the researcher I imagined myself becoming.

*All this talk of “us” and “them” leads into the concept of “othering” and engaging in the practice of it. As I speak and write in this reflection journal, I am constantly drawn into the vortex of ‘othering.’ I begin to think always in terms of us versus them. It is very difficult to not create this dichotomy with in my brain and speech, for if I don’t acknowledge the effects of colonization and the fact that we are the ‘other,’ then will I be hiding under the hegemonic<sup>30</sup> blindfold of internalized colonization by allowing us to be considered one group of ‘humans’ and not Indigenous and non-Indigenous? Great care must be taken on this path in what words I choose and how I view the forces working for or against improvements in Indigenous education. I am reminded of the need to choose each word carefully in my speech and in my writing. I am not aware however of what exactly I must be careful not to do. Am I trying not to incite outrage at the continued colonization or not to offend those who continue to remain in power or to remain a neutral, scientific observer of all? Perhaps I must look to my inner kindness, empathy, and compassion, and stop viewing others as the ‘enemy’ and start looking for a way which insists on compassion for all living thing Indigenous or not!*

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<sup>30</sup> See Gramsci, A. (1971). Selections from the prison notebooks, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International. Control not just through violence and political and economic coercion, but also ideologically, through a hegemonic culture in which the values of one class became the ‘common sense’ values of all where the lower-class identified their own good with the good of the upper-class, and helped to maintain the *status quo* rather than revolting.

—*Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal*;

*February 2009*

As I reflect back and relive these moments, I can still feel the angst. I desperately desired to be this Indigenous researcher, but I wanted to do it in ways that were coherent with who I am and who I am becoming as a person or who I thought I was; but somehow I didn't seem to be able to find my way to living the image I created. Stories are very powerful<sup>31</sup> (King, 2003), and I was telling myself some stories without taking the time I needed to pause and reflect on what this really meant. I needed to inquire into them in the three-dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to more fully understand. I had to address the “temporal dimensions and address temporal matters” (p. 54)—understanding how my past still very much impacted my present lived experiences of today. I had to try to “focus on the personal and the social” (p. 54) to understand these grander Aboriginal narratives and their impact on my personal lived experiences, and I had to do all of this while here at this ‘place’ called university. I needed to understand my lived experiences through the writing I engaged in, because those field texts reveal how I was trying to make sense of theories and my lived experience, and how that attempt created unease to such a degree that quitting graduate studies began to feel increasingly more coherent with my “less than” and “not belonging” stories to live by.

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<sup>31</sup> “Once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories that you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told” (King, 2003, p. 10).

This inquiry space, the relational inquiry space (where I allowed my lived experience to be centered, and where I lovingly world travelled back in time to come alongside of the me that was so often either tearful, anxious, or afraid) created a safe space for me to try to understand and to restory. It was a space where I could begin to re-imagine me as an Indigenous researcher, and to, this time, hear more of the loving, relational ways of Indigenous research rather than just resist the oppressor's message that I was focusing on, trying to make coherent with who I was imagining becoming. I hear now the words that didn't ring loud enough during the lived experience but which come through now as I inquire into my lived experiences; the more relational ontology that placed the needs of the humans involved in the center of all research.

I was often confused throughout these two years as a graduate student as I tried to comprehend the numerous moments of tension, and it is difficult to articulate this confusion in a thesis format. I choose a narrative representation because stories are well suited for representing the complexities of the lived experience. "Narratives allow researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness" (Bell, 2002, p. 209). I hope that through a narrative representation, you, the reader can live alongside me and feel what I felt with each piece of writing. I want you to imagine those moments when I was not able to see my way out of the complex stories I had created around me. I couldn't find me inside the stories, and I desperately wanted to. I didn't want to tell you that there were moments of tensions when my stories to live by bumped up uncomfortably

against the institution of university; I wanted to bring you inside each moment, to inquire alongside me. This results in a longer story, and a less linear process; however, that too is representative of how I understand the world, as I think with story<sup>32</sup> (Morris, 2001).

Even in this rereading, retelling, and reliving, and the creation of this thesis, I experienced many moments of tension. I fear that I am now beginning to story my graduate studies in a way that ‘despair’ and ‘tragedy’ tinges all. Yet there are other stories untold. As a narrative inquirer, I have to choose the field texts, and the stories to leave out (Dillard, 1987) and which to leave in. It is these moments of tensions and bumping points that I needed to understand, as they were distracting me from an imagined future as a researcher. So while I recall loving my classes as a Master’s student, meeting fabulous people, engaging in classes full of diversity in culture, careers, and backgrounds, I choose to leave those stories out. I recall, however, how this diversity made for amazing discussions where people voiced their opinions in ways that didn’t silence, and loving those moments after class when I would reflect on all that was said, on all the stories of humans that I heard. I also recall being disappointed in finding no immediate answers to issues in Aboriginal education, but also feeling ecstatic at being in graduate studies, able to sit and ponder these grand questions and not worry about the ‘day-to-day’ teacher life which so often overwhelmed me. My way of thinking was slowly being stretched, and that was good. Just as in a

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<sup>32</sup> Morris (2001) describes “a process very different from the exclusive operation of reason. Thought clearly involves reasoning, in addition to various forms of cognitive activity from memory to meditation. Thinking also involves a crucial collaboration with feeling” (p. 55).

photograph, you see only one piece of the larger picture. I attempt to capture one view, one piece of the larger story, and that is the view of my struggle to understand what I saw. I choose for this moment, to leave out those memories of joy so that I can understand the storyline which began to block my vision of these happy moments. I focus on the tensions, but I ask that you not sculpt my experience into a statue: rigid, unmoving, and only full of despair. Keep in mind that I am here, I am writing; within this experience, I found what I needed to not stay at rock bottom, to trudge my way out of the mud I'd fallen into—in the process, I fell in love with research, a love that accepts the hard moments, those fraught with tension, and the tears that I am sure will always be a part of my research journeys. These, too, are a part of my stories to live by. It is only in the reflection that I have been able to see this storyline of joy alongside the tension and unease, and while I don't focus on it in this inquiry, this too is something we need to keep in mind as we journey deeper into my stories: my autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences as an Aboriginal student in an Indigenous Peoples Education program.

I return now to that moment, to that paper where I was trying to write about revitalizing Indigenous languages. Recollecting (Crites, 1986) that moment, viewing it through a narrative analysis lens, I see how I just could not live any longer with the lack of coherence between my lived experiences past and present, and my imagined future, with what I was reading and understanding as Indigenous research. In that moment, my lived experiences studying the issue in

Aboriginal Education had begun to draw in thick clouds; the sky darkened and the atmosphere became heavy and smothering. Trying to understand my lived experiences through theory, I wasn't yet able to create a coherent storyline. I kept trying to understand, only to come up with more questions. I kept trying to figure out how to fit myself into the vision I created of Indigenous Researcher, and I, in that moment, had lost hope.

That “rock-bottom” moment I described in Chapter 1 inspired me to write out a plea to the universe. A few days later, I also decided to write something to share in The Research Issues table. I decided that sharing stories of my lived experience with those who also live as graduate students and researchers would be more helpful than continuing to share with friends and family who empathized but didn't really understand. It was then, sometime in December, at the Research Issues table, that I spoke of my angst, my despair, and my inability to study the topic of ‘language revitalization,’ or even write a paper. Literature reviews and theoretical lenses—and I could no longer communicate because I couldn't see past my stories of “not belonging.”

In that writing that I shared at a Research Issues table, I wrote something of my very own. I wrote my own words which came from deep inside of my own heart and from my own lived experience, with a few gathered words of others thrown in just to be safe. I read them to the students, professors, and guest researchers who gathered that Tuesday afternoon. As I remember the moment of the reading, I can still feel the way my hands shook, how my voice caught



slightly, and how my head stayed mostly down with eyes on the paper. I read it that day because I needed to understand and I couldn't find this understanding on my own. When I finished, I put down the paper and I looked around the room. It was silent for a few moments, with my audience gazing upon me. I felt relief at letting the story go, and exhausted at the effort and slightly apprehensive at what response I would get, considering I had just revealed to a room full of scholars, in my very own words, that I really didn't know what I was doing and that I really didn't feel like I belonged.

Then I felt very much cared for, very much not alone, and very much a part of something good when they began to voice their understandings of my story, their support of my struggles, and when they shared stories of their own worried experiences. This moment was very much a narrative inquiry-type of moment where we were all in relation, and together we tried to make sense of my lived experience. This moment, as I sat there at rock bottom, was also the moment I began to climb back up.

I end this chapter with a found poem<sup>33</sup> where I removed the extraneous words to reveal the essence of my writing that day and to reveal the story I was telling to that group of scholars who had been gathered around a table, and the story I am trying to tell you now. It is the story of my graduate experiences, which

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<sup>33</sup> Found poetry takes the words of the participants or from the field text, the data, and transforms them into poetic form "to recreate lived experience and evoke emotional responses" (Richardson, 1994, p. 521). Keeping everything in the same order as they appeared in the original writing, I deleted words around the main ideas and kept only those which revealed my thoughts and feelings that day.

were coloured dark and gray by my “less than,” “unworthy,” and “not belonging” stories to live by. Theories, research, and scholarly writing were coloured in ways that I couldn’t find a place for me, especially when the research and writing related to Indigenous people. I had storied myself out of academia and out of any plans for future research, and I was, for a moment, unable to see what my future could be.

### **A Scholar Or A Tragedy?**

language revitalisation

save

Aboriginal people

impossible

power

English

not valid voice

theoretical framework

“see” a case-study

theories to view

Bourdieu?

fooling self

no idea

don’t know

Read more

framework, empirical data,

case-study, literature ...

can't see

read more

darker

difficult to implement

language program

despair

Doubt

keep reading

theoretic framework

case-study

language revitalisation

battle

save dying

unequal power

colonizer and colonized

oppressed and oppressor

indigenous people

taking back

power

asserting rights

culture and language

literature review

tears

frustration

despair

sadness

fear

secret is out

imposter

don't belong

no story

can't find it

can't hear it

cannot "tell" it

writing papers

literature reviews

eludes me

heart breaks

don't belong

walk away

Never comfortable

why stay

darkness

literature reviews, case-studies, theoretical frameworks

scholar ends here

a tragedy?

—Random Thoughts, December 15, personal life writing

## **CHAPTER THREE: COMING TO KNOW THROUGH NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

### **Fearful Beginnings**

My very early memories of learning about narrative inquiry was about the word “wondering.” The word was a like a medicated balm on the wounds I had inflicted upon my psyche as I wielded theories and theoretical framework and lens with inexperienced hands. It seemed to allow me to wonder gently, and puzzle about a topic instead of trying to come to some hard and fast conclusions. The last paper I tackled before I began to learn about narrative inquiry asked me to “view a case study through a theoretical framework,” and, at that moment, I just couldn’t see. The paper did get written and I completed the required course, and my marks were good. But I felt defeated believing that without an ability to see the world inside of theories and within a framework that I couldn’t engage in research or study of any sort. This word “wondering” seemed to invite me to step outside the box I had painted myself into and look around to see what I could see. Early on and even now, I know I have only a rudimentary understanding of narrative inquiry and of other research methodologies, but there is a fitting of this word “wondering” that is comfortable and even comforting to someone so anxiety-ridden as myself.

With this autobiographical narrative inquiry, it is not my intention to pit other research methodologies against narrative inquiry to find them lacking;

rather, I want to show how I began to understand who I was which enabled me to better understand what methodology felt most comfortable and more coherent with my stories to live by. As I story myself as being highly anxious, and because I come into the world of research living stories of “less than” and “not belonging,” I know that careful tending of “me” as researcher must also occur alongside my wonderings of others. Bateson (1994) says, “To attend means to be present, sometimes with companionship, sometimes with patience. It means to take care of” (p. 109). I found something in narrative inquiry that felt safe and that seemed to give me permission to do this tending and this taking care of. There is also something in me that is drawn to other human beings and their story in ways that some research methods and some theories and frameworks make me feel uneasy. Of course, even this unease was not fully noted until I had completed each research task and had a moment to reflect. So I am fortunate at this time to be able to give my full attention to this inquiry, in ways that hopefully lead to my becoming more mindful and awake to these moments of tension, so as to understand and restory and allow me to accept a title of “researcher” so that I can being to engage in relationships which allow for wondering and growth of both researcher and participants.

Even now, as I try to begin this chapter, I struggle with how to write my lived experience during the four months that I began a narrative inquiry into me; an inquiry that now forms the core of my thesis. Having “me” as the phenomenon of research is something that caused great unease and yet feels like the right thing

to do; I really did, and do, trust in the process of inquiring narratively and thinking with story, because this has been something I had been doing since I was a little girl. It is as Morris (2001) describes, "... a process very different from the exclusive operation of reason. Thought clearly involves reasoning, in addition to various forms of cognitive activity from memory to meditation" (p. 55), but he does emphasize that "thinking also involves a crucial collaboration with feeling" (p. 55). While I didn't know the theoretical term to describe my way of being and my way of thinking, I recognized it and my current struggles seeing through a framework or a lens with Morris's (2001) words:

We need a greatly revised understanding of reason and emotion—a revision consistent with recent discoveries in cognitive science—in order to escape the history of erroneous assumptions about thinking and about ethics, a history that I wish to challenge. The concept of thinking with stories is meant to oppose and modify (not replace) the institutionalized Western practice of thinking about stories. Thinking about stories conceives of narrative as an object. Thinker and object of thought are at least theoretically distinct. Thinking with stories is a process in which we as thinkers do not so much work on narrative as take the radical step back, almost a return to childhood experience, of allowing narrative to work on us. (p. 55)

It is this process of allowing narrative to work on me, an honouring of the feelings that were invoked as I engaged in research, that a returning to that



childhood experience occurs. And this is what I now try to show you, rather than just to explain it.

Trust in my own knowing, and trust that there was something in my own stories worthy of the title ‘thesis’ is still hard for me to accept, yet I feel compelled to tell and inquire into my own stories. This chapter tells the stories of my lived experience as I began to learn about narrative inquiry. With the help of the narrative inquiry professor who responded weekly to my journals, the help of my works in progress group who listened carefully and asked gentle probing questions, and with the time and space and opportunity for me to look back, I began to try to understand who I was, and understand why my now much changed research question was so important to me. I abandoned my quest to understand the impact of policies such as standardized testing and accountability pillars, and returned to my love of literature and story.

### **New Wonderings**

I often wonder about this forever feeling of “not for the likes of me” that I exist inside of. Because I am revealing those inner insecurities and endless worries, leaving out my accomplishments and the stories of the hardworking, creative, multitasking, voracious reader, silly side of me, it may not be easy to understand how perplexed I am at this “less than” story to live by, that I allow to control my way of being when there is so much more to who I am and so many other moments when I am confident. So I wanted to wonder about those early formative years, and how I lived very much inside of a storybook and how inside

of those storybooks did not live little Aboriginal girls; instead, there existed ‘others’ who lived vastly different lives and I so desired to be them and to not be me. For you, the reader, to understand how I got to that “rock-bottom place” and then to understand what I think narrative inquiry did for me, I am trying to show you the peeling back of layers that occurred, and take you along the journey I took. Together we can attempt to see what I probably didn’t see during the living of it and didn’t yet notice in the occasional recollection of it, and hopefully the inquiry process I tell speaks to others in ways that helps them navigate their own understandings. In this retelling, I begin to move away from theories, educational systems, and unfair policies into lived experiences; specifically, my own lived experience.

### **Peel Back Layers**

Returning to that “rock-bottom moment” where I didn’t think I could see a future for me in research, I return also to where I was when I began to climb back up. In the paper where I was struggling to write about the concept of revitalising indigenous language, I tried to understand who I was and why I had such difficulties with this topic when others in the class seemed so very sure, and so very confident in their knowing.

*For much of my Revitalising Indigenous Language class, I pondered the question of revitalisation itself, needing to be convinced of its importance and of its relevance to me and my family at this moment in our lives. I had*

*learned to view being Cree and Indigenous as an unsafe place to be. It appeared to be a position of inferiority, struggles, complexities, and even at times, of danger. Viewing the world from that vantage point seems to mean always having to defend, or just watch and listen as all things Indigenous were not valued and were often condemned as being beyond hope. So, as I pondered my need to keep questioning the very idea of language revitalization, I realized that I shy away from it as a form of self-preservation and in efforts to protect the next generations from the inherent danger, which occurs when one identifies as a Cree person.*

*—Revitalising Indigenous Language, Final Paper; December 2009*

In my words, I note how conflicted I felt between wanting to claim being Aboriginal with pride and fear at what the title Aboriginal also brought with it. Restoule (2000) writes, “Understanding what influences our pride or shame in identifying as Aboriginal people is important” (p. 102). “It depends very much on our experiences with the education system. I think in order to be able to understand this difference, as Aboriginal people we need to be able to identify ourselves who we are” (Young, 2003b, p. 24). Throughout my two years, this is exactly what I was trying to do. But the way that I had storied my Aboriginal ancestry and the way I was writing about it wasn’t capturing the whole picture and continued to lack a more positive and loving view; I wanted to change this,

and I tried to convince myself and my reader that I did believe and that I was beginning to know. Yet, I still wasn't sure.

*Listening in class to both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students sharing their thoughts and beliefs on the idea of language revitalisation and hearing some so knowledgeable and proud of their Indigenous culture, denying my Cree roots no longer felt like the right path. I begin to wonder if perhaps revitalising the Cree language was not going to make the life of the Cree more dangerous and difficult, but perhaps instead, offer a way out and a source of strength to draw for an epic journey back to becoming “nehiyawak”—□□□□□□□□ (Cree People). Without their Indigenous language, many Cree people may not feel “whole and complete” and are beginning to seek ways to reconnect with their Cree roots. Just as Daniels-Fiss says in her article, “Learning to Be a Nehiyaw [Cree] Through Language,” there is an idea that “together the Old Ones and the oskapewisak [helpers of the Cree] can create a whole and complete child who was meant to be born a nehiyaw, an exact person...” (p. 244). Therefore, revitalising the language seems to offer ways to do this. It bonds the young and the old in a joint quest as well as liberates and returns power back to the people. It becomes a form of resistance and not just a language program. I began to search the literature for those deeper reasons and I looked to the experts to convince me, once and for*

*all, of what it is about revitalising indigenous languages that is vitally important for the future of Indigenous people.*

*—Revitalising Indigenous Language, Final Paper; November 2010*

I began to wonder if this loss of my traditional language was a big part of why I had spent a lifetime living a story of “less than.” I began to feel even more guilt at not knowing Cree, and trying and failing again to be able to fit Cree classes into my graduate studies schedule. I felt on the outside of this issue and even more distant from this Indigenous researcher, this “nehiyaw/exact person” that I wanted to become. I felt ashamed that I wasn’t resisting or attempting to “return power back to the people.” I was still drawn to those words, though, because they allowed one to fight back and to not remain in the position of “victim” and seemed to offer a suggestion and a solution to closing of the “education gap” which was discussed regularly when the topic of Aboriginal education came up. I wanted to be allowed to be a part of this, I wanted to see practical concrete solutions, and yet I felt as if I couldn’t. I just couldn’t see.

Indigenous scholars such as Battiste (1997, 2000), Hampton (1993), and Young (2003b) speak of the impact mainstream education and its systemic discrimination and racism has on Aboriginal people, with each person having been impacted differently. Each story is unique even in its similarities. I needed to understand how I had been affected, but to understand in a way that allowed me to still care for and about those people I had been storying as the cause of my “less

than” stories to live by. I now wonder if the source of my difficulties in finding a framework from which to view this issue of language revitalisation, stems from the issue being much too close to home for me and very much filled with my own insecurities and angst, and the impact of a lifetime spent in mainstream education where delving into these highly complex issues regarding Aboriginal education had not been the norm. I continued to look elsewhere for understanding.

At the writing of the next field text, we read the words of Indigenous scholar Eber Hampton (1993) and we read of how I was trying to understand what revitalising languages and Indian education was telling me.

We must also always remember that in the revisiting of these written works, now and at the time of the writing, to attend to the three-dimensional inquiry space as my remembered past, my lived present, and my imagined future impacted every written work illustrating how through writing I was trying to make sense of and create, a coherent storyline. We need to not forget my early landscape full of uncertainty, both with my forming Aboriginal identity as well as the actual geographic location I would call home. We cannot forget the teaching moments as well, when I felt less than and the tensions I had lived during two years as a graduate student.

We need to remember that this inquiry space takes place on the university landscape while visiting constantly those other landscapes of homes, school, and the imagined one—the Indigenous research landscape.

*Indian education recognizes and nourishes the powerful pattern of life that lies hidden within personal and tribal suffering and oppression. Suffering begets strength. We have not vanished. Statistics show the inroads of winter. Just as counting the dead plants is an inadequate measure of the life of the seeds, so counting the deaths, the alcoholism rates, the suicides, the murders, and the dropouts is inadequate to measure the vitality of Native life. The horrors and indescribable pain of Native existence after the European conquest cannot be minimized. Neither can the vitality of Native resistance and resurgence (Churchill 1982; Deloria 1982; Iverson 1978; Jennings 1975). (Hampton, 1993, p. 35)*

—Quote used in *Revitalising Indigenous Language, Final Paper*;

November 2009

can recall at the time of the writing when I was so full of angst and worry, how I was drawn to how he referred to those same negative statistics that frustrate me in their inability to show the rest of the lived experience of me and mine, the experiences of Aboriginal people. He too seemed to be saying that it was not okay to just look at the horrors and judge a whole group of people on those numbers. He didn't dismiss them, but neither did he allow that to be all one would see. I wanted there to be resistance and resurgence so that I could not lose hope and be overwhelmed at the enormity of the task. But I wanted it to occur in more gentle loving ways, as once again, I just as I didn't see myself in the traditional

Aboriginal person, neither could I see oppressors and enemies in the non-Aboriginal friends I had made. Mary Young (2003b), speaking of her own journey, states that her “journey [was] not about blaming others for what [she] missed out or endured but it is about taking into account [her] original landscape, where [she came] from and by doing that [she would] be ‘truly present’ to [herself]” (p. 7). I too wanted understanding without having to assign blame for the past and an already lived history. Just as Young (2003b) looked to the words of Kerby (1991), I too see the wisdom when he says. The meaning of my past is not something fixed and final, but it “is something I can continually refigure and update in the present” (Kerby, 1991, p. 7).

### **A Master’s Student with No Answers**

As I reflect back on those years in this inquiry, I recall how my Master’s education had my friends and family looking to me for answers to why some schools which served mainly Aboriginal people had such dismal reputations for academic standards as well as seeming to lack in adequate discipline, and I had no explanation. Others would ask me hard questions about ‘how long would the government have to keep paying Aboriginal people money for the mistakes which occurred in the past,’ and I didn’t know what to say. They too wanted to understand and they too thought that as a Master’s student I should know the right answers. I wanted to be able to give them hope and share the words of other scholars who were really the experts, as I was still afraid and did not trust in my own knowing.



They trusted me and wanted to hear what I had to say, but I didn't trust in "me" and I looked instead for someone else's words to answer those hard questions. And again, I found something in Eber Hampton's (1993) words that day that felt coherent.

*At the historical level, Native and non-Native look at the world from opposed positions. Not only must they contend with personal differences in viewpoint, language, and experiences; not only must they contend with cultural differences in value, understandings of human relationships, and modes of communication; but they must contend with the world shattering difference between the conquered and the conqueror, the exploited and the exploiter, the racist and the victim of racism. It is this historical difference of perspective that demands more than 'learning about each other's cultures.' It demands that we change the world. The graduates of our schools must not only be able to survive in a white-dominated society, they must contribute to the change of that society. (Hampton, 1993, p. 41)*

*—Quote used in Revitalising Indigenous Language, Final Paper;*

*November 2010*

When I found these words I was relieved, for I had been searching for some way to frame my understanding of revitalising indigenous in a way that would be coherent with my storyline of "not raised traditionally" and my lack of

Cree language skills; lack even of a plan to begin to acquire those skills. His words resonated with me. He seemed to capture the enormity of what I felt might be asked of those of us who are Aboriginal and who strive for the title Indigenous researcher and who desire to make changes. According to Hampton (1993), not only do I have to “contend with the world shattering difference between the conquered and the conqueror, the exploited and the exploiter, the racist and the victim of racism” (p. 41), and not only must I “survive in a white-dominated society” (p. 41), I had to “change the world” (p. 41).

Reading those words then, as I was struggling with feelings of imagined failure, I understood what he was saying. I often felt the weight of expectation in every gaze when I would speak up on an Aboriginal topic and all eyes would turn to me as ‘expert’ when all I really had were my own stories, and my own experiences and they just didn’t seem enough<sup>34</sup> (Hooks, 1989). I felt it when my friends and family would ask me what I was learning. I can recall how I would struggle to try and explain that the issues of Aboriginal education are complex and very intricate, and one needs to look at history, and society, and educational systems and that there are changes happening and there are many people studying the issues; but always as I tried to say this, I knew that my answer didn’t change the stories they or their children were living in at that moment. We all understood

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<sup>34</sup> I find it “a necessary aspect of self-affirmation not to feel compelled to choose one voice over another, not to claim one as more authentic, but rather to construct social realities that celebrate, acknowledge, and affirm differences, variety” (Hooks, 1989, p. 12).

the statistics,<sup>35</sup> for many of us had lived them, but we also understood they did not define us and we were more than what was being read about, written about, and reported. And I didn't know how to say this to the world inside a framework, from behind a theory, and I didn't know how to change the world. I felt as if I would fail, and this failure would mean that those dismal statistics would include the children in my family whom I adored. Not only would my failure reflect badly on the courageous words of Eber Hampton and other Indigenous scholars, but they would reflect in the eyes and the hearts and lived lives of me and mine.

The glimpse I gave of that final paper and of that dark December day is just a glimpse but I tried to show the fear that was building and the mistrust in my own knowing that I was forced to try to deal with. I was nearing the end of my Master's studies and I had gained much and changed my way of thinking—my world was now huge instead of the four walls of a classroom—but inside this world, I felt so very small. But that month someone also began to speak to me of “wonderings” and of story and of a way of researching that was gentler and perhaps a little slower, and one that began to call my name. I too, “want to tell and retell to myself and to others the story of what I am about and who I am” (Carr, 1986, p. 97). Young (2003b), also drawn to this narrative inquiry as an Aboriginal woman, quotes Carr and other authors (Carter, 1993; Crites: 1971; Hooks, 1997;

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<sup>35</sup> See Hanselmann and Analyst (2001) who refer to a few of those statistics: Aboriginal families are over twice as likely to be lone parent families, and more likely to experience domestic violence. Aboriginal people are more likely to have lower levels of education. Aboriginal people frequently have lower income levels. Aboriginal people tend to have higher rates of homelessness and greater housing needs. Aboriginal people are over-represented in the criminal justice system, both as victims and as offenders. Aboriginal people generally have poorer health status.

Kerby, 1991) and speaks of how they “suggest we need to make sense of our lives, both in a personal and communal sense” (p. 21). She reminds us to look again to Crites (1971) who explains how “without memory, in fact, experience would have no coherence at all” (p. 298) (Young, 2003b, p. 21). I had come to a place in the graduate student experience where I could not go further until I was able to attain some kind of coherence.

### **Finding Narrative Inquiry**

The field texts we will inquire into in this next section comes from my “Written Dialogue with Text”<sup>36</sup> assignment. The words I wrote in that assignment began an inquiry into my early landscapes as I desperately needed to understand; failure was not an option and I had to do whatever it would take to not allow that “less than” feeling to overwhelm.

Returning to my former written assignments as the field texts of my autobiographical narrative inquiry made sense to me. In the variety of written work I chose as field texts, I always, through the writing, tried to connect my lived experience, tried to express my unease and tried to illustrate the knowing that I was coming to. As a way to inquire into my lived experiences, this reflective written response was especially suited for reflecting the lived experience I was trying to understand through the words of the scholars I was reading. Hopefully in the rereading, retelling, and reliving, we can see how I

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<sup>36</sup> Works-in-Progress was an assignment in the Narrative Inquiry class asking that each participant wrote each week, working on their own research, which they would share with their “works-in-progress,” engaging in a sustained conversation for the duration of the course; sharing at the end of the course to the whole class.

begin to come to terms with who I am and how I reconciled the demands I was placing on myself about Aboriginal education and about Indigenous research and about scholarly studies. In this, my very first entry after reading the book *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), the tone of the writing is already very different, and I can still recall being anxious but feeling much more hopeful.

*Here I sit in New Orleans, Louisiana, spending the day inside pondering Narrative Inquiry and doing more writing than I have in awhile. Putting words onto paper seems so final, and for much of my 1.5 years as a graduate student, almost painful. The fear that I am not doing it right weighs heavy. Within this fear is awareness or suspicion that I am to be judged from two opposite poles and a worry that even attempting a task such as this is near impossible and perhaps ludicrous. On the one hand, academia urges me to be “rigorous” with my theories and frameworks and dreaded literature reviews, and so to meet this challenge, I seek examples and I attempt to mimic the words I see; words that do not come easily to me; words that come from books already written. On the other hand, looming larger in my world is the need to not fail those who I most want to benefit. My friends, my family, my people and our children are who I seek to ‘wonder’ about and whose lives I want to improve from any words I put on paper. There is also the responsibility I feel as a*

*Métis/Cree person to take care in what I say, because all words and all stories contribute to what others see as the “Aboriginal” person. I am especially aware that I am only me and I have only my story. I am not all Cree people and I am not all Métis people. I am just one story inside of a long history and very diverse population, and so I worry a bit when I see others look at me seeking an inside view of the Aboriginal person, and yet I am still compelled to stay the course and finish the degree and tell the story that I think is still not quite heard yet; a story that is not easily found in books already written. I hope to give another voice to the Aboriginal person who lives in modern days and doesn’t fit all the stereotypes and grand narratives which are still in place about the “Indian.” I wonder as well at the obvious absence of this kind of story in our Aboriginal children’s literature and its impact on girls who grew up just like me and on the girls who are growing up now. “Comfortable in their skin and at ease with the world” is a phrase I heard recently which seemed to kind of capture the unconscious nature of Bourdieu’s (1984) idea of habitus, and I wonder what impact children’s literature or lack of it has on our Cree and Métis girls’ unconscious feelings of self. Can it or does it have a role to play in encouraging a more peaceful way of being or does it instead help to create that sense of discomfort and unease that I grew accustomed to?*

*What I think narrative inquiry does is that it gives me permission to tell a story using my own words and accepts that it is one story that may*

*change each time it is told and change again each time it is heard, but will always allow me to better understand my wonderings and for all of us to better understand each other as people and to see the connections and similarities between all of our stories.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text Assignment;*

*January 2010*

“In our lives, in our work, in our efforts to educate others, let us identify as Aboriginal people from our inside place, from ourselves, our communities, our traditions. Let us not allow others to decide our identity for us” (Restoule, 2000, p. 112). I wanted to begin to decide and figure out my own identity just as Restoule (2000) suggested, and I knew intuitively that no further research progress could be made until this happened. As I inquire now and reread, there is a sense of knowing that I recognize now but wasn’t seeing then. This was my first reading, in my first day of class, and already I was aware of how much story was a part of how I understood the world. I needed only to learn the language, to hear the words of others, to understand the theory behind this more narrative way of understanding. Reflecting back, I see the immediate connection, the instant coherence to a methodology that even in its title refers to and honours story.

I could see early on that with this research methodology, with narrative inquiry, that there might be a way for me to uphold the standards set out by Indigenous research. I sought out other Indigenous scholars to verify what it was

that I was feeling. Reflecting now, I see the knowing that was embodied in my way of understanding the world, but at the time of this writing and even at the time of the interim research text writing, I had not quite made that storyline coherent with my “less than” and “not belonging” stories to live by.

Reading the words of Young (2003b) and also of Bruno (2010) was like going home and visiting the family. The way they write, the words they choose, and the story they tell resonated deeply with my own ways. Reading the words of Aboriginal writers from closer to my own land, the land I didn't feel connected to, allowed me, in a roundabout way, to feel as if I was honouring the Aboriginal ways that would be similar to my own; ways that I felt at the time of this writing that I had not yet learned. Bruno (2010) describes her understanding of Indigenous methodologies as they compared lying alongside of narrative inquiry methodologies:

When I first began thinking about the two methodologies I sought them out as two separate bodies of work and, although narrative inquiry and an indigenous research methodology are from independent research traditions, I found aspects within each were consistent with one another. The converging values and practices are as follows: (a) stories are viewed as the carriers of knowledge; (b) both are intimately connected to experiential learning or ‘hands-on’ learning within each discipline [e.g., an Aboriginal teaching and learning practice would be to learn from the stories of an Elder]; (c) lived experiences are expressed as storied lives;



(d) each are holistic, in that in each research tradition, the totality of a phenomenon is addressed; (e) respect: both are respectful in their process and respectful of all involved and; (f) future development and growth is inclusive in the purpose of each practice. (p. 51)

Just as Bruno (2010) “came to understand narrative inquiry” (p. 51) while “still learning” (p. 51) and noted the values above as “consistent with an Indigenous framework” (p. 51), I too began to feel that “narrative inquiry lives within that framework” (p. 51). In narrative inquiry, I saw possibilities of how I could meet the standards I felt were crucial to Indigenous research even though I was still living a storyline of unknowing. It seemed also to provide the words I needed to frame my current wonderings and why I felt it was such an important wondering to me.

As I inquire into the writings I engaged that January day, into this next field text, I note how the words in the prologue of *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* Clandinin and Connelly (2000) spoke to me then and speak to me now.

*The prologue also introduces the idea that “... experience is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others, including the young and those such as researchers who are new to their communities” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). I*

*find early in the book, words which speak to the way I think and to the way I view the world. As an avid reader, stories have always been important to me. If I couldn't read a story then I made up one in my head.... They entertained me, they taught me lessons, and they created a world in which I lived as a character. I could be either the queen, as my grandma insisted, or the lowly subject unequal in a world where I knew, some had and some had not.*

—*Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text Assignment;*

*January 2010*

At the time of the writing, I didn't fully understand narrative ways of thinking, nor was I really aware of the relational ontology from which I lived. It is only now in reflection, seeing my rather simplistic notions of the importance of story in my life and rereading how I was trying to articulate that knowing. I can now see how I embodied that knowing, that way of understanding that was narrative and I articulated it in the way I wrote, in the stories I told, in the way I made sense of my world, but I felt then as if it was a "less than" way rather than an equally valid form of knowing.

Seeing years of research, reading the words of scholars, understanding what was being said gave validity to my way of knowing and while not coherent with my "less than" stories to live by, it most definitely felt coherent with my way of understanding the world. It felt as if narrative inquiry made more room for me

and all of my anxieties, and that was comforting to me at the time when I had been feeling a bit lost; and it is comforting to me now as I continue to experience moments of tension when my desire to represent my knowing narratively bumps up against the more traditional formats of Western research and thesis writing.

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

—*Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text Assignment;*

*January 2010*

I was very much drawn to the idea of living in the midst, allowing my life to still exist and a space created for me within the research, a space I felt was necessary and legitimate. With my love of story the idea of narrative inquiry being “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi) appealed to me in a way that I was just beginning to be aware of. The word “stories” on its

own was enough to draw me in and the rest of the writings just confirmed that I had found a place where I could still be me and this “researcher” I envisioned.

*Narrative inquiry characteristically begins with the researcher’s autobiographically oriented narrative associated with the research puzzle.... The tension this creates for those moving across the boundary from formalistic to narrative inquiry is expressed, in graduate student work, as a tension between the student and the supervisor, and it is expressed in the different advice given by different committee members: Go to the library. What experiences have you had with this? Read Gadamer. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41)*

*When I thought about the balance of theory and I read that paragraph, I vaguely recalled a discussion in research issues about ‘two ways of doing research’ with one being to start writing and one being to start reading. The advice was either to go and write out my experience and from that the wonderings and the directions would be revealed as the story was retold and reaffirmed and eventually modified. And the other advice was to go and read and read and read some more. I followed the path more travelled because I was trying desperately to create a solid, research proposal ... with good literature reviews and so I needed to read lots of literature review and lots of theories and lots of other research text. So I did read,*

*and read, and read, and read some more. I read on Bourdieu (1984) and his idea of habitus and in my mind I likened it to the “feeling comfortable in one’s skin” or “uncomfortable” when faced with something outside of the imagined self or imagined plot lines of one’s story. But I only read and I thought and I wrote nothing. So I read about literature for children in general, which confirmed my belief in their power but really did not further my ‘thesis’ and so I read about ‘Aboriginal literature’ and the many dangerous stereotypes and perpetuation of “the Indian” which often go unnoticed in there. And I still read and thought and wrote nothing. I read more, often getting side-tracked by an interesting but completely unrelated article, but always I didn’t write. I might write a small note about the reading or the chapter but no real writing. And now with so many months spent reading, I wonder what would have happened had I started writing instead; writing the story and not attempting the literature reviews. Again, words from your book reassure me that there are other ways and that since reading is getting me nowhere in a rather hurry the book seems to say that I can try the ways of narrative inquiry. You say that your*

*... own narrative inquiry students ... frequently write dissertations without a specific literature review chapter. They weave the literature throughout the dissertation from beginning to end in an attempt to create a seamless link between the theory and the*

*practice embodied in the inquiry. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 41)*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text Assignment;*

*January 2010*

### **Emergence of a New Storyline**

Revisiting this moment in my graduate studies, I can recall that hotel room in New Orleans and as I gazed out that day at the gloomy sky inside, writing, I felt hopeful that day despite the grey clouds. I had found a storyline that was different than the ones I lived. I found words to help me, scholars to tell me that that the difficulties I had with literature reviews, and viewing through theoretical lens and framework first was not because I was “less than” and not capable, rather, it could be because I understand the world narratively and I want to see and hear the story of the human relationally rather than from a distance and behind a theory. Narrative inquiry early on gave me permission to start from my own stories or the stories of my participants and see how the theories fit them, rather than trying to fit the human and their lived experiences inside of the theory. This idea seemed to sit much more comfortably with me and knowing that placing myself, the researcher, in the research, still allowed me opportunity to wonder about the lens I was using to view without forcing me to do so in a more artificial way. This was just the very first week of the course, and I can almost hear an

audible releasing of the breath I was holding and I can almost feel the tension seeping out and my body begin to relax and settle in.

*About literature reviews you also say the tension is between literature reviewed as a “structuring framework and literature reviewed as a kind of “conversation between theory and life” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I have the kind of mind that is usually easily persuaded to see another side of an argument when in a discussion, and so my belief often changes a bit and modifies itself. I don’t jump ship and throw myself onto each new theory or idea, but locking myself into a framework when I see value in so many different ones is difficult for me. I’d much rather have conversations with many people whose ideas will influence the shaping of my thesis, wondering, than with just the one. This still leave me with the question about the place of theory in my own writing. Do I try to wrap my stories around the theories of habitus (Bourdieu, 1984) and identity, or do I weave in those theories within my narrative where I see them fall nicely?*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text Assignment;*

*January 2010*

As we reread these early writings, and revisit those moments in my lived experience, I see that I was seeking coherence and not finding it.

I had been unable to find myself inside the theories, and I began to be unable to even formulate thoughts when I had to start with theory. The lived experience of constant tension as my stories to live by, and my ways of understanding bumped constantly against both Indigenous research and Western theories, and frameworks was taking its toll. I can recall feeling, and in this inquiry I relive that tension, of how in every direction that I turned, every storyline I tried to create, I couldn't find coherence. My fear built, panic was setting in, I began to feel overwhelmed to such a degree that I had little energy left to theorize or to discuss. But with narrative inquiry and 'story,' this too began to change.

Storytelling, oral histories, the perspectives of Elders and of women, have become an integral part of all Indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful. But the point about stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every Indigenous person has a place. (Smith, 1999, p. 144)

Of course, at the time of the writing, I was and still am filled with questions and riddled with insecurities, but it is no longer about whether I could do research or not—it was more about how I would do it. I was still searching for my place inside of research in this next entry, but slowly inquiring narratively through my assignment I was coming closer to finding that place.



*The place of the researcher is another tension introduced in the book. Here is probably where I have the most issues with narrative inquiry. I LOVE hearing about others as researchers and watching as they puzzle and wonder and discuss, but I am afraid to write a thesis where I loom so large in the writing. This could explain why I balk at writing anything down. I can't imagine obtaining a degree in which my field notes were allowed to reveal my insecurities, my doubts, my second guesses for the whole world to see. I think what I fear most is that the story I know about me and books and literature is not the same story others see and know, and that the announcer in my brain will call all researchers to come forward and just as I step up to the line the officials will pull me off to the side and ask for my 'proof' and I will not have any for wasn't 'being the queen' of my literature land just a story I told myself? My habitus and my unconscious beliefs about what I think is possible or not possible in my own story creates intense feelings of discomfort at the idea of my friends, my family, and my colleagues reading a story about a me they don't see in exactly the same way, or about literature they view with a different lens. Just as Clandinin & Connelly (2000) speak of a researcher who discovers a "boundary within herself—a boundary created by her own narrative history with respect to formalistic thinking on matters of culture and her purpose in undertaking a narrative inquiry" (p. 46), I too am aware of the multitude of boundaries I come to this inquiry with. Boundaries from*

*previous experience and from the imagined self I have in my head and so I must then, as you say, “reconstruct my own narrative inquiry histories and to be alert to possible tensions between those narrative histories and the narrative research I undertake” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 46).*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text Assignment 1;*

*January 2010*

### **Peeling Back More Layers—Digging Deeper**

Inquiring into this field text, I hear how my past, my shaky Aboriginal identity, my tentative way of living in the world, waiting always for the next life event to occur or the next aunt to welcome me into their home, I see how difficult it was for me to trust that my own stories deserved an important place within this research world, on this university landscape. Fitting in quietly, carefully, and cautiously, never setting permanent roots was for too many reasons to articulate now, how I lived my early landscape and so placing me so firmly inside of research, positioning me and pinning me down was not coherent with how I storied the importance of me and my stories on any landscape.

I am now, and was then, very much aware of how the “stories to live by” that make me who I am do colour everything I look at, especially if the topic is something very close to me. So I am attempting in this autobiographical narrative inquiry to “reconstruct my own narrative inquiry histories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 46) and “be alert to possible tensions between those narrative

histories and the narrative research I undertake” (p. 46). I need to make clearer this colouring that is going on so I can see its impact on the research picture. I need to find my place and then be awake and aware of the impact I wield in this research. My seeking of a place for me remains a constant quest as does my worry about my ‘othering.’ We see it again as we reread, retell, and relive those moments in this next field text selection.

*Another tension which causes me some grief is the idea of the place of people. “People are looked at as composing lives that shape and are shaped by social and cultural narratives” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 413) and not as just “exemplars of a form—of an idea, a theory, a social category” (p. 413). I am drawn also to this idea because I worry about the view educators have or are being encouraged to have right now about Aboriginal education. Because there is such a big push to solve the problem in each division, teachers and schools who have had little experience with the population search for ‘experts’ to tell them how to teach the “Aboriginal learner”<sup>37</sup> and so they are shown examples of Aboriginal children who fit a theory or an idea and are part of a social category. And yet the life experiences of each and every one can vary immensely. I consider myself Cree and/or Métis depending on who or what or when or how I am feeling, and yet I know I have an equal amount*

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<sup>37</sup> “Aboriginal learner,” a term often used and quoted in reference to Aboriginal education which seemed to story all Aboriginal children as one kind of learner. A term I was very uncomfortable with when I could see the diversity of the children to which it referred.

*of other “races” within my family line and I have lived with many different families who raised their children in many different ways. So to pinpoint me alone and place me into a “box” from which you can pour the new strategies for which I will suddenly become more successful as an Aboriginal learner based on the ‘experts’ sounds absurd. And yet even I try to find books which I think will help to do the very same thing. The power of books and stories I believe is that they can show different characters living lives in different settings having different experiences, and so instead of the one Aboriginal learner type who grew up on the reserve and hunts, traps, and fishes, you can have all sorts of stories from which each reader can see beyond the label “Aboriginal” to the person, and we can begin again to educate children while being mindful of who they are and where they come from, which will be different for each and every one of them. The place of people in my world is right, front and center, and yet how does one write a thesis, then, which must be limited and which must fit in with theories presented? I hope this too is something that I develop as I begin to “think” like a narrative theorist.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text Assignment 1;*

*January 2010*

My view of people or participants began to emerge into an understanding that it was more about the stories they lived, told, retold and relived. It is these

“stories of individuals and their relationships through time” that “offer another way of looking” (Bateson, 2000, p. 247), and “we need ways to tell these stories that are interwoven and recursive, that escape the linearity of print to incite new metaphors” (p. 247). Just as Young (2003b) spoke of in her writing, I too “believe the choices we face today are so complex that they must be rehearsed and woven together in narrative” (Bateson, 2000, p. 247). And it is through this weaving that I believe we can begin to do this “placing of people” and their stories in ways that allow the complexity of this “Aboriginal learner,” the complexities of me, as beginner Indigenous researcher, to reveal the details of this much more diverse picture to emerge.

As a child I had grand adventures; we played unsupervised in the bushes; we came home as the sun began to set; and cousins and cousins and more cousins made any family event a festive occasion. I loved school. I was an avid reader. I usually did really well. There were always tensions; yes, I never felt as if I really belonged but I did like it in school, just as I like graduate studies now, and so I like this idea of allowing the complexity of the Aboriginal learner to exist. Even in this thesis I give the impression perhaps of an early landscape that lacked stability from which my “less than” and “not belonging” stories to live by began to form, but again, I ask you to remember that we are inquiring into only one plot line in the stories of my graduate studies. There were most definitely moments when someone storied me as Aboriginal in a way that I felt “less than,” and there were definitely moments where the landscape I lived could change without

notice and home would be somewhere else, but that is not all that my childhood was. I have to choose the pieces in this inquiry that help us understand the tensions of my lived experience as that is the inquiry we undertake. But as you try to imagine that little girl I was, do not forget a sparkle of mischief in her eye, a smattering of tattletale in her way of being, and a dream of one day becoming queen in her imagined future. These stories too are a part of the complexity of the three-dimensional inquiry space that this autobiographical narrative inquiry exists within; however, those wait patiently for another time when they are needed for deepening understanding.

When I finally decided what my Master's thesis topic would be, I did so thinking it is important as educators that we are able to imagine what the complexity of the lived experience of the Aboriginal graduate studies learner really is. Statistically, according to Mendelson's (2006) report, my future is shaky and the odds are against me succeeding. I believe that my stories someday could catch the eye of another student feeling tensions and not understanding the source, and I hope my stories can offer them a small space where they can imagine becoming otherwise and becoming one of the ones who know.

As I recollect memories of this writing, of these moments of discovering what narrative inquiry was, I can hear how the tone of my writing from that early December to this early January had changed immensely. I went from feeling so overwhelmed to feeling more hopeful and willing to try again to learn to be researcher, but in ways that were different than the ones I wrote myself out of.

*The angst of the narrative inquiry researcher/student and the constant tensions which they live while in the midst, mirrors my own life so perfectly that despite all of the fretting and fussing and rethinking and wondering and wondering I feel very much at home. “Comfortable in my own skin” I am not, “at ease with the world” I am not; maybe that is because I am not supposed to be, for where then would come the wonderings?*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text Assignment 1;*

*January 2010*

While I needed this inquiring more deeply, and was seeking coherence in ways that I didn't understand fully that January, I believe that the restorying began upon the opening of that first book and words I found in the prologue (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I am even, in that early writing, speaking of an acceptance that the worrying, fretting, and constant questioning just might be who I am, and I just might have to learn to exist peacefully within it.

I began just like Young (2003b) did by telling my stories and sharing my experience as a way “to ‘remember to remember’ who we are and to honour the special life we have been given” (Cajete, 2001, p. 9). This honouring is important to me because if I can't do it for my own story, and my own life, how I can I

begin to wish that for our youngest Aboriginal people; those treasured children whom I desire to engage in research alongside of.

I ended this first written response, that January day sitting in New Orleans, Louisiana, recollecting a memory of my elementary years when the impact of my early landscape, when the beginnings of my “less than” story, are occurring. Revisiting this moment now, rereading and retelling, I can see a bit of the process of inquiring narratively into my own stories I was trying to do and how these memories of my stories to live by actually had shaped who I was to become; and continue to impact my imagined future self.

*This chapter introduced terms which help explain what it is that a narrative inquiry researcher does. I especially like the idea of the four directions of any story: “inward and outward, backward and forward.... By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. Backward and forward, we refer to temporality—past, present, and future” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50): and all while situated in a place. As I tried to figure out what that means for my research idea, I connected more with the “memory” of Jean and the spelling test. Likely because I was not a good speller myself and attended, for a year, a multigrade class with my younger brother who was a good speller. He got many stickers and I got*



*very few. He did share his with me and while this was awfully nice of him, it was not quite the same as earning it myself. To this day, part of my imagined story which I hold to be very true is that I am not a good speller and my brother is. I must admit that while the story is my imagined one, it is often reinforced by the mistakes he finds and corrects for me when he peruses some of my work. It is good to have little brothers who are good at spelling words.*

*From this example of Jean's, I did go back again to memories of being in school and the unease I felt in that setting, except for when I had my nose buried in a book. So as I try to imagine my research puzzle or wondering I think of how it does take me back in time to reading as a girl and does move through time to trying to find books for my students as a teacher, and it also takes me to the present as I search for what is available now. It takes me forward also to my question of what impact this all has on the 'imagined self' or the feeling of comfort or discomfort the theories of Bourdieu's (1984) habitus hints at in our future children. All which will take place within a university where I attempt to manoeuvre through and move from being a student trying to get her Master's degree as part of an effort to escape the harsh realities of the teaching world to a researcher who has a question which will benefit others if she can just get "words on paper." Am I complicit in this world I have created where I chose to hang with the "white kids" and bond with the "less traditional"*

*family members? Yes, which does make me a wee bit afraid and a little bit nervous about becoming visible with my own lived and told stories. I hid inside of books disguised as Anne of Green Gables or Laura Ingalls Wilder, and here I attempt to begin a narrative in which my own “unnamed, perhaps secret, stories may come to light” as much as or even more than what I hope is revealed about children’s literature. I am willingly and knowingly allowing myself to be made “vulnerable” where my secret stories,<sup>38</sup> my imagined self will be made public. It is a scary thought.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text Assignment 1;*

*January 2010*

### **Finding Me Through Narrative Inquiry**

That January day, through the words I read about narrative inquiry, I began to find that coherence I was seeking. I then spent the next months trying to understand myself as researcher and where, within my stories, my wonderings about Aboriginal girls, and literature and identity originated from so that I could be aware and mindful of my presence within my proposed wonderings. The

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<sup>38</sup> The term is taken from Clandinin and Connelly (1996): “These lived stories are essentially secret ones. Furthermore, when these secret lived stories are told, they are, for the most part, told to other teachers in other secret places. When teachers move out of their classrooms into the out-of-classroom place on the landscape, they often live and tell cover stories, stories in which they portray themselves as experts, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in the school” (p. 25). Secret stories exist also within the other identities—Aboriginal, researcher, graduate student.

attempt was essential and key to any further understandings, but it was not easy, and sometimes I cried. Many, many times I storied others in the telling of my own stories and I worried. But I always moved a little closer to understanding, and my stories changed a little with each telling; I began to imagine and was able to see the emerging Indigenous narrative inquirer that I wanted to be, never quite reaching her, but at last able to see her possibilities.

While this inquiry looks at my whole two years and begins essentially from that rock-bottom moment where I then look backwards and forwards and back again, it really began with a “Work in Progress” proposal on a mid-December day where I decided that the understanding I most needed at that moment was the understanding of me. It was a scary prospect then, and continues to be a bit scary. The writing of it and telling of it is not as scary as the imagined reading of it. In this process, when I become too afraid of the telling of my stories, I go and read some more. Reading has always been soothing for me. And I searched for other Indigenous scholars to tell me that narrative inquiry is good because most of all, in my desire to become researcher, I long more for the title Indigenous than I do “researcher.” And the last time I needed to go and read, my angst was much soothed and calmed and I found reassurance that I am on the right path and I am doing what I need to. I followed the advice of Cora Weber Pillwax<sup>39</sup> who suggested I read Willie Ermine (1999)—a suggestion I shall be

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<sup>39</sup> Personal correspondence.

forever grateful, for in his words I found the permission I needed to continue that day.

In his article, “Aboriginal Epistemology,” Willie Ermine (1999) talks of how “every individual had the capacity to make headway into knowledge through the inner world” (p. 114). He refers to the archaeological findings of a stone medicine wheel as evidence of this path to knowledge being used by the “old ones” (p. 109), and of how it is necessary to understanding the outer world, to begin by understanding your own inner world:

The medicine wheel can be used as a mirror by any sincere person. The medicine wheel not only shows us who we are now, it can also show who/what we could be if we developed the gifts the Creator has placed in us.... Many of these gifts might never be developed if we do not somehow discover and nurture them. The great spiritual teachers have taught that all the gifts a person has are like the fruits hidden within a tree. p. 114)

I wanted to understand the outer world, and I knew that I was blocking my own way, so I was seeking understanding of myself through this inquiry into my lived and told stories. And since I was ever untrusting of my own knowing, I needed Ermine’s words to feel that this was a worthy endeavour. I was humbled to hear him speak not only of his own words, but that he referred back to the “old ones” (p. 109) as well. I found the permission I needed from him, from Cora Weber Pillwax in her referral, and from the “old ones.” I wanted to believe that I had hidden gifts within me, and I wanted to take the time to discover them and to

nurture and to reveal them. Once I knew and understood who I was and who I had the possibility of becoming by attending to my lived and told stories, then I would feel safe and secure enough to venture back out and understand the worlds of others.

The next field text I chose to reread, thus revisiting that lived experience, is the “Works in Progress” assignment required as part of the Narrative Inquiry class. I was asked to submit a proposal of what writing I hoped to work on during the course, which would at the end produce something helpful to me in my research or in my scholarly studies. Below is the field text, revealing more words written of my desire to inquire into my own lived experiences.

*What I need to understand first is “the researcher” and how this research wondering became important to me. I also need to tease out the pieces of the research that are the most crucial for me to understand or to wonder about. While I still hold firm to the need for Children’s Literature to have Métis or Cree female characters, and I insist it be situated in northern Alberta, I see that perhaps “girl” is not so much the worry more so than “place,” and Children’s Literature not so much the cause of identity issues, but perhaps my strong belief in literature as a potential “solution” or “protector” so that these issues will not be able to take such a strong hold on the next generation. I could possibly be looking for ‘magic books’ which would create a mirror where our next generation of children could*

*look and say, “Mirror, Mirror on the Wall ... who are the bestest ones of all?” and instead of only seeing non-Aboriginal people from across the land or stereotypical, stoic Indians from far away, and especially instead of seeing only the “uneducatable learner” living in the land of despair, they just might see themselves and remember no matter what, no matter where, it is they who are ‘the bestest ones of all.’*

*So I propose, under the patient, gentle guidance of the WIP [Work in Progress] team we have gathered to whom I shall listen carefully, both in their responses to my work and to their various identity journeys, that each week I choose a memory of a place and I peer inside and see ‘her’ and try to understand why she still searches for the perfect magical book and especially why she insists it be not from “Manitoba.” At the end, I will have “words on paper” which I can submit as a tiny piece of a giant thesis and a bittersweet story of a girl whose magic books just didn’t quite work.*

*—Narrative Inquiry Course, Work In Progress Proposal; January 2010*

### **My Early Landscapes Revisited**

In this section, the field text is the writing I engaged in as I shift backwards to attempt to find that little girl who loved literature so I can understand my early landscapes (Greene, 1978), and what I think happened when she began to live that story of not belonging and yearning to be otherwise (Carr,

1986). The process was not linear, and sometimes I got lost in memories that perhaps didn't lead directly to my wonderings. This thesis, my research text is also not linear, and returns often to the same stories to live by, and the same unease experienced and written and relived through the various field texts pieces I chose. I can recall how much I loved revisiting those early landscapes in this assignment, and I loved being able to find myself living and telling stories on those landscapes. Now through my narrative inquiry into those recollected (Crites, 1971) memories of the little girl I once was, through retelling those lived and told stories, I can begin to understand and I can begin to restory.

*Until now, I had lived in books and other written work. I had relied on the written word, and all of its authority from having been published, and printed and made available, to guide me and tell me what it was I needed to do to become this "researcher" everyone spoke of. Yet in narrative inquiry, I was to do things differently. In narrative inquiry I was to look for a story. This will be easy, I thought. I love stories and so I began sifting back through my memories in search of the story where I would find the "me" I used to be.*

#### *The Blue Vinyl Chair*

*I need to go and get her. She is there in my memories waiting patiently as always. I know exactly where she will be.*

*There is a window, in a kitchen, in a “low-rental house.” And in front of the window, in this kitchen, in this low-rental house is a chair; a blue vinyl armchair. Beside the chair is a stand filled to overflowing with books and papers and photo albums and scraps of paper. Sitting in the kitchen chair beside the desk near the window is Grandma. She is silent, with only the smoke rising from her cigarette stirring in the air and only the inhale and exhale of her breath making noise in the room. Once in a while, she will begin another game of solitaire and only the gentle shuffle of the cards and the occasional snap as she lays it down will intrude on this silence. Beside this kitchen chair, this grandma, and this never ending game of solitaire is a chair, a blue vinyl chair.*

*And it is here that we shall find her. In this low rental house, in this kitchen, by this window, we will see her sitting in the blue vinyl arm chair as silent as her grandma.*

*Her hair is long and brown, pulled back in the half-ponytail which she despises. Her eyes are huge in her little face, and they take in everything. Her hands are small and gentle as she sneaks another look at the photo album sitting beside her on the stand. The window is behind her. She does not look out; instead, she looks in. She looks at the photo albums or the papers or she sits silent watching her grandma or she stares across at the kitchen shelves full to overflowing with ornaments and cups and toothpicks, and spices galore. It is there in this silence with only the*



*gentlest of sounds to intrude that she begins to imagine stories. As her big eyes take in the world around her, stories swirl and whirl and twirl inside of her until she too is full to overflowing with treasures beyond compare.*

*And that is where I shall find her; the little four-year-old me who sits silent and still on the blue vinyl chair, watching and waiting, imagining and dreaming and not yet a reader.*

*I need to go and get her. She is there in my memories waiting patiently as always. I know exactly where she will be. And I need to go and get her before someone tells her a story where she is not full to overflowing with treasures beyond compare. I need to go and get her before they look in and only see a girl on a blue vinyl chair in front of a window, in the kitchen of her grandma's low-rental house.*

*—Narrative Inquiry Course, Final WIP Assignment; April 2010*

As I recall writing this, I also recall the memories of sitting endlessly on that chair. I don't remember if I had to sit or if I wanted to, but I know I was in no hurry to leave. From that chair I was able to see and hear all that went on in the world of my grandma's house, and to hear the stories told when adults gather around a kitchen table. But this first memory recollected, this early writing, didn't seem like it was going to get me to where I needed to go, but I knew I wanted to go back to before the story of "less than" and "not belonging" began. I thought I would find that version of me sitting on that blue vinyl chair. Going back, I had to

remember some hard things and some sad stories, and inside of those stories were others and I told the stories anyway, with permission from some but not all, and I worried about that as I told and wrote. Once again, the stories could only show a moment or an event, and I didn't want my readers to not see the whole picture but I wanted to tell the story so we could begin to understand who I was and where my stories to live by came from. Now I know that in this thesis, I need to leave out some of those early writings because they do sweep up others into the telling (Torgovnick, 1994). While those I have storied have given me permission, I worry that they really just might not want to be brought along (Zinsser, 1987).

In those early works in progress writings where I inquired into my experiences on my early landscapes and how I experienced them, I wonder at the differences in my recollected memories that I have of my grandma compared to others' memories of her. But I slowly came to the conclusion that my memory, my lived experience, was what was important to my understanding (Zinsser, 1987).

*I do remember those not so happy times, and yet I was grandma's girl. As a little girl that was where I liked it best and in my memories, once I returned I wanted to stay awhile. Memories "cannibalized" they warn, memories forever altered and "replaced" (Dillard, 1998, p. 27) they say, but I think these memories are rescued and these memories tell me about who I am. There are still no books in this story of "me." There are still no*

*hints of literature impacting my identity. But there is a grandma and a low-rental house and a wee little girl who thought she was going to be queen. There is a story of neglect, there is a story of abuse, there is a story of poverty and yet inside of that story, nestled in safe and sound, there is another story; a story of a little girl who wanted to stay a little while and linger for a bit. Is that the story I was looking for? Is that the story I wanted to find, the one that is hidden behind those secrets, the one that yearns to break free? I remember all of that, too. But I must continue on. This isn't how it is supposed to be. I am to find the memory of books and literature and its impact on the "me" I thought I could be.*

*I begin again. I leave that house. I promise to return. I have these words now for when the memories fade. I have this past, this history that is a part of me, and now I see it again. I have found it and I hold it dear but I must continue. I must go on. My duty is not yet fulfilled.*

*—Narrative Inquiry Course, Final WIP Assignment; April 2010*

Narrative inquiry is about stories lived and told, retold and relived, and I began to play with the memories and with my stories and I was comforted by the remembering because as I sat here in the world of research feeling sometimes all alone, these memories reunited me with family. These memories also reminded me of a grandma who gave me a story to live by that I wish I had held a little closer. She told me that I would grow up to be queen, and I really did believe for

awhile that this would be true. But slowly and surely this story was replaced by one which now I am trying to understand.

The next section of my final works in progress assignment became the paper I presented in Montreal, so I return to excerpts from that paper, the introduction to which we read in Chapter 1 of this thesis. At the time of writing, I was trying to explore identity and the impact of literature upon it to try to understand why my researcher identity will not stay in place and instead constricts or slides away. The text begins in the middle of the story when I left the blue vinyl chair and went to live with relatives for a year so that I would not start grade one alone; instead, I would join my cousin on her first day. Through this inquiry, I revisit my lived experience of graduate studies, and I inquire into writings engaging in the recollecting of memories on my early landscape; attempting always to attend to three dimensions as I did so.

*The little girl missed her grandma and her blue vinyl chair, and spent her time quietly trying to learn the new rules inside of this house where they just didn't seem to believe that she would someday be queen. Inside of this house, just as she did her whole life, the little girl hovered near the outskirts of the adult conversations listening to stories not meant for little girl ears. It is here that she first heard "Indian jokes" about alcohol and laziness and free money given to the undeserving Indians, and it is here that "Indian" and "mother" first became connected. Being too young to*

*fully understand all of this adult conversation, the only thing that she knew for sure was that she was no longer queen, and instead she might very likely be this “Indian” that they spoke of. Life in first grade progressed uneventfully and ended with a most improved certificate, and this former nonreader, who never did attend kindergarten, was now officially a reader! And if what her relatives said was true, she was an Indian reader and not a future queen.*

*The little girl returned home to her grandma’s house, no longer a queen; with a now uncertain future she turned to books and trusted that they would tell her what her future would be. Conversations of adults still intrigued her, but stories in books began to draw her away from her blue vinyl throne and off to the quiet of her bedroom where the skilled storytellers drew her inside and transformed her into “someone not quite herself,” someone not a queen but still someone worthy of grand adventures. With that word hovering above her, that “Indian” word, she slipped inside of the story and began to once again dream. It was a different dream, but it was just as powerful and just as desired as the dream she lost when the world pointed at her and saw “not queen” but instead “little Indian girl.”*

*In those books, she read of Tom, Susan and Betty and the little white house. In those books, her mother was blonde and wore high heels, and her father returned from work in a business suit. She had birthday*

*parties and painted garages and wore pretty dresses and chased her dog named Flip. In those books, life was good but she was often called away and forced to return to the real world. The real world still had Grandma and a brother and a sister and little house. But the house was blue and not white, and father had died and mother was not around, and so despite her longing to live in that world inside of that book, she couldn't. She wasn't Susan or Tom or Betty. She longed to have the light-coloured curly hair instead of hair that was long and dark. She longed for a mother and a father and the laughter and smiles and pretty dresses that existed in this world. She longed to stay inside of that story. She longed to be not quite herself.*

—Paper, presented at CSSE Conference in Montreal, May 29, 2010

### **A Litany of Evidence<sup>40</sup>**

This phenomena of not finding one's self in books is not something I alone lived, but is echoed in the stories of many other Aboriginal scholars. I quote Bruno (2010) who recalls a similar experience which also impacted her future research studies.

I soon realized, although not fully understanding, that I did not see myself, a Cree person, reflected in the books or in the classroom discussions. It was during this time I started to think about the various books I had read

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<sup>40</sup> Royster (1996): "Individual stories placed one against another against another build credibility and offer ... a litany of evidence from which a call for transformation in theory and practice might rightfully begin."

when I was younger and I did not recall that any of the books had any kind of Cree content. If there was, it was either an imaginary Indian to which my *being* could not relate, or it was not positive. (p. 7)

While Bruno (2010) went on to inquire into “The Silences in the Lives of Cree Women in University,” I continued to try to understand the impact of that missing story within children’s literature on the stories to live by, those “less than” and “not belonging” stories that I began to live as a little girl and continue to embody to this day.

### **The Dissonance of Bourdieu**

As I wrote of those memories in a style of writing that allowed me to try and look back as observer while still recalling that lived experience, I tried to understand why I chose that memory and how it could possibly fit my wonderings about Bourdieu (1977) who was still at the time, my theory of choice for understanding this “less than” storyline but I didn’t really get any closer to that understanding yet. Bourdieu felt too constricting, and from inside that theory of habitus, I couldn’t see room for “becoming.” I was uneasy with the idea that much of the effect of habitus was unconscious. The idea of “less than” stories to live by and my “not belonging” storylines is coherent with the idea of “not for the likes of us” unconscious self-elimination (Bourdieu, 1977); yet I couldn’t find coherence within his words and I couldn’t find a way to represent the understandings he implied in ways that felt respectful to my imagined audience—all my relations (Wilson, 2001).

*I don't remember the actual reading of this book. I know it was at my grandma's house. I know I loved the stories. I know I desperately wanted to be in that little white house with that family. I know when I was reading I was really there, and I know that when I returned back to real life I was slightly disappointed. Did I know yet I did not want to be an Indian? I don't think I knew that yet. But I do remember once being a chubby little girl who was content to be Grandma's favourite, and then I remember wanted nothing more than to be Susan or Betty and to live somewhere else. Was this identity forming or identify being unformed? Someone once told me about Bourdieu's theory of "habitus." They said habitus is "history turned into nature" (Kerby, 1991, p. 25), and so can this history of not wanting to be who I was turn into an unconscious habit, into my very nature? I am still not sure, so let's go in search of more memories of books. These memories are hard to find because I lived inside of the story, and so I can't recollect the memory of the actual reading. I can only remember the story and my desire to stay inside of it.*

*—Paper, presented at CSSE Conference in Montreal; May 29, 2010*

Hampton (1995) noted that "Indian children face a daily struggle with attacks on their identity, their intelligence, their way of life, their essential worth. They must continually struggle to find self-worth, dignity, and freedom in being



who they are” (p. 35). With habitus being “history turned into nature” (Kerby, 1991, p. 25), and this daily struggle being the experience of many who are recognized as Aboriginal and many who desire to identify in that way, I begin to see how this does become a story so ingrained that it become habit to believe that one is “less than.” But still, I am not yet seeing clearly the potential for becoming “otherwise” within that theoretical lens.

Then, as I do now, and as I have throughout my two years as a Master’s student, I continue to wonder how stories read, heard, told, and lived form the “Aboriginal” identity of children. It is especially important to my understanding because I seek evidence of a possibility of this Aboriginal identity sitting more peacefully upon the shoulders of our next generations of Aboriginal children.

*Years go by, and now she is a little older and perhaps a little quieter, and she still listens when she can to all the conversations which swirl around her but still books are her true love. Books have become some of her best friends. She knows that she is an Indian, although not the one in the books who scalp others and kill settlers and hunt buffalo. Her name gives it away, and her mother and her mother’s family confirm it and even her grandmother as she pounds moose meat into pemmican has given her some subtle clues about who she is, and she isn’t really sure that it is something to be very proud of. She cringes a little as she overhears the words “dirty rotten Indians,” and in the jokes made about the drunken*

*laziness and especially at the anger in the voice of her aunt who whispers of that “mother” who comes to take the girl away from Grandma. Indian is what she knows she is as she leaves the home she knew at Grandma’s house and goes to live on the reserve with her mother’s family.*

*She no longer lives in the town, in the low-rental house, in the safety of Grandma and a blue vinyl throne. Now she lives with her Mosom, in a cabin in the woods with her mom and her sister and her brother. Her Mosom speaks Cree and hunts and traps and built his home himself. This now older girl sits and listens and wonders at what he is saying in Cree, understanding only bits and pieces, and yet she often peers into his face looking for similarities to her own. His face is large and dark and lined from years of being outside. His silhouette in the darkening light shows the slicked back-gray hair and the prominent features so unlike her own. He is often silent when they are alone, knowing she will not understand if he tries to speak to her in the only language he knows. This is not the Indian she heard of. He is not lazy. He is not drunk. He does not get money because he is Indian. Although stories say he might have been different when he was young, the Mosom she sees now is not the Indian she read of in books or the Indian she heard of in those secret whispers and hurtful jokes. The girl does not understand. If she is supposed to be Indian and not queen, why does she still feel “not quite herself?” Is it possible that an “Indian girl” with an Indian grandpa called Mosom can*

*really claim to be Indian if she can't even communicate with him in his Indian language?*

*—Paper, presented at CSSE Conference in Montreal; May 29, 2010*

### **Identity Wonders**

Throughout this journey, I also struggle to understand how identity is formed and what I mean by identity. I know now that I want to understand identity as a narrative construction, as stories to live by, a term that opens identity to meaning fluid, shifting, changing, as contextually shaped and expressed, as partial, as embodied, and as always in the making (Bruno, 2010; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Greene, 1978; Johnson, 1989; Young, 2003b). The stories to live by idea seems to give me some clues of how my identity was formed. Clusters of stories one embodies, stories that once collected and told and lived, can be restoried, these understandings of lives offered more hope that the ever-rigid unconscious habitus, and yet I still wasn't quite sure.

*Identify formation. How do we begin to know who we are and where we fit in? Is it the sense of belonging? Is it from our family and our friends? Is it from what we are told? Is it in the reflection of ourselves we see in the eyes of those around us? If so, then once again identity is unforming, no longer queen, no longer Grandma's girl, not really an Indian. How does identity form then? Habitus is "history turned into nature" (Kerby, 1991,*

*p. 25). Unconscious self-elimination of a future that is “not for the likes of us” (Bellamy, 1994. p. 126). What if there is no “us” to belong to? What kind of habitus forms when one is unsure of one’s identity and can’t place herself with a group of people? Did books do this? Or were books the escape? What if there had been an “Indian” in a book who had a grandma’s house in town and Mosom’s cabin in the bush? Would that have made a difference?*

*—Paper, presented at CSSE Conference in Montreal; May 29, 2010*

### **Yearning for Belonging**

During the months in this narrative inquiry class, I tried to understand the place of literature and books in the stories to live by that I began to tell and retell. I know that not finding myself within those stories made me wish to be otherwise. I did not see myself in the writings of non-Aboriginal people, yet I also didn’t find myself within the Aboriginal stories that I was reading and so when I tried to explain my wonderings to others, they didn’t quite understand. It was about more than books with Cree/Métis girls in them. It was about wondering where we gathered our stories to live by, and how perhaps literature could offer some other possibilities by showing both similarities and difference in ways that we could desire to be otherwise without giving up completely who we were. There is a need for little girls to dream of being queen without giving up some of the other clusters of stories that form their identity.

*A few years pass and now the girl lives with her aunty, still near her Mosom but no longer with her Mom and with no hope of ever returning to her grandma who is now too ill to care for any little girls at all.*

*She still reads and lives inside of books. But she has outgrown Laura Ingalls Wilder and seeks another character. She searches and finds a “bosom buddy” in the red-haired Anne of Green Gables. She no longer wants to live in a rustic cabin to which she must haul both wood and water. She now covets the little bedroom of her own, in the little Victorian farmhouse, and she now feels a kindred spirit in the Orphan Anne. Once again, moved from the place she called home, she understands what it feels to be “unwanted” and yet so desperate to stay and belong. She wants flaming red hair and freckles upon pale white skin and not the long, dark hair she owns nor face that browns every summer. She wants to be “not quite herself.” She wants to live as another. And so she hides away inside the world woven by another storyteller. Only to emerge when rudely pulled back to the present by those who demand she attend this world. As Anne, she speaks loudly and with flare, as the Indian girl, she is shy and quieter and her English does not roll off her tongue as poetry like Anne’s words do. As Anne, she could let go of her dream of being queen and instead become Anne of Green Gables. But she knows she cannot be Anne, just as she could never be Betty or Susan, and could never be Laura, and*

*just like she could never be queen. But what she does not know is who she really is and where she really belongs.*

*—Paper, presented at CSSE Conference in Montreal, May 29, 2010*

This feeling of not belonging goes way back to my early landscape, and it became part of my stories to live by very early in my life. And yet when I look now and I read these words, I see different stories, stories that I did not yet see that Saturday in May 2010 when I read this at a research conference. That day, I was coming to know and understand, but I wasn't quite there yet.

*Can you just see her now? She stands not so very tall, not so very old, not so very Cree, and yet not so very anything else. One thing does grow stronger in her and that is her desire to be someone “not quite herself.” She sees in books a better life, and nowhere in those books is an Indian. She sees in books red hair and blonde hair and little white houses and families with only a mother and a father and brother and a sister living inside of a home and no homes filled to overflowing with cousins galore. She lives now in a certain kind of space, a liminal space, an in-between place, a story-less place (Heilbrun, 1999). She lives now with an uncertainty, a cautiousness, trying to figure out who she is and where she belongs. She peers into different worlds wondering if that is where she should be. Identity formation or identity destruction? Habitus is the*

*unconscious beliefs one has about one's self. A way of being in the world that is gleaned from a slow build-up of experiences, and of a life lived (Kerby, 1991, p. 25). What then of habitus if one tried desperately to live inside of books and yet never really belonged?*

*—Paper, presented at CSSE Conference in Montreal; May 29, 2010*

### **Retell, Relive, Restory**

By the end of this journey through a works in progress which ended up being read somewhere across the country at a research conference in Montreal, I began to understand that I wanted to be in this storyless place and that there were others who existed along side of me in that space. I love books and stories, I love asking others to tell me about their lived experiences, and I love it because I can go there. My imagination is such that when the storyteller begins, I jump right in and live alongside or inside them. And I like that. It is this thinking with story, thinking about story, and representing in story that draws me to narrative inquiry and allows me a place to exist more tentatively where I too could be changed by the research, and my story could begin to change in the telling and retelling as well.

It is only now, in my reliving of this first attempt at inquiring narratively, that I see more than just my forever struggle with identity and with belonging and with wanting to fit in. I also see now how welcomed I had always been. Did I, and do I now, feel absolutely comfortable in the non-Aboriginal world? No, not

absolutely comfortable, but now I see that I had been welcomed at times, and I feel that I still am. And there are friends inside of those ‘non-Aboriginal faces’ and those friends did see me and not just the dismal statistics that often come attached to the title “Aboriginal.”

Did I then, and do I now, feel absolutely comfortable in the Aboriginal world? No, not absolutely comfortable there either, but again I felt welcomed as a child in many relatives’ homes, and I felt many instances of being loved and wanted. I am aware that I am far from knowing my culture, and I am not quite at complete peace with how I decide to identify myself as Aboriginal, but I am beginning to see that much of the “denial of entry” was because that was coherent with my stories to live by. Within those stories, I created an image of Indigenous researcher so tightly rigid and unattainable that I storied myself right out. But now, as I continue to inquire narratively, I continue to remove the box I created around myself with these rigid ideas about what I should be like and what research should look like, and I allow some uncertainty and liminal space to exist. I think I can begin to see what I had missed during the living of it all.

And yet, as I attempt to restory a history of feeling less than, I can hear the warning of Thomas King (2003), who says:

I tell the stories not to play on your sympathies but to suggest how stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to the stories as long as I live. Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous. (p. 9)



### **Show, Don't Tell—Coming to Know**

In this chapter, I want to take you along to see how inquiring narratively allowed me to remember and to relive, and in the process to accept the me that I am and believe more in the knowing that exists within me; so I could try to show you, the reader, both the impact it had on me and also so that I could understand myself through the retelling and reliving of that lived experience. In the next chapter, I examine more closely my belief in narrative inquiry as a process that allows the title “researcher” to become friends with, and learn to coexist with, my still-forming “Aboriginal” identity, and in ways that will build the confidence needed for me to continue to engage in Indigenous research in ethical, relational, and responsible ways. I will look at what I tried to do as a researcher, how I felt tensions and discomforts, and how what I was learning helped me see a way to become more like the researcher I imagined I could be.

In the recalling, rereading, and reliving process of narrative inquiry—a process which always includes other humans—I began to realize that I was drawn to the relational ontology commitment<sup>41</sup> that Clandinin and Murphy (2009) describe, and it is this caring ethical attitude that drew me in. In my early landscapes (and even this more current one), my life as an Aboriginal person truly did and still does encompass experiences which could be documented in those dismal statistics. But there are stories that aren't documented and recorded in the same way. The stories that few really get to see are of the fierce love, unlimited

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<sup>41</sup> “Ontological commitment to the relational locates ethical relationships at the heart of narrative inquiry” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 600).

pride, and feeling of belonging that I didn't always see in the living of it, but that are absolutely the often untold stories of living this Aboriginal existence in the midst of a giant extended family that always welcomes you back with a smile. I do live the world in relational ways, so when I fell into the trap of dichotomy and found enemies lurking in every corner, and cruelty beneath the surface of policies and curriculum, my heart hurt and was sad for all of the humans who were living that. But when I got to go back and find that little girl on the blue vinyl chair, and I got to remember those much neglected early memories, I got to see with my adult eyes that all the way along, me—just as I was Métis and/or Cree, daughter, sister, cousin, mother, aunt, teacher, and friend—would be okay living in this place that is “amidst, among, atwixt, rooted nowhere except in the realm of questioning, experiment, and adventure, and as it questions everything, it uses what it finds befitting” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 98). From there, I can stand up and also identify as a kind of Indigenous researcher.

My stories to live by were disrupted by the process of inquiring narratively, but they cannot so easily be thrown out, for this “less than” and “not belonging” have truly become “chained to me” (King, 2003, p. 9), but what narrative inquiry as a phenomena does is shows the possibilities of living outside the box, whether it be at home, at work, or at “the university.”

I end this chapter with another found poem, from a writing that occurred before that “rock-bottom” moment, but illustrates still what I wanted then and what I wanted now; it leads into Chapter 4 where I try to dismantle the box that I

built, and show the possibilities of living in the midst and on the borders.

“Returning to these landscapes through [my] reflective presence to them, the relational threads [I] continuously negotiated since childhood, created a space to look forward and make meaning from” (Huber, 2000, p. 118). “We trust easy oppositions. We are suspicious of complexities, distrustful of contradictions, fearful of enigmas” (King, 2003, 25). I seek now to be released from the dichotomous box of either belonging or not belonging, and begin to make meaning that is coherent with who I am becoming; I seek to accept that this process continues always.

### **Outside Of the Box**

Outrage

all of the oppression

the disadvantages and road blocks

indigenous students face

those privileged ‘white’

resentment

(non-indigenous)

more knowledgeable

work towards solutions

education gap

ignoring it

(not their problem).

stop

re-evaluate

'white' faces of friends

rethink

stop feeling 'oppressed,

repressed'

withhold 'blame.'

suspending judgment

focus on the policies

overcome

remove "blame"

deepening understanding

allow room

outside of the box

—Found Poem, created from Indigenous Research Methods Course,

Critical Reflection Journal; February 2009

## CHAPTER FOUR: POSITIONING MYSELF IN THE RESEARCH

### **Retelling, Reliving, Restorying Research Stories**

There was something about the writings around narrative inquiry that appealed to me on many levels. The words chosen to describe the phenomena, the relational ontology<sup>42</sup> (Clandinin, 2006) of the methodology and the personal experiential stories brought the issues in the inquiries so much more to life and allowed the complexities to show through in ways that statistics and categorization could not.

As Maxine Greene (1995) suggested, the possibility was in being able to look between seeing big—that is, seeing the particularities of individuals' lives; and seeing small—that is, seeing the trends and patterns. It was important that I learned to look at the larger picture (what Greene called seeing small) and move away from the individual (seeing big), but it was hard for me to see hope and possibility when Aboriginal people and the issues which surround them are viewed from a more distant vantage point; narrative inquiry seemed to give me words to express this. I wondered if I could learn using narrative inquiry to see both “big” and “small.” Could I move between the two ways of seeing? Narrative inquiry seemed to offer me a powerful way to “see big.”

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<sup>42</sup> The idea of working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space highlights the relational dimension of narrative inquiry. Narrative inquirers cannot bracket themselves out of the inquiry but rather need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences, as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process. This makes clear that, as narrative inquirers, inquirers, too, are part of the metaphoric parade (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). They too live on the landscape and are complicit in the world they study (Clandinin, 2006, p. 47).

*When I began learning about narrative inquiry, I was drawn to the idea that we tell the stories of lived experience and that these stories, each and every one of them, are very important to our understanding. This working alongside of and learning together approach, always allowing one to develop relationship and not remain so distantly “objective,” was much more suited to my soul.... I realize that I still need to think of the grander narratives to understand the stories I live and the stories I will listen to, and to try to make some sense of it all. So I liked when Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) spoke to this very idea, about how “people’s stories can be an important way of responding to macrosocial forms of oppression” (p. 62). First, it serves as a healing function with “stories about oppression, about victimization, about one’s own brutalization—far from deepening the despair of the oppressed, lead to healing, liberation, mental health” (p. 62), and emboldens the hearer who has had similar experience but not voiced them, telling them they are not alone. Second, it can contribute to the “transformation of oppressors” by “removing silence” and “disrupt the insularity that the ‘privileged members of society insulate themselves from the suffering of other” (p. 62). I am especially drawn to the words of Delgado (1989) as it spoke to the argument “paying attention to people’s stories opens up possibilities for generating new stories in which we can all live,” “leading the way to new environment,” “avoiding intellectual*

*apartheid,” “banishing sameness,” “stiffness,” “if we would deepen and humanize ourselves, we must seek out storytellers different from ourselves and afford them the audience they deserve. The benefit will be reciprocal”(p. 2439). And so for me to make sense of it all, I must “simultaneously acknowledge that an individual’s experience is shaped by macrosocial processes of which the individual is often unaware and that the same individual’s experience is more than living out of a socially determined script” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 62)... I do like the way this article gave examples of others who struggle with this and cautions that*

*... the more attention a researcher pays to macrosocial structural processes of oppression—be it patriarchy, white supremacist ideologies, institutionalized homophobia, or market economies, which commodify every aspect of our lives—the less it may seem that individuals and their experience make a difference. Focusing on the details of personal experiences can feel like escapism. (p. 64)*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text Assignment; March 2010*

This field text illustrates my lived experience at that moment and the position from which I came to narrative inquiry. I spent a lot of time trying to understand the macrosocial structural processes of oppression, and I began to feel

very helpless about whether my stories or the ones I wanted to tell would make a difference after all. I can still recall how reassuring it was to begin to see that my stories, and the stories others lived and told, could make a difference and would benefit participants in more ways than I realized. This article seemed to indicate a way to bring together that macrosocial understanding and allow it to exist, but also to place the individual and their experiences in an important position—a position in which there was possibility of change. This article also seemed to allow me to continue to exist on the borders, to value this narrative inquiry process but to never lose my ability to “recognize the good neighbours in others, even if they speak different theoretical languages” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 70). This continues to be very important to me because I hope to illustrate why this narrative inquiry methodology is suited to my way of being while understanding that there is much value in all other ways and much that I can benefit from by also “affording them the audience they deserve” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 62).

While I was living these experiences, I sensed that what I was learning through narrative inquiry was coherent with my reading about Indigenous research; I didn't take the time then to make the direct connection. Now in this autobiographical narrative inquiry as I reread my early writings, I am also taking the time to reread about Indigenous research to examine more closely where I see these connections. I came across the words of Fournier and Crey (1997), and they spoke about the three-dimensional inquiry space in the same way as narrative



inquiry does: An important Aboriginal teaching points out that “we will not know where we are going, unless we know where we come from” (p. 207). This teaching feels coherent with the three dimensional inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and coherent with my need to do this inquiry into my own lived experiences before I can imagine future research with Aboriginal people. Doing this, I feel that I am also honouring the concept that Fournier and Crey (1997) speak to of how “the traditional values that sustained First Nations for thousands of years before contact are emerging as the foundation that will carry Aboriginal nations to recovery and renewal” (p. 207).

These words speak also to what I am trying to do in this autobiographical narrative inquiry; it reflects its three-dimensional nature of my own autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences as an Aboriginal graduate student studying Indigenous Education, including the temporality of my remembered past, lived present, and imagined future. In order for me as researcher to begin to envision a future where I could wonder about others’ experiences, I needed to reflect on where I had come from. In this next section, I go back to the field texts which speak to my early attempts at becoming a researcher, where I begin to figure out what feels more comfortable with my way of being and what is coherent with my “stories to live by.”

### **Tensions Emerge—Retold and Relived**

In my last required course, I was asked to engage in a small research project with an Aboriginal community and to write up my findings. The topic was

Aboriginal education, and in my introduction I wanted to take a moment to reflect on research projects I had been fortunate enough to have engaged in during the previous year. I had learned about narrative inquiry by this time, and wanted to try to use this beginner knowledge to inform this most recent attempt at research. I wanted to think about the tensions I experienced and to think of ways to address them that felt more coherent to who I was imagining as Trudy the Researcher. I began by trying to recollect memories of (Crites, 1971) previous projects as best I could. I didn't have a lot of saved personal writing about those research projects, as at the time I didn't realize the value in that written reflection, so in this field text, my recollections were brief but still very relevant.

*Before I can begin to speak about the process I engaged in during this course, I need to give a bit of a background of the transformation of Trudy along the journey from just a graduate student aiming for a degree and a break from teaching towards Trudy the future Indigenous researcher or Aboriginal scholar. Without this prior knowledge, I am unsure if I will be able to portray why I chose narrative inquiry or why I felt the weight and responsibility of those stories that have been shared. I came to this course with experience on four different research projects, all gained from the summer of 2009 to the summer of 2010, all with Aboriginal people as "participants" and with most placing me as the "Aboriginal researcher"*

*and perhaps even seeing me as the “Aboriginal expert” in those situations; all of which, also, began to feel very uncomfortable....*

*In the first, I was to administer surveys to a cross-section of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit of a variety of ages and education levels. The survey was 25 or so pages, took about one hour, and ranged from multiple choice to long answer questions. I read the survey to the participants and I listened to the answers and I recorded what they said.*

*This was my first experience attempting research, and I was naïve and eager and laughed at some of my ineptness. I knew nothing of the protocol for interviewing Elders or about the protocol for approaching family and friends about these potentially intense questions which brought up memories and feelings which were not always happy. My participants took it very seriously while I had bounced into the project thinking of it as a job and tons of fun. The seriousness of the questions and the solemnity of the answers given forced me to begin to rethink this attitude. My enthusiasm remained but was now tempered with calmness and seriousness as I gazed at the expressions on participants’ faces while I asked hard questions about racism and friends and dreams and goals and setbacks, and about residential schools and correctional systems and many other similar queries relating to Aboriginal people. I didn’t once ponder at the time how this would help them, or help me, or what it was that I was representing when I carried this survey into the lives of my*

*family and friends. One cousin needed to pause in the interview, and he looked at me seriously and said he needed a few minutes as this was bringing up memories and feelings that were hard. In that moment, as I gazed at him, I realized that perhaps what I was doing needed to be taken even more seriously and given much more thought. I wondered if this kind of questioning could actually be causing harm. But before I was even completely finished this research assistant project and had time to process what that niggling feelings of being an imposter and the doubts I felt when I recalled the memory of that one cousin struggling to answer the difficult questions, I agreed to help with another project and promised to reach out to the Aboriginal population in my social circle for another group of researchers. I had no time to really consider what I had done to my friends and family nor did they, and so we pocketed the cash we all earned and, as is our way, we got on with life.*

*—Issues in Aboriginal Education, Final Paper; June 2010*

As I look back on my reflections, I recall that with those uncomfortable feelings and moments of tension, a beginning awareness was developing; an awareness that I wasn't being as mindful or awake as I should have been. Despite that unease, as I sat across from humans listening to their stories and engaging in research, I did become enamoured with the idea of a research life during the process. Having the privilege of engaging in real projects, a hands-on lived

experience of the process I was able to learn from those more experienced in this art of research, I began to formulate an idea of the kind of researcher I wanted to become. In this process, I also learned a lot from my participants who so willingly accepted my request knowing that I was a beginner without much experience, and through their patience and some laughs at my early awkward attempts I began to try on this researcher identity.

The Elder who was the very first person I interviewed as a novice researcher was patient and kind. When I explained how little I knew about proper protocol for research involving Elders, she took time to teach me about protocols and how to navigate them, correcting me gently when needed before we began the formal interview process. I was thankful and very grateful. But I was also embarrassed by my lack of knowledge about research in general and especially about Indigenous research. Now, as I recollect the memories of those moments, I didn't realize then how deeply they impacted me and how they wormed their way into my stories to live by. This feeling of not knowing enough of my culture was coherent with these moments, but also fed the story of "not for the likes of me."

The project leaders had carefully chosen Indigenous researchers as a way to honour Aboriginal rights to have control over research they are engaged in. It is as Kenny et al. (2004) explain:

As Aboriginal people regain control over their own research processes, Aboriginal researchers are often sought out to implement research initiatives with Aboriginal people, because the people tend to be more

comfortable with Aboriginal researchers who usually have both the cultural and academic research background. Aboriginal researchers can also relate to their own nation as well as those of other tribal affiliations.

(p. 13)

In that moment, I recall trying desperately to be and to act as this knowing Aboriginal researcher, and yet I was very much aware that I had never been responsible for the protocol required when asking Elders for help. I wasn't sure I was fulfilling the duties I had been slated in this project to fulfill, even with my honest intentions and with my heart in the right place. I so eagerly wanted to engage in research and learn from the process, but I was nervous. At this early stage, I recall that I was uneasy about the technical details involved in research and not yet as aware of the relational elements I knew would begin to cause tensions later. I was especially conscious of the huge honour and responsibility I had been given as I engaged in that, my first interview experience, which was with an Aboriginal Elder, and I was extremely nervous at offending her with my lack of knowledge of protocol. I knew what I was supposed to do technically. The research leader had prepared us well; however, I was worried that my execution would reveal my lack of knowing and that I might offend in some way.

Thankfully, her willingness to help me personally as well as for the research project allowed me to enter into this research relationship, together alongside this Elder rather than as researcher and participant. Through the lived experience I was learning a lot, although in the reflection I am aware that I was not yet

understanding. I thought I could just jump and become this Indigenous researcher just because I wanted to and because I was Aboriginal, but my “less than” and “not belonging” stories to live by would begin to erode that early belief.

As I reflect and reread about Indigenous research now, I came across a phrase that again reassures me that the process I engaged in was necessary to my process of becoming, and was a necessary part of the larger picture of Indigenous research methodologies, which themselves are in the process of becoming (Smith, 2005).<sup>43</sup> That first project that I engaged in, relived through the field text and the memories of those moments, was, as Smith (2005) explains, important for “building capacity of Aboriginal researchers” (p. 92). I know now that it wasn’t expected that I begin as an expert or even experienced, yet I was uneasy with the impact my not knowing could have on my rparticipant. This awareness was only just beginning.

Engaging in actual research projects, then taking the time now to inquire narratively about those lived experiences, I did learn much about this research process and about myself. Reflecting back on those moments, inquiring in a three-dimensional space, I try now to gather some of the loose threads of understanding in those early research moments, gained long before I had even heard the term “narrative inquiry.” I learned it was good to be humble and ask for help and admit when I didn’t know, and I learned how to listen to all she, my assigned Elder, was

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<sup>43</sup> “Strategies for Building Indigenous Research Capability: The training of indigenous peoples as researchers. The employment of indigenous people as researcher. Participation by indigenous people in a wide range of research project employing different kinds of approaches and methodologies” (Smith, 2005, p. 92).

saying. And I recall how together, just for a moment, we entered into a relationship that went beyond the hour-long survey where I read and recorded while she spoke. Viewing those moments, from this position where I more fully understand my need for honouring of the research relationship and the inquiry space, I see that it isn't so much the amount of time spent with the participant as it is the intention one goes in with and the integrity of the relationship developed during the time in the midst of that research moment.

And even then, when I was very much a beginner and had not yet been introduced to narrative inquiry, I felt the relationship inside that research moment. At that time, I just didn't know how to understand nor how to articulate it. "Narrative inquiry is relational inquiry" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60). "We exist because of and for our relationships we hold with everything around us. Knowledge is therefore of no use if it does not serve relationships" (Anderson, 2000, p. 46). The research I engaged in that day took longer than the expected one hour, but the extra time was needed for the relationship to develop. I am fortunate in looking back to see how lucky I was to have been introduced to this idea in my very first interview. Despite my naïveté and my lack of experience with Elders, I knew enough to allow the process to unfold guided by us both and not by me, the researcher, watching the clock or the survey tool.

### **Seeking Understanding Through Others' Words**

As I return to reread and relive these experiences, I also look to other Indigenous scholars to try to understand the process I had engaged in through



their lived experiences. I came across the words Young (2003b) chose to describe the inquiry space she developed over a much longer period with her participants. I see that while my moment was shorter, and unlike the research relationships Young (2003b) developed, with my way of being in the world, and with my respect for those who are Aboriginal Elders, I had enough embodied knowing that, even in my very first interview, I was trying to enter into that same kind of space. The inquiry space “we developed together and maintained throughout our time together was based on trust, respect and the interconnectedness of our stories, our experiences, and our lives” (Young, 2003b, p. 135). Because this Elder reached out to share with me more than just the answer to the questions I was asking, and instead spoke to me as a complete person, not just a researcher, I too felt the beginnings of this interconnectedness. I was fortunate this was my first research interview and, reflecting back on it now, I feel blessed to have begun my learning to be an Indigenous researcher with an Elder. I now feel that this influence of an Aboriginal Elder early in my research experience is appropriate and respectful of the Cree/Métis cultures to which I belong, but am only just beginning to learn about. This is what I should be doing and this journey, this path that I began that day had long ago been granted the approval I had been seeking, and until I engaged in this inquiry and retold and relived these experiences, I might not have seen that. The process of narrative inquiry allowed me to see “with different eyes” (Greene, 1991)<sup>44</sup> what had always been there.

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<sup>44</sup> “I want to see through as many eyes and from as many angles as possible” (Greene, 1991, p.

As I recollect those memories and relive that I experience, I know that I really was a beginner with a lot to learn. Other participants were family and friends because, as interviewers, we were able to choose Aboriginal people of various age groups and education levels from those we knew, and I chose mostly from friends and family. At the time, I didn't wonder if I would influence them in any way, as the questions and the research felt outside of us, having been created by others, and were to be analyzed and reported on by others as well. I felt then that I was just the person asking the questions and recording the answers. Reflecting back now, inquiring into those moments, I instead see how the participants and I learned more about each other in the asking and in the telling; our relationships deepened. As I look back to relationships rekindled by this joining over a survey, I see how they were shaped during the interview, and continue until today. We are closer and speak of things closer to our hearts than we did before I called them into the research project. Again, there was relationship-building, even in those one-hour research moments.

Because I am lacking the knowledge of my Cree culture, and am only beginning to learn it, I am again humbled when I stumble across the words of other Indigenous scholars, other Cree women who share what they know. In their words, I see an embodied knowledge that I picked up somewhere in my lived experiences, never directly taught but learned nonetheless. I spent these two years of graduate studies reading and wondering about this Indigenous worldview,

feeling that because I moved a lot as a child, living with many different families, and that I lost the connection to the land where my mother's family was from, that I couldn't possibly have developed that worldview that comes from living and existing inside the Cree culture. And yet when I read the words Bruno (2010) chose to describe this worldview, I began to think that I really was Cree. My way of being and of viewing the world is coherent with an Aboriginal way, a Cree way, as described by her in her dissertation (Bruno, 2010):

The ethics of relationships and community are an embodiment of knowledge that reflects Nehiyawak values. Cree knowledge is a way of living. It is embodied in who we are as Cree people. For many who continue on to university there is no comfortable place for this way of living in a university environment. (Abstract)

I had always had this "ethics of relationship," and it is something that I feel more than I know intellectually. When I sit across from a human and gaze into their faces as they share their lived experiences, and when in the telling we laugh, and we cry, and we talk and we listen, we do develop a relationship, whether that was the intention or not.

I look again to the writings of Bruno (2010) and study the gathered words of the many other scholars she chose to help her represent what she knew of an Aboriginal worldview. These words, chosen based on her understanding, from her Cree worldview, I imagined contained a validity for me that allowed me to more readily accept them as true. Because I storied myself as unknowing about my own

culture, I was often seeking out Cree writers from Alberta. Somehow, I imagined what they said would resonate more with my way of being because we would have come from the same land and our culture would be very similar. I sought out her words to peer through imagining that if I had known my culture, I would have chosen the same. I recall the longing I had to read this dissertation when I first heard her speak of it in a research issues group. The longing was from a past lived experience of a disconnect to my land and my people, to a current lived experience full of tensions, and to my imagined future as a researcher. As I inquired and pondered her description, I was ever hopeful that I would understand it in the same way, for that would then be the proof I needed that I too had this same Cree worldview.

The Aboriginal world Bruno (2010) is referring to includes the writing of many other Indigenous scholars. She looks to Battiste and Henderson (2000) who speak to the concept of “Indigenous people’s worldviews” being “cognitive maps of particular ecosystems” (p. 40). She quotes Martin (2001), who states:

Our worldview is the lens through which we perceive, identify, and articulate who we are ... knowledge and the way that experience is formulated are functions of worldview defined as ‘that which provides the basic assumptions and the total attitude of life. (p. 16)

She refers us to Henderson (2000) who claims that,

... this worldview is also described as ‘a unified vision rather than an individual idea. Aboriginal worldviews assume that all life forms are

interconnected, that the survival of each life form is dependent on the survival of all others. Aboriginal worldviews also note that the force of the life forms is derived from an unseen but knowable spiritual realm.’ (p. 261)

Having spent a lifetime feeling “less than” and “not belonging,” I was especially drawn to the words of Trafzer (as cited in Martin, 2001):

The interconnection between human beings and the stars, sun, moon, and Earth is what ties our being with the creation and the Creator. We are all a part of the whole. We are not separate. We are as tied to the earth below our feet as we are to the sun that is shining on us now. We are part of a whole that is tremendous. It is incredible! (p. 17)

The desire and slow realization that I am “part of this whole” and that I do view the world in this Aboriginal way truly is incredible. As we inquire into my lived experiences, and read my recollected (Crites, 1971) memories of my early landscapes, we return repeatedly to moments of tension where I doubted constantly my “right” to call myself Indigenous, to be Cree or Métis. Knowing this, having lived it and relived it in this retelling, makes these moments of assurance very important to me and I gather and treasure them like precious stones. I place them gently where I can pull them out when I might forget about my embodied knowledge, the origins of which remain always a mystery.

### **Relationship Responsibilities**

Returning again to that field text where I tried to retell and relive through the writing I had engaged in then, I recall how some participants were acquaintances and months after the interviews whenever I ran into them they asked me how it all turned out and what the final report said. Because I was just a research assistant and I had nothing to do with the analysis or reporting, I hadn't really thought about the relationship after the interview. It is only really now that I truly realize that the moment I began to ask them hard questions, asking them to share their innermost thoughts and stories was the moment that we did enter into relationship. It was my responsibility to be respectful and honour their stories and the relationships we were co-composing. I did contact everyone that I could once the final report was out, and I explained to those who wanted to know how to access it. Still, I was left wondering about our one hour together and the impact this had on us. Reflecting back, I recall the security I felt, knowing my team leader was an Aboriginal Elder/scholar whose children I had even gone to high school with. Realizing how disconnected I had become from my own family and land, I was immediately drawn to her because of her own connections to the place I was feeling the loss of. She took the time to meet regularly, giving the opportunity to talk about how things were going and to share what she knew as an experienced researcher. Her insistence that we start with the Aboriginal Elders is proper protocol for working with Indigenous people and respectful of their traditions, and that I note now is coherent with what I believe Indigenous research

principles entail. The research project itself was guided by a circle of Elders and other Aboriginal scholars, and really was as mindful and respectful as possible. Intellectually, I knew the project was good. Reflecting back, I see how well thought out it really was but the lived experience of it, where I played at being Indigenous researcher not yet mindful and awake to what this process really meant to the humans involved, had created moments of tension. I was aware that something was not quite as it should be, but without taking the time to inquire into the moments of tension I wasn't able to locate the source of that unease in ways that was helpful.

There was something about the 'calling up, meeting for an hour, and never really looking back' process, the lack of "negotiating of entry and exit"<sup>45</sup> (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that wasn't coherent with this ethics of relationship that is a part of who I am. Of course, at the time, I had people to interview and I was living in the midst of graduate studies and part-time work, so it is really only now that I feel that loss. It is that feeling of driving away for the last time, looking out the window watching the ones you care about get smaller and smaller until they don't exist at all. It is that feeling that, just for the briefest of moments, is what I felt when I closed the survey, shook their hand, and walked out of their lives. I am not saying that there isn't a place in research for surveys, and neither am I saying that every survey I ever took myself ended with me looking longingly at my new friend, wishing they would stay awhile, as they clutched my answers walking

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<sup>45</sup> Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote that a research relationship is one that is negotiated throughout the inquiry. The researcher must negotiate entry, negotiate in the midst and negotiate an exit as part of the relational ontology of this methodology.

away; I am just trying to illustrate how this same process, when I engaged in it with family and friends who I would see regularly and likely for the rest of my life, felt much more comfortable for me. I am insecure in my knowing, and I worry always about the impact I have on others, wanting them to be happy and content, and I wasn't able to judge this impact if I just walked away and I didn't have a way to look back. It is through the unfolding of my lived experiences where I was granted these wonderful real-life opportunities to practice this research that I read about that early on I was able to begin to negotiate how I imagined the research I wanted to engage in to look. But because of my "less than" stories to live by, I started to feel that the problem was me, that I couldn't do this research right, and only now, in this narrative inquiry process, the reliving and retelling, that I see I didn't do it wrong but that the process was necessary for becoming the researcher I wanted to become.

### **A Second Research Attempt**

In that summer of 2009, I wasn't able to reflect on the process in ways that allowed me to become aware of the tensions and bumping points that I was feeling then, as the project was only a few months long and I saw my involvement as very minimal. I also wasn't really able to go back to the participants to try to understand the process through their eyes. From the first phone call to finished survey, there was only a matter of hours of direct contact. Then I jumped right into another project, having loved my first interview experience. I thought then that something in the way that I was engaging in research was not feeling



coherent with my way of being, but I wasn't aware enough yet to acknowledge or even begin to unpack this unease that was present in these first interviews. I assumed it was part of the learning process, and that eventually I would begin to do "research" in a way that felt ethical to me.

*This new project also had another set of criteria for the people I needed to convince to participate. I was to approach Aboriginal agencies as well as a population of "low income" Aboriginal learners and seek their participation. This project had a great team of 10 researchers and they demonstrated passion for the project which was to gather the voices of those populations of people who were not accessing educational institutions so that these institutions could better plan for their needs. I believed in this project with its open-ended "guiding questions" and its desire to listen to the participants as they shared their educational stories. I watched as the project leaders demonstrated their compassion for others, and their ability to be good listeners and to draw out stories from those they had conversations with and then I headed off to do my own. I felt confident with only a small amount of nervousness, but then I called my first friend and as soon as I began to explain the project and the criteria of participant I was looking for, I realized that I might have just labelled them in a way that perhaps they did not identify with or want to be labelled.*

*Again my friends, family and acquaintances were willing to help me out and they were willing to practice with me the art of interview so that my awkward attempts and clumsy questioning began to get smoother. Again I learned much about the people I thought I knew, and again I sat across them and I took in stories of disappointment, loss of hope, barriers which derailed their plans, and I also heard stories of ‘someday’ returning to school and dreams of careers as lawyers and accountants and always of their desire to learn and of the many ways they already engage in this learning process while negotiating their daily lives. A few people I interviewed were living on the street and willing to help me in exchange for a small token of appreciation. With this project, a project I had faith would result in good things, I again felt that discomfort and worry that once again my Aboriginal participants were willing to bare their souls and hand over their stories, and I was giving, essentially, what added up to a few dollars. Once again I realized that I was not seeing the people in these projects, not seeing our relationships, nor was I being really thoughtful about how I was benefitting them. In this project I again made some mistakes with a colleague when we entered an Aboriginal seniors’ centre without the proper protocol in place thinking that my small tokens were sufficient. My spidey senses were tingling and telling me that I was still not doing this “research” with Aboriginal people in the way that I should be engaging in research. I was uncomfortable and I could not*

*articulate it. I don't think I was yet really and truly aware of what "it" I was trying to understand.*

*—Issues in Aboriginal Education, Final Paper; June 2010*

I chose the field text for this autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experience as graduate student based on those moment of tension that kept reoccurring. As I reread, retell, relive, and begin to unpack those tensions, I realize the unease has not gone away. It is there still, so even in this inquiry I seek understanding from others who I story as more knowledgeable about the Indigenous worldviews. I still seek to understand now the lived experiences and what I felt then.

Wilson (2001) speaks to the concept of Indigenous methodology being about relational accountability. Reflecting back, I am always surprised when something I did fulfilled a concept of Indigenous methodology with my being consciously aware. I always pictured my imagined audience filled with the faces of my friends and family and the people I met along the way, and I continuously tried to create storylines which I would feel comfortable telling to them so this idea is very coherent to the researcher I imagine becoming. Wilson (2001) notes that:

As a researcher you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research ... you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. So your methodology has to ask different questions:

rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship? (p. 177)

Reflecting back on those lived experiences of engaging in my first two research projects, I recall how I truly believed in them. I trusted then, and believe now, that they were organized well, and I knew they met the criteria set for Indigenous research in their attempts at providing a way for the voices of Aboriginal people to be heard and in their desire to compensate the participants for their time. Yet there was still something, for me, that I felt was missing. My stories to live by that consisted so very much of feeling “less than” and “not belonging” began to impact my views of myself as researcher. There was something in the way of being of my team leader that I could see and even feel. There was a level of compassion and of care that she brought into the inquiry space with her participant. I didn’t feel as if I were able to do it in the same way because I was always worried about the technical aspects of remaining objective, and trying to limit my involvement so as to not influence the participant. This was so outside of who I am as a person; this suppressing of my own knowing, and my own stories and my desire to reach across and hug those who just bared their soul and shared with me, sharing some of their most intimate dreams of their imagined future. My interviews didn’t hold the same feel. Somehow I wasn’t creating that same ethics of relationship. I could see it in what I was being shown but I didn’t

know how to enact it. It wasn't in the technical delivery. It was something more intuitive, more embodied, and I wasn't quite there yet.

I remember being drawn in to their stories in those moments. I was impacted, and began to care for this person who was telling me their innermost thoughts on the complexities of being Aboriginal and living lives within the dominant narratives. The way Aboriginal people are often storied and categorized has never felt coherent with what I knew. Nor was it coherent in the stories of intricate lives and multitude of identities that each and every participant brought to the research questions being asked. This next project I engaged in had more of an open-ended, conversation-type of interview as the main method of data gathering. Stories were being gathered in ways that I began then to see but only really comprehend now, having learned about narrative inquiry as a way to allow complexity into the research wondering. We surveyed people asking the same questions, but in the analysis, which I was fortunate to be a part of this time, it was the stories, the words of the participants that drew us in and allowed us to begin to develop an understanding of their lived lives. Even in the final report, and in every presentation given since, where the understanding we came to were shared, the words and the stories of those who bravely shared their lived educational experiences are honoured and given their place. This feels coherent with my relational way of being and with how much I want to honour that brave participant who hands over their life story.

Returning through the writing, and through my memories of those moments, I know that within this process I wasn't entering the inquiry space as aware of the relational ethics as I should have been. I recall trying to do everything in my power to ensure I was respectful and caring of the participant, but as I tried to squash my own presence I didn't honour my own story, and I held firm to my belief that I could remain a neutral and objective interviewer. I was missing the point. I was trying to create an unequal, unbalanced inquiry space and I could feel the difference, but I didn't know yet what the cause was. I and my "less than" story just assumed that I was doing something wrong and that I wasn't learning what I was supposed to as Indigenous researcher. Now, as I look back and reflect on this research team who were not engaged in narrative inquiry per se, nor in Indigenous research exactly as they were having a wider participant base, embody a way of being where relationship and stories and honouring of the voices of participants were who they were as researcher. I see now what a gift I had been given to learn from those who embodied a way of being that only now, as I inquire narratively into my stories, do I begin to understand as coherent with who I am becoming.

### **A Question of Accountability—Accountable to Who?**

In the following excerpt from my critical reflection journal, this next field text, we return to that moment in February and reread my reflections on the reading of the article, "Indigenous Heuristic Action Research: Bridging Western and Indigenous Methodologies" (Kahakalau, 2004).

*This article articulates the main goal of indigenous research—“... must be first and foremost accountable to our indigenous community” and lists the following attributes which make it indigenous: informed by multiple methodologies, adheres to protocol (establishing personal relationships, utilize primary [Indigenous] ways of communicating and data collection—observation and talk story, research in an [Indigenous] community, for a [Indigenous] community, with the [Indigenous] community) (p. 19). This seems pretty standard protocol for indigenous research methods. This also seems very restricting and limiting and makes me feel like it is very difficult to get into this secret “club.”*

*—Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal;*

*February 2009*

At the moment of this writing, I return again to the idea of community, and my story of “disconnect” bumps up against the key principle of Indigenous research needing to always be accountable to the Indigenous community. At the moment of this writing and now in the reliving and retelling, I am not sure that I had, in my early attempts at research, attained this level of accountability. The principles<sup>46</sup> Kahakalau (2004) spoke of, which in the simplest of terms state that

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<sup>46</sup> See also Weber-Pillwax (1999) who states “Indigenous researchers must understand and respect: The interconnectedness of all living things, the impact of motives and intentions on person and community, the foundation of research as lived indigenous experience, the groundedness of theories in indigenous experience, the groundedness of theories in indigenous

research must benefit the Indigenous community and include the Indigenous community members in all stages felt to me absolutely critical to good research. It allowed the participants to be a part of the research and the benefits of such research to belong to the participants. That felt right to me. It was coherent with the kind of research I imagined engaging in.

Makokis (2001) further believes that it is important to be guided by the natural laws: the natural laws of love/kindness, honesty, sharing, and determination/strength, and this too felt right to me. I recall that my early reflections on those lived experiences as researcher continuously return to the tension experienced as my “unknowing of culture” bumps up against the standards of Indigenous methodologies, and without coherence, imagining research in the way that was being discussed wasn’t yet possible. I knew I was not as knowledgeable about Aboriginal history, my Cree culture, or Indigenous epistemology or pedagogy as I thought I should. Before I became part of any more research projects claiming to be an Indigenous researcher, I needed to learn to trust in my own knowing, and develop my understanding of my own Aboriginal identity. When I look back at the research I engaged in, jumping quickly into each new project enthusiastic and willing to learn, I realize that I didn’t have enough time to unpack what I was thinking defined this “Aboriginal community” nor to develop what I thought the word “benefit” meant. I was too

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epistemology, the transformative nature of research, the sacredness and responsibility of maintaining personal and community integrity, and the recognition of languages and cultures as living processes” (pp. 31–32).



caught up in my “less than” and “not belonging” stories to live by to see how rigid I was beginning to story “Aboriginal community” and how shallow my understanding of “benefitting” that imagined community was. I was learning and I was becoming, but the feeling of “less than” and “not belonging” fed on my unease; I didn’t yet know the power of inquiring narratively into my own lived experience and so I existed in the midst of all this unaware, asleep, and feeling very much unknowing.

Despite this constant tension, I wanted to continue to try to become the researcher I imagined. I was enamoured with the idea of being a researcher and of learning about these issues through the stories of humans. And along with the unease I often felt, there were moments when this lived experience as researched felt coherent. Once, the words of someone I had interviewed made their way back to me. The participant wanted to share how he never had the opportunity to tell his whole story before, and that the process had meant a great deal to him and allowed him to see and to understand his lived experience. Those are not his exact words, but was his message. It is only now, in the retelling and reliving my early research experiences, that I recall that moment. And only now, having been given the same opportunity to tell this, my whole research story, to you and to myself, that I begin to understand the feeling he tried to articulate. It is only now that I see the terms benefitting the community in a different way.

### Researching Through Historical Documents

But back then, knowing that perhaps I had much to learn before enticing other humans to engage in the process with me again, my next research assistant position took me into the world of “archives.” I speak of this lived experience in this piece of field text:

*I began working with old Métis script documents and doing some data entry on yet another research project. I thought this would be easier because I would not be working with humans and I would love to read the stories that were told on these government forms. Some of these documents described a story about Aboriginal families who had to work really hard to prove they were eligible for the 250 dollars or the little stretch of land being offered up. I saw documents signed with an X and notes scribbled stating the person spoke only Cree, and I wondered at the power of this English only document on their lives. I filled in boxes with names of living children and other boxes with the names of children who died so young and were buried, but only deaths that had been recorded by the church got a true spot in my database. I wasn't working with living humans but I was deeply impacted by the stories I read of families who could potentially be my direct relations. The unfairness of the system was evident as I probed and picked apart stories to enter into little boxes, recording both “Indian names” and Christian names. Once again, what I*

*thought was just a summer data entry job turned into stories of humans which wove themselves into my consciousness. Again, I began to feel their weight. I felt shame at how little I knew of my own Métis culture, of my not knowing Cree, of my never wanting much to do with my Aboriginal culture.*

*—Issues in Aboriginal Education, Final Paper; June 2010*

Returning to the landscape of my next research project, I notice how I seemed forever to be this ‘bull in a china shop’ kind of researcher, always trying to navigate carefully but never quite aware of the impact I was creating on the research or the effect of the research on me. I recall yearning to know which of these archival documents held the stories of my ancestors, yet I could never find the time to go in search of the names I needed. I desperately wanted to learn Cree, but I knew that I didn’t have the time and the immediate family connections to learn it in the way I wanted to. I wanted to be able to talk to the old ones from the community where my maternal family is from. It would be the old ones, from this place, who would hold the knowledge of my family history. I wanted to belong there and to speak with the same dialect as they did. But I knew from my beginner course in Cree at the University that the Saskatchewan-based Cree program they taught wasn’t the same dialect that my family spoke. I knew because when I asked my mom to help me with a word or a phrase, she would tell me the way she would say it but then would clarify that it isn’t the same as the Saskatchewan Cree

learned at university. She would give me clues to what to look for but then I had to go and find it on my own to complete the assignment using more of the Saskatchewan Cree dialect. I am sure that if I learn the Saskatchewan Cree from the university, then I went home to live surrounded by my Cree-speaking family members, I would probably be able to understand the Cree they spoke. We could very likely engage in conversations, but I would sound different. I would need to relearn the dialect of my own community of Cree speakers. The image this created of my returning home with a “university Cree” bumped up against my desire to belong, and the anxiety this image caused might be a reason why time was never found to learn Cree on this landscape. As I reflect again on my lacking, I know that someday I will go home and learn the Cree of my mother and her family, but time for going home and time for learning Cree is not right now. So crashing into things unaware, just as that giant bull in that metaphorical china shop is who I must be right now as I figure out through inquiring narratively how to create a new storyline. Fortunately, in this autobiographical narrative inquiry, I can retell, relive, and restory my destructive “less than” stories to live by. And it is only now, reflecting back, that I understand my bull in a china shop researcher days might have been necessary to develop a sense of Trudy as Researcher and in this reliving, and that perhaps this knowledge of Cree/Métis culture was not as lacking as I storied it to be.

I want to be an Indigenous Researcher. I want to do it right and walk away feeling that I am respectful, and that the community or the participants benefit just

as much as I do. I hope that I learn to honour the stories others tell in ways that they too would feel the importance of their telling. Even as a novice researcher, I have always felt that responsibility but I was unable in the living of those moments, to see how to manage it in ways that felt coherent with my stories to live by.

Stan and Peggy Wilson (1998) assert,

Each individual is therefore responsible for his or her own actions, but not in isolation. Individual responsibility for actions must be in relation to all living organisms. It is this web of relationships with each individual in the center that stretches out in all directions. (p. 157)

It is this web that I hadn't been aware of in my early attempts at research, and only now do I begin to see the impact of each question asked and the ripple that went out much further and wider than I could ever have imagined. I note now how my small research assistant positions were turning out to be much bigger than I imagined.

In the same article I spoke of earlier, "Indigenous Heuristic Action Research: Bridging Western and Indigenous Methodologies," I look again to Kahakalau's (2004) writing as I continued through writing to explore what this means to me.

*I also thought this was a good article choice because it described the Indigenous Heuristic research methodologies as—"a way of being*

*informed, a way of knowing, which involves the researcher on a personal level; a disciplined and devoted way to deepen the researcher's understanding of a phenomenon being studied" (p. 20); a form of research which the author felt most aligns itself with indigenous research methods.... I like the idea of the incubation period described as "the researcher retreats from intense focus on the question and allows the inner workings of tacit dimensions and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness"(pp. 28–29). Western research often feels so technical and so cold and clinical. I like that that this one allows the idea of intuitions and "inner workings" to come into play. I think this is essential. One needs to clear out the clutter—the endless thoughts that crowd the brain—and allow the intuition to find that pure and clear understanding or insight and that is where the genius of the idea will come into play. Hard work gets you far but I do have a belief there needs to be something more, something from a slightly different dimension than the one our academic brain lives in. I have no idea yet if this "theory" of mine is true, but I know when I want to write, some days I can't, nothing is there, nothing wants to be said. Then I set it aside and come back again another day, on the same topic, and suddenly I have much to say. The clutter clears out and leaves room for the idea.*

—*Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal*;

*February 2009*

In this writing, I was beginning to be aware that there was a level of this research process that was more than just being technical and ensuring I was following proper methods. There was an element of “feeling and intuition” that resided somewhere outside of the mind (Kahakalau, 2004). Yet this level of awareness was difficult for me to articulate in words. However, as I began to learn about narrative inquiry, and the “always in relation” between researcher and participant, I felt I was coming closer to understanding why the way I was engaging in research made me so very uncomfortable. I needed to feel that I had developed this relationship, and I needed to allow myself space in there too. The inquiry space created had to be based on trust. I am now beginning to understand what I need to for this space to be created. I need both researcher and participant to come together in relationship where we relive and retell their stories, and my stories, and together we create new stories. To me, that feels a way in which I could imagine myself as an Indigenous researcher, in ways that are coherent with the principles I want to uphold.

### **A Place for Embodied Knowledge**

While I am not yet sure how to articulate this embodied knowledge, I think it has something to do with the part of my Cree culture of which I am not as yet aware; the parts involving spirituality, that I get glimpses of in others’

writings. Bruno (2010) states in her dissertation that “it makes sense then to say that spirituality is a big part of [her] research and that [she] cannot step outside [herself] while attending or working at the university. It is an integral part of who [she is]” (p. 150). I cannot yet make that same claim of spirituality as an integral part of who I am because I have not been taught, nor taken the time to explore, that interwoven part of who I am. I do know that when I appeal to the universe and seek out help from a power greater than myself, and when my aunt says, “Don’t forget the spirits of our ancestors are cheering you on, kmosomak ekwa kohkomak [grandfathers and grandmothers] are by your side,” that I feel what it is that I cannot yet know. Wilson supports this, stating:

It is clear that the nature of the research that we do as indigenous people must carry over into the rest of our lives. It is not possible for us to compartmentalize the relationships that we are building apart from the other relationships that make us who we are. (p. 173)

In my haste, in my participation in multiple research projects, and in my lack of reflection, I wasn’t yet aware of this interconnectedness. Now, in this autobiographical narrative inquiry (that is, in the retelling and reliving), I am seeing it much more clearly. That part of me seeking approval and belonging and doubting my Aboriginal identity is humbled at this beginning awareness.

### **Ethic of Care in Indigenous Methodologies and Narrative Inquiry**

Within the Narrative Inquiry literature I was reading then and that I read now, along with the Indigenous Research literature I have read, I am always



drawn to discussions that revolve around the need to be careful and take care within the research relationships and in the research texts that we write about those relationships. When I pondered research with a whole community, which means maintaining many relationships and attempting to benefit many and not harm, I was overwhelmed. But when I brought it back to the level of people and the idea of co-composing stories, I began to feel like this was something that I could do. There wasn't a moment in my life when I didn't seek out someone to care for. I was the babysitter of choice, the sister, and the young mother, the teacher, and the best friend and grandma's girl, and always I nurtured and tended to and cared for others in the same ways as they cared for me. Relationships are key, and this kind of relationship-tending between humans is one that I feel I am capable of.

Kenny et al. (2004) refer to Smith's (1999) writing on methodology and its importance in Indigenous research because of how "it frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed and shapes the analyses.... Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of existing methodological approaches and Indigenous practices" (Kenny et al., 2004, p.143). As always, I look for permission from scholars who lead the way. In Smith's words, I see the importance of finding a methodology that I am able to feel confident engaging in. Kenny et al. (2004) speak to Smith's (1999) claim that qualitative research is more "appropriate for researching the lives of Aboriginal peoples precisely because the purpose of qualitative research is to reveal the

identities and stories of the people and the meaning of these stories, giving the viewpoint of the participants in the research” (Kenny et al., 2004, p. 18 ). I grow increasingly confident in narrative inquiry as a good way to engage in research for me. “This research gesture, [Smith] claimed would, in fact, decolonize, bringing the power of people over their own lives back to Aboriginal populations (p. 18). I had always been uncomfortable in this quest for more power and yet this “giving the viewpoint of the participants in the research” by “gathering their stories” (p. 18) was something that I did feel I could do.

*Relationship and responsibility and benefitting the community as an Indigenous researcher was very important to me, and by “attending to their lives” in this way I hope I came closer to upholding the standards that have been set for research with, rather than on, Aboriginal people. In the process of telling, Riessman (1993) believes the story is created by both the storyteller and the researcher: “By talking and listening, we produce a narrative together” (p. 10). All of these qualities were important to me, and I heard echoes of similar ideas in readings of narrative inquiry as well as about Indigenous research. I was especially cognizant, from my past experiences, to heed the words of Cora Weber-Pillwax (2004) when she says:*

*The most serious consideration for me as a researcher is the assurance that I will be able to uphold the personal responsibility*

*that goes along with carrying out a research project in the community I have decided to work within. Once the decision has been made to enter a community with the intention of 'doing formal research,' I am accepting responsibility and accountability for the impact of the project on the lives of the community members with whom I will be working. (p. 3)*

*I felt deeply this responsibility and I wanted to make sure that ... I would honour it.*

*—Issues in Aboriginal Education, Final Paper; June 2010*

This field text speaks to the coherence of narrative inquiry and this relational aspect of Indigenous research that has also drawn in other Indigenous researchers. In their article, “Becoming ‘Real’ Aboriginal Teachers: Attending to Intergenerational Narrative Reverberations and Responsibilities,” Mary Young et al. (2010) speak to the relevance of narrative inquiry for their own research wonders:

“Relationship is key to what it is that narrative inquirers do” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189). A key in negotiating relationships as narrative inquirers is our collective sharing of stories of experience. In the shared vulnerability experienced in this communal process, the space negotiated in the meeting of stories becomes filled with complex understandings of

lives, understandings with significant potential for shaping cultural, institutional, personal, and social transformation. (p. 288)

### **Restorying Indigenous Research**

Bruner (1990) speaks of this qualitative, narrative inquiry approach “well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity” because it “gives prominence to human agency and imagination” ( p. 51). Smith (1999), who I return to yet again, speaks of narrative inquiry and the collecting of stories, and says “new stories contribute to a collective story in which every Indigenous person has a place” (p. 144). My desire for belonging returns often to this phrase because I want to be an Indigenous person who has a place and coming to this place through story feels right.

As I recollect my early thoughts and writings about learning about Aboriginal issues, about resisting and being called to stand up and fight, I recall trying this way of being on and finding it not fitting and not feeling coherent with my stories to live by. Feeling both “less than” and “not belonging,” engaging in battle, choosing a side and imagining being the victor was not possible. Being a “fighter” was also never a story to live by that spoke to me. I had a big sister to do this fighting for me, and even a little brother who grew to be a man who very much stood up and fought for what he believed was right. I, on the other hand, was the crier. I wished sometimes that I had that belief in myself that is required to stand up and defend what I believe in. Yet, I live in the world more tentatively

and I lovingly world travelled<sup>47</sup> (Lugones, 1987) long before I knew what that meant.

There is something that feels right in choosing a narrative inquiry approach for Indigenous research. It can still be an important strategy for inquiring into Indigenous experiences and epistemologies, especially when trying to work within an educational system following the academic structures in place for research and writing. I then can feel that I am not letting down my people by not standing up alongside of and defending them against harm, but I can do this in a more gentle, and loving way—but a way that hopefully is just as effective.

Iseke-Barns (2003) explains as follows:

For Indigenous peoples working inside institutions it is important to work in ways that support decolonizing the mind and spirit. It is important to find creating, interrogating, validating, and disseminating knowledges. Telling stories is a practice in Indigenous cultures which has sustained communities and which validates the experiences of Indigenous peoples and epistemologies. (p. 211)

Engaging in this kind of research, I feel much closer to being able to uphold those high standards I read about, and created for myself when I speak of research with and for Aboriginal people from my position as an Aboriginal person.

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<sup>47</sup> See Lugones (1987): “A particular feature of the outsider’s existence. The outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where she is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where she is more or less ‘at home’.... I recommend this wilful exercise which I call “world” –travelling and I also recommend that the wilful exercise be animated by an attitude I describe as playful” (p. 3).

The ontological stance of being in relation with participants is also what drew other Aboriginal narrative inquirers such as Bruno (2010), Glanfield (2003), and Young (2003b) because of how the methodology resonates with ways in which they know in relation to their families and in relation to the Creator and Mother Earth. Building relationship, honouring the voices of participants in the co-creation of research texts makes narrative inquiry suited for research with Aboriginal participants. It is especially suited in how the interactions also build capacity of the participants, as in the process they will come to see the ways in which the experiences being inquired into impact their lived lives and sense of self, and can help to develop a stronger sense of agency over their envisioned future. This sense of agency and sense of self is what I believe developed as I engaged in a narrative inquiry process. This aspect is also what informs my desire to continue to engage in this research methodology for further studies.

What I like best of all about narrative inquiry is how it is different from research which places “researcher” in a position to study “subjects.” Narrative inquiry instead positions people alongside one another, sharing stories of experiences, listening to, learning from, and inquiring into how stories lived and told help researcher and participant to understand themselves, the places they are and have been, and the people and situations within past and present context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It seems to allow room for the complex lives of both researcher and participant. I wasn’t then, and likely wouldn’t be able to now, make “studying subjects” coherent with the relational way that I live within the

worlds that make up my lived experience. Creating inquiry spaces that feel safe to both researcher and participant and that helps to understand themselves is a way of ensuring that the research benefits participants as well as researcher.

### **A Place of Tentative Acceptance**

Then, and now, I slowly come to accept that it is okay to be who I am. I cannot yet change the guilt I feel at not knowing my culture; I can only work slowly towards learning it through rekindling of relationships with my extended family and through reading the words of other Cree scholars. Scholars, who in the sharing of their lived experiences, make themselves vulnerable and at the same time ensure that I have access to some of the teachings they have learned. That might mean that I don't yet go into that home community as researcher until I feel I can engage in a caring, ethical relationship that will not begin and end with the research project, instead of trying to fit into the research models that I read about and trying to make myself comfortable in situations where I am not. I must now begin to take some care and give some thought to finding ways of engaging in research that are coherent with my stories to live by. This will allow room for change to occur thoughtfully and slowly, as that is what feels comfortable to me.

Bruno (2010) and Young (2003b) both speak about the need to honour the Aboriginal identity with which one walks into the university, and both engaged in research looking at how to keep this safe. Looking back, I can see that I was not yet "secure in my identity" and I ran the risk of which Lyons (1997) spoke: without that security and going to university I could potentially have become

“whatever the university is” (p. 14). Bruno (2010), Lyons (1997), and Young (2003b) all share the same belief that:

...it is important to have pride in your own heritage. Know who you are first. Know your nation, your history, your clan, and family. Even if you learn all you can in school, its only half of what you already have.”

(Lyons, 1997, p. 14)

I wasn't secure in my becoming identity, but I felt strongly enough about it and I cared deeply enough for those in my family who were that I couldn't allow myself to become someone unable to live comfortably beside them. I couldn't engage in research on Aboriginal topics without seeing them and their lived experiences.

The stories to live by that I brought into graduate studies were of “not belonging” and “less than,” and I storied research in general and Indigenous research specifically within that same story. My writings have now given me time to think carefully, and recollect lived experiences that at the time I felt uneasy about; I note the many instances where “university” in this Indigenous Peoples Education program provided experiences that drew me closer to the Indigenous knowledge and understanding that I sought. I was fortunate to have professors who nurtured my writing in ways that allowed my voice to continually show through. I was fortunate to be encouraged repeatedly to engage in journal writing and the recording of my thoughts and of my lived experiences within graduate studies in ways that felt right to me. And often when a class was started with us gathered in a circle, and the pressing wonder of the day being about each



classmate and their current feeling or lived experiences, I was shown a different way of educating. At the time I was appreciative, but not to the degree that I understand now. If there hadn't been those moments where I was allowed to speak from my heart, and to enter into relationship that extended beyond academia, I would not have been able to deal with the tensions created in the way I began to story research. If there hadn't been all those professors and thesis supervisors that believed in me and my knowing, then that "rock-bottom" moment could have been the end of my scholarly studies. Instead then and now, I was allowed to form center stage in much of my writing, and someone responded to each and every entry to further my thinking. This, too, is what narrative inquiry and Indigenous research offered to me that only now I begin to see.

*I learned about narrative inquiry, and about story, and about relationship with participants and working alongside of. This felt right. As I read about, and talked about and listened to stories of my fellow humans, my soul was soothed and I began to calm again. My head still hurt and my heart ached at times as I lovingly travelled to other peoples' life worlds, but in this circle of researchers, 'people' loomed larger and relationships and connections were valued and welcomed and made very clear and brought into the open. In this way of being, I could value the wealth of knowledge my participants had and I could honour them by wondering together, and I could engage in conversation rather than reaching in and*

*pulling out what I needed. Instead, I could sit and listen to stories and they could tell me what it was they wanted me to hear. Narrative inquiry and Indigenous research seemed to hold at their core very similar values. They value stories, and relationship and humans, not just theories and questions and answers, and with all of this comes responsibility and the need for respect and honouring. The lessons I needed to learn were being articulated in the words that I had not been able to find on my own and I thought I had finally figured it out.*

*—Issues in Aboriginal Education, Final Paper; June 2010*

### **A Place For Story**

Just as I began to understand the importance of “relationship” in all of my lived experiences, I was also beginning to see how story wove in and out, ever present in all that I did and all that I wrote and everything I wondered about. This idea of story permeated much of the writing of both narrative inquiry and of Indigenous research. As the importance of story was referred to repeatedly, I began to see a way out of the rigid, inflexible box I had created, which held all that I thought research could be. In the field text below, I inquire into the understandings I was coming to.

*... our reports must glow with life ... not only to honour our stories but, more important, to support the ethic that undergirds them:*

*Much, if not most, narrative research centers on information people have provided us.... Narrative researchers are obligated to present the stories of those people in ways that cleave as closely as possible to the essence of what and how they shared. (Ely, 2007, p. 569)*

*I did not want to be a 'scholar' because the 'picture' I saw in my head was a lifetime of writing what I sometimes thought were horrible papers full of academic jargon to which I hardly understood. I knew I was not good at reading or writing them, and that they did not make what I thought was good reading. I like this idea, although it makes me nervous that I am "obligated" to present the stories of my participants ... and try to "cleave as closely as possible to the essence of what and how they shared" (p. 569). That seems to make more sense and make research seem more "real" and more "important." Especially when the 'grand narrative' of academic life is that a "Master's" is just a stepping stone.... This acknowledgment of the importance of these stories makes me feel better about this all. I will honour the stories told to me and do what I can to make sure they are represented well, and I will not just "step on their stories" on my way up the academic ladder.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 8; March 2010*

In Indigenous research and epistemology, the importance of story was even beyond what it meant to me personally, and became even more sacred and more valid in my own eyes. I had yet to value my own story, but stories in general and stories of others and stories importance in Aboriginal culture I revered. “Wetherell and Noddings (1991) similarly suggest that “stories invite us to come to know the world and our place in it” (p. 13); therefore, “our stories motivate us” (p. 280) to “walk in a good way” (Young, 2003b, p. 141). It is the “walking in a good way” that I was beginning to understand was essential to my feeling comfortable and capable as a “researcher.”

*The article, “Narrative Argumentation: Arguing with Natives,” Means (2002) speaks of the success of an Aboriginal court case in using their stories to defend their land claims right. In this article, the author argues for the successes Native people make convincing the courts to allow stories to be used as evidence. The plaintiffs in the case convinced the courts that their stories were valid and not just hearsay. It also discussed the importance of citizens and courts as a group to learn to listen to others’ as they use their way of communication to defend their rights. This author also illustrates how the stories that are told in indigenous societies contain much more within them beside the ‘story.’ There is also evidence within the ‘storytelling’ rituals and ceremony of an actual structure for maintaining the validity of the story. We may not be able to fully*

*comprehend if we have a different worldview, but it will allow us to view the world from another perspective. The author argues that this will be especially important in today's multicultural society.*

*This idea about storytelling, its importance and the "Arguing with Natives" article about how we many never fully comprehend "others'" stories, but that we can learn to listen has relevance to the current Education system. As Indigenous people begin to tell their stories (as is their way), those who need to hear them are ones who may not view them as valid, and so part of the task will always be to convince them of the validity of the story. It is through this sharing and listening to each others' stories that expands thinking. It is through this expanded thinking that a more complete understanding of why Aboriginal students don't do as well in the current education system can begin to form with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal studying the phenomena.*

*—Indigenous Research Methods Course, Critical Reflection Journal;*

*February 2009*

Story also provided away to begin to again think about this "viewing through lenses" and "theoretical framework" that was necessary to research. My fear and discomfort had built to such a degree, and continues to this very moment, that those words evoke a panic that prevented me from even trying to articulate an understanding, but if you tell it through story, with story, then somehow my love

of story, and my way of understanding begins to allow the information in. I begin to see a way to articulate my knowing in ways that feels authentic. “Thinking with story,” as Morris (2001, p. 55 ) says, continues to be where I am most comfortable. And in the narrative inquiry literature, as others (like Coles [1989]) note, my understanding of the importance of story and my own stories to live by become even more evident to me.

*The people who come to see us bring us their stories. They hope they tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives. They hope we know how to interpret their stories correctly. We have to remember that what we hear is their story. (Coles, 1989, p. 7)*

*These words echo the ideas I read about in the Narrative Inquiry course textbook. Throughout my year-and-a-half of courses as a graduate student, we repeatedly discuss the researcher’s bias and the lens we view and how it affects and colors what we see. I understand better (I think) the way it is explained in narrative inquiry, which seems to allow for and explain that it is “their” story we are hearing, and that we hear it from within “our” own story, and together a new story is created. That makes sense to me.*

*I realize that my job as a researcher of narrative inquiry is “getting them to tell their stories ... also, I realize that as active listeners*

*we give shape to what we hear” (Coles, 1989, p. 19), and “we make over ... stories in to something of our own” (p. 19). I will attempt to “listen to the stories ... with a minimum of conceptual static in my head” (p. 19) and remember that “theory is [just] an enlargement of observation” (p. 20). I will take the time to “worry about messages omitted, yarns gone untold, details brushed aside altogether, in the rush to come to a conclusion” (p. 21) and rethink the conclusion I am coming to. I will remember that “what ought to be interesting is the unfolding of a lived life rather than the confirmation such chronicles provides for some theory” (p. 23). But most of all, what I think the article says to me, a beginner, is to “let the story itself be the discovery” (p. 22).*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 2; January 2010*

Reflecting back on the writing in this field text, I see the coherence created when I imagined allowing the story itself to be the discovery. It appealed to me on a deeper level. I can only attempt in this autobiographical narrative inquiry to show you through pieces of my writing what that meant to me. It took me from a time when I storied myself as anxiety-ridden, existing in the dark coldness of a not belonging, of heartbreaking attempts at writing scholarly papers, feeling as if I was a fraud, to a time when I was becoming someone who could exist comfortably, still anxious, still mindful and striving to remain awake to tensions and biases, but more comfortable living, reliving, and telling and retelling stories.

This coming to a place of more peace and acceptance was not easy nor was it quick, nor is it even over. It was and continues to be riddled with panic—even up until this very moment—and will likely continue long after I set these words free, and you, the reader, finds them. I know I will still have moments of unease and of utter panic. But there is something in this retelling and reliving that I can almost imagine becoming otherwise, becoming more calm and at ease. As I am finally able to begin to imagine being a researcher, I know I cannot enter into a relationship feeling “less than” and “not belonging,” and unsure because they too, my chosen participants, will come there with me, and that is not the place I wish to take them to. In this most recent recollection of memories, I am beginning to marvel at what could possibly happen next time I return to retell and relive my life’s stories. I marvel at the possibilities I can only now glimpse in a distant future.

Kenny et al. (2004) speak further to this importance, and makes the same connections that I begin to understand, only in this reliving and retelling.

Narrative inquiry is a research method that is particularly suitable for Aboriginal research, because it is predicated on the importance of story. As the research culture turns to include more and more literary elements in qualitative research, this type of inquiry encourages researchers to gather stories in a respectful manner and turn these stories into texts that can be shared, analyzed and archived as the Aboriginal story (p. 28)



Stories, even just one or two individual stories, are the beginnings of research. Slowly, my emerging understanding begins to accept that even my own inquiry into my own story is research. I recall the moments of doubt, where I wasn't sure if the story I felt compelled to tell, as my thesis inquiry, was worthy. I searched for reassurance, of the importance of this telling of one's own stories, in the writing of others. I looked to Young (2003b) who also came to this same realization of the importance of telling her own story in her research inquiry and in her lived life:

In this way, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, "Narrative inquiry is stories lived and told" (p. 20), and as Aboriginal people we live our lives, our stories and we are only now beginning to share these stories publicly.... Narrative inquiry honours the way I have learned from the stories of other Aboriginal people. (p. 24).

I chose this next field text and many others in this chapter for the tensions that are still evident even as I find moments of coherence. There are still moments where my "less than" and "unknowing" stories to live by bump up against my desire, having been given permission through the words of other Indigenous scholars, to value my own story.

*The article, "Emergent Visions," is speaking about the value of one or two individual stories to research and what we can learn from it. As I read the words, "They do not constitute a statistical sample—only, I*

*hope, an interesting one” (Bateson, 2001, p. 16), I return to that nagging worry that my writing will not be helpful because it has such a narrow focus on literature with female Métis/Cree characters and told only from my perspective. I am aware of the predominance of the grand narrative and need for more ‘proof’ lurking around in my psyche telling me that my thesis needs to be more. So I tuck this little nugget of information away, this truth that I, a staunch defender of stories and narrative inquiry and indigenous research, have a wee bit of doubt that what I produce in this way will be “not enough,” but I do still hope that it will be interesting. And I will watch and see how often this “doubt” rears its little head just in case it begins to change the stories I hear.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 2; January 2010*

The doubt still hovers, and only resurrects when I think of those terms to which grew into giant monsters within my brain “theoretical framework,” “lens,” and “literature review,” but I continue to try to think with story and navigate my way around to where they too become characters in a story which I can imagine living.

*Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of culture, and stories are used in a number of ways and for a multitude of purposes. Stories can work as cultural indexes for appropriate or inappropriate*

*behaviour. They can work to oppress or liberate, to confuse or enlighten. (Sarris, 1993, p. 4)*

*I want to see what stories we offer up and what they are doing right now to know the intentions of the storytellers who write for our children.*

*“Those who tell stories may have intentions that you don’t know about or can’t decipher” (Sarris, 1993, p. 4). I wonder as well at those who are writing and publishing stories and what their intentions are.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 2; January 2010*

I tell my story with intention. I want my story and the stories of those I brought along with me to liberate and enlighten. That is what inquiring narratively continues to do for me. Will I ever lose my hypersensitive stories to live by? I hope not. It is that “spidey sense” that I speak of, that gut feeling that something is or isn’t right that keeps me awake and mindful (Huber & Clandinin, 2002). It is when I began to feel the most unease that I was forced to stop and reflect on what I was doing. I had to seek out those tensions that were causing the unease, and I had to begin to think carefully about what I was doing. The unease that cues me to stop and reflect is what prevents me from ever going too far; what holds me accountable to my own sense of knowing and ethical responsibility.

Finding my place within research in general, then within Indigenous research specifically (and especially in my own Master’s research), was absolutely essential to my being able to imagine myself as “otherwise.” The

desire to be otherwise are stories to live by that I entered into very young and that I never lost; but that too just might be okay. Once I was so very afraid of this process, this narrative inquiry into my own story, and, yet as I have recollected those early memories of graduate life, I see that it is something I did always but just didn't see while in the midst of the living.

*I am also a bit afraid of and excited about the idea that “the more I learn about [my research] ... the more I learn about myself” (Sarris, 1993, p. 5). I think this attempt at thesis writing will allow me to learn about myself, and make sense of the multiple identities I wear and of the conflicting view of self that continually negotiate a position of importance as I move through the world. I hope it is within this learning about myself I can also clarify what message it is that I want to be able to tell. I have been given an opportunity that others are denied, and that is an opportunity to further my education. With this opportunity comes responsibility, and so I am very aware that this is not ‘my’ thesis only, but instead a tribute to all who have helped to get me this far and to other little girls who I can potentially inspire to follow my path.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 2; January 2010*

Reflecting back on those moments and reliving through this written text, I realize how narrative inquiry provided me with ways to navigate out of the

dichotomous trap I had written myself into, and it is a methodology and phenomena that I believe for those like me who exist on the borders is essential to learning ways of lovingly world travelling, and to inviting relationship rather than conflict.

*I also liked when the author [Sarris] said,*

*I am not interested in pitting Indians against non-Indians, insiders against outsiders, or in showing that any one group of people is necessarily privileged or better or worse than another. Instead, these essays try to show that all of us can and should talk to one another, that each group can inform and be informed by the other.*

*(Sarris, 1993, p. 7)*

*I am aware of the need for all of us to hear each other's stories, and that we are more alike than not. But I do feel there is a missing story, which is why I focus so much on Métis and Cree. I too am not interested in pitting Indians against non-Indians, and so I need to be especially careful in what words I choose to say and what words I choose to write.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 2; January 2010*

In the process of this narrative inquiry, I came to a deeper understanding. Intellectually, I knew I had to be capable of graduate studies and this research, or I wouldn't have attained the marks that I did nor would others have asked me to

be on their research team. But emotionally and spiritually, I had not been ready to fully comprehend. The narrative of Trudy as Researcher was not coherent with my “less than” and “not belonging” stories to live by. In those early research projects, as I gathered the stories of others who struggled with similar insecurities in their own personal lives, I would see such a different story than they did. I would see strength and humour and love where they would see struggle and despair and hopelessness. I began to understand then the need to find the safe space and the time and the humans to share one’s stories with, because it is in the reliving and retelling and reliving again that one begins to see the possibility of restorying.

Sarris (1997) teaches:

... that stories are inner things: you’re interacting with a living story. The way the western man is taught to read is to find meaning, the symbols. Instead [he] says no, a story is not something you figure out the meaning of but something you carry with you the rest of your life to talk back and forth with. (p. 229)

### **A Place of Knowing**

I am thankful and grateful for this opportunity. I will still slip back; stories to live by, these sacred stories that I created and lived for almost four decades are very difficult to change, but as I recollected these lived experiences and as I reread and relived those memories, I grow increasingly fond of this “writing life,” and it is becoming one of my newest “stories to live by.”

*This week, “The writing life” Dillard (1989) writes of grows on me, and I can begin to imagine it more. I especially like how Richardson (1994) says,*

*I consider writing a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic ... a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable. (p. 516)*

*And I also like how, in her writing, she speaks to how she writes to know, to learn and to discover” (Richardson, 2001, p. 35). I want to write to know, learn and discover about me and my new friends and about Aboriginal people in general and about Cree people specifically, and I am beginning to see that it just might be in the writing that I can best accomplish this ‘understanding.’*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 8; March 2010*

Writing, and stories as a way of understanding and engaging in research, is coherent with all of my stories to live by; it was coherent that March moment when I wrote the text above, and now having inquired narratively into those lived experiences, I am increasingly able to see and feel this coherence. I also begin to see the Cree ways that inform my way of being in the world and why narrative inquiry felt so coherent to me as an Aboriginal person. Despite my constant

doubts, there were many moments of reading the words of other Cree scholars where I understood what they were saying, I recognized their ways of knowing because they so resembled my own, as of yet unaware, ways of viewing the world.

I include here the writings of Bruno (2010) because I am drawn to her confidence in who she is as a Cree woman and this Cree worldview from which she views her lived experiences. I am reassured at the scholars she referenced, as they too are ones I have been drawn to and they too are Cree women. I need Bruno's (2010) words to be included because as of yet I don't have this same confidence, and when I look back to this, my early writings, I hope by then to have found this same confidence. I will like seeing her words nestled within mine, framed by the Indigenous scholars we both read. I will see her name, and my name, and the names of all these other Indigenous people, and I will see myself alongside of and part of a larger, connected whole. And this too is part of my becoming and my search for understanding of who I am as an Aboriginal person. I gather these words, the ideas they represent, and the reflection they offer of a Cree worldview. I place them gently in that special place that exists inside me. I gather all this treasured evidence of who I am, and that I maybe I really do belong here. I feel the interconnectedness in the entwining of all of our words. Bruno (2010) elaborates:

This interconnection has been found to be universal among the various indigenous groups around the globe, despite individual and group



differences, and connects these groups together (Steinhauer, 2002).

Weber-Pillwax (2001a) states, “Good relationships mean good lives: nothing complex, a principle of beauty and simplicity to guide everyday living. In a general sense this principle seems to reflect a commonly shared belief or attitude among most Indigenous peoples of the planet” (p. 154). (p. 41)

Wilson (2008), writing on Indigenous research methods, explains, “If research hasn’t changed you as a person, then you haven’t done it right” (p. 135). The process of narrative inquiry has changed me as a person, it has allowed me to add another “story to live by” that remains coherent with those that already exist, and keeps open the possibility of always in the process of ‘becoming.’ I also understand that this knowing will evolve again, the next time I recollect and inquire into my lived and told stories.

## CHAPTER FIVE: A PLACE OF KNOWING

“Although change is slow, the need to tell our stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance” (Smith, 1999, p. 35).

### **Indigenous Research in Community—A Final Class Project**

In the final required course for my Master’s degree, I attempted once more to engage in research with humans on the topic of Aboriginal education. I tried to live out what I was coming to know as a researcher in Indigenous education as well as in narrative inquiry. In this course, I returned to the core group of family members who had come along on my research journey. They were the ones who were always trusting and willing to give me their stories whenever they met the criteria of participants needed for research assistant positions. They came because they wanted to help me and to try to come to an understanding together. They also came in relationship.

All research projects exist in the midst of lived lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and life did intervene in the middle of this research project. The day I finished interviewing the second of my planned five participants, family tragedy struck. I abandoned the research for a week and headed home to join my loved ones. Together we rallied to cope with this latest loss. This gathering together in ceremony, remembering and honouring the life of a loved one, tightened the bonds that unite us and brought us even closer as a family.

Now as I look back in this autobiographical narrative inquiry I choose to leave out the personal details of the stories I gathered in the interviews and of the tragedy that united my family in the midst of the research project for this final course. There may come a time to tell them, but it is not now and it is not here. Deciding what to leave in and what to leave out (Dillard, 1987) is something narrative inquirers need to do.. Slowly through my lived experiences in my personal life, in graduate studies, and through my autobiographical narrative inquiry, I am becoming more and more awake to how I story others and drag them along into the stories I tell—willingly sometimes, and unknowingly other times. It is especially troublesome to wonder how they feel about how I story them in writing (Josselson, 1996, p. 62). This I attended to more now in my autobiographical narrative inquiry and in all the landscapes of my lived life. As Dillard (1988) described in talking about her memoir writing, I too tried “to leave out anything that might trouble my family” (p. 171). I wanted to make sure I took very good care of anyone I brought along with me, especially family members who often were participants in my research projects.

I eventually completed the final three interviews, and in the inquiry space created by the course and with the same family members touched by this most recent event in our lives, relationships were key. The conclusions reached, and the paper written attempted to honour the sacredness of the stories told. With care and tenderness I wrote to understand and to respect the gift of stories I had been given. I wrote to try to give back to those who always, for the two years of graduate

study, and for much of my life, gave so willingly to me during processes of becoming graduate student, researcher, and Indigenous scholar. Loppie (2007) describes the process I engaged in with this final course project as being “both intellectual and intuitive” (p. 277), “based on my relationship with the women” (p. 277), and on my “evolving knowledge and understanding of [Indigenous education]” (p. 277). “This process was also emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually laborious, because it required the prolonged and intimate engagement of my consciousness regarding the challenges continuing to face Aboriginal women” (p. 277); women who were an intimate part of my extended family. “According to Indigenous scholars (Battiste, 2002; Castellano et al., 2001; Smith, 2000), this engagement of multiple capacities is crucial to learning, particularly with respect to the historical and sociopolitical context of Aboriginal women’s lives” (Loppie, 2007, p. 277).

The conclusion I reached in final course project paper represents some of the knowing I came to in two years of graduate studies. I had yet to engage in the autobiographical narrative inquiry process in my thesis study when I wrote that paper. But as I look back, I note how I attempted to take a moment of reflection within this final class project to try to articulate my emerging understandings. These initial comments, reflecting the thinking I engaged in during that time, were a part of what drew me further into the idea of an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my graduate studies experiences.

In this class project, I had a beginner's understanding of the methodology of narrative inquiry, and of methodological principles of Indigenous research. However, I tried, in that short time frame, to honour the elements which draw me to these methodologies which are coherent and overlapping in ontological principles. I attempted to build relationships, to gather stories, and I searched for awareness of stories to live by within the inquiry process. Through my lived experience, my readings and the gathering of stories read, reread, and relived again, I tried to come to some deeper understanding. I sought out the impact of those grand narratives, always trying to see "big" and "small" (Greene, 1995). Above all, I tried to honour the 'being' of the 'other' (Stewart-Harawira, 2005, p. 156) while I read, reread, and revisited their stories gathered in visits, as well as in the lifetime of our relationship. I searched for common threads within the narrative, and I began to create research text, always checking back to make sure that I continued to "honour the 'being' of the 'other'" (Stewart-Harawira, 2005, p. 156). While I was early in my understanding of what inquiring narratively entailed, and how similar in relational ontologies it was to Indigenous research, I wanted to emulate the kind of understanding that could be gained through a narrative inquiry.

Wilson (2001) says:

As a researcher you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research ... you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. So your methodology has to ask different questions:

rather than asking about validity or reliability, you are asking how am I fulfilling my role in this relationship? What are my obligations in this relationship? (p. 177)

I truly do imagine all my relations reading what I come to understand and I come to write about, and it is to them who I most seek approval. In this last class research project, I carefully considered who my community was and how I was going to ensure they too benefitted from the research process. This felt coherent with the understandings I'd come to in the two-year graduate studies process. I chose my community thinking about Cajete's (1994) concept of community as "the place where the forming of the heart and face of the individual as one of the people is most fully expressed" (p. 164). My community of chosen 'go-to' girls was a community in which I did feel "one of the people" (p. 164), and it was to these women that I was accountable in the writing up of the final class project.

Now, as I reflect back to that former landscape in this inquiry, I deepen my awareness of how much this narrative inquiry methodology also created safe places for my stories to exist and be told, and created an "in between" place where I could begin to see possibilities of how to negotiate these tensions between who I was in the past, who I was now and who I was becoming while in the midst of research. [Barton \(2004\)](#) sums it up the following way:

I have discovered that narrative inquiry is about interpreting the threads of life woven in the fabric of our daily lives. Narrative inquiry is about eliciting from life stories the insight, essence, and resonance that

accompany our philosophical and cultural expressions and our desire for them to be recognized. As a methodology congruent with Aboriginal epistemology, narrative inquiry could be about witnessing an insurgent effort by Aboriginal people to reclaim confidence in their identities, regain a political voice, and heal from colonial injustices of the past. It is about a whole life. (p. 525)

Through narrative inquiry, I found a way to show “respect through cultural protocol” (Archibald, 2008, p. x) while still learning what this entails within my family. Narrative inquiry provided a way to negotiate these tensions that this perceived lack within my own stories to live by created when I imagine further engagement in Indigenous research. As I reflect on the concept of “relationality” (Caine & Steeves, 2009) in a narrative inquiry methodology and in an Indigenous methodology (Wilson, 2001), I feel that I am able to demonstrate “significance of and reverence for spirituality, honouring teacher and learner responsibilities, and practising a cyclical type of reciprocity” which are important lessons ... for those interested in First Nations/Indigenous methodology” (Archibald, 2008, p. x). I also felt more capable of upholding the principles that Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt (1991) speak to in the article, “First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R’s—Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility.” I saw possibilities when I imagined entering into relationship alongside people (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) rather than beginning research on participants or on Aboriginal issues. Stewart-Harawira (2005) explains it in the following way:

Reciprocity recognizes that nothing occurs without a corresponding action. Reciprocity means deeply acknowledging the gifts of the other and acting on this recognition in ways which deeply honour the other. At its deepest and most fundamental level, reciprocity requires that we acknowledge and honour the ‘being’ of the other. (p. 156)

### **For All My Relations**

My early conclusions about Aboriginal education, my initial understandings, and the threads gathered at this moment in time were as follows:

*I have learned and I have been transformed. I have learned that I can't speak for the family who stayed on the reserve. I can't fully understand their stories in the same way that I can for those of us whose ties were weakened, who drifted away from the giant extended family and were set adrift in an urban setting. I learned that as an Aboriginal person, my community can and does include family who show up when they are needed, women who are my 'go-to girls,' expert in the lives they live as Aboriginal people, women who I bounce the 'university's' ideas off of to test their validity. I learned that from my community's perspective—the issues in education extend far beyond the walls of the institution of school—the issues go deep inside to that shaky 'wounded learner'<sup>48</sup> and far and*

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<sup>48</sup> Wounded learner—as explained in Lange and Chovanec's (2010) unpublished paper: “Wojecki (2007) also identified learners with internalized feelings of failure and negative dispositions to learning, as individuals who have experienced “wounding learning practices.” He declines to use the term ‘wounded learner,’ suggesting it implies an internalized perspective and individual



*wide to society who still initially learned about Aboriginal people as half naked, on the shores in awe of the big boat that was arriving to bring destruction and change forever their future. It includes an honest look at history, an accurate portrayal of where we are today—success stories, political structures, a living, breathing, evolving people—and continued hope for that future—those babies who laughed, cried, and snuggled as I questioned their mamas about—issues in Aboriginal education. In the midst of our loss, in the midst of my research, in the middle of our interviews—I saw again, looming large, those smallest members of my community. As I hugged their wee little bodies, and I smooched their smooth chubby cheeks, I knew that the words I heard in my Indigenous research class—those words about benefiting the community, about respect and relationship were so very true. I can't be an objective researcher for this topic. I can't present on it as if I don't live it and as if the "can't lose another generation of children"<sup>49</sup> (Hancock, 2010) isn't speaking about me and mine. As we, as a class, strive to understand this*

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deficits. However, we are using the term to express the structural dynamics that create learning conditions in which some are deliberately wounded within a system where failure is necessary. Rather than believing they are losers who do not deserve better, do not have any academic abilities, and are solely to blame for their own failures, they can see the symbolic violence of a system that victimizes and pathologizes them, within a system where education is used to jostle for social positioning (Goldstein, 2005)" (p. 5).

<sup>49</sup> "The bottom line is the education of students is suffering and we can't risk losing a generation of young people"—a quote from Alberta's Educational Minister Dave Hancock referring to a decision to dismiss the entire Northland's School Division School Board and the resulting media coverage of the event; a statement which storied Aboriginal people and especially their children as 'lost.'

([http://edmonton.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20100121/edm\\_school\\_100121/20100121/?hub=EdmontonHome](http://edmonton.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20100121/edm_school_100121/20100121/?hub=EdmontonHome))

*issue—as some at the university fight to keep these Indigenous research courses alive despite the low numbers—as we write these papers—how can we not be transformed at the weight of those little souls, those little dreams to whom we hope education and educators can be, what I heard Elizabeth Lange and Donna Chovanec (2010) at a Montreal conference, refer to as dreamkeepers?<sup>50</sup> From this research process I am transformed—by loss, by hope, by the love of a family who statistically represent all the crappy stuff we hear about—but also by a family who I am very proud of—for their sheer strength, their beauty, their determination and especially for their love of their babies for whom we do research to try to change a statistically predetermined future. Thank you for trying to be “dreamkeepers” in this world of institutions. Thank you for listening to and taking with great care and respect this story of me and mine. Thank you for striving to allow hope to be a part of the story we call “issues in Aboriginal Education.”*

*—Issues in Aboriginal Education, Final Paper; June 2010*

That very intense, emotional experience of engaging in research with a small section of my own Aboriginal community evoked such a deep and embodied awareness of the sacredness of that inquiry space that I became even

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<sup>50</sup> Dreamkeepers: Ladson-Billings (1994) called teachers—who keep hope alive, in this case among African American students, in education is a pathway to opportunity and service—dreamkeepers.

more awake to my responsibility when I invited humans into the inquiry with me. I was becoming more aware that as a researcher and as a human, I am not always awake and mindful to the impact of my words and actions on others, but I strive even harder now to attain the “good life” of which Cajete (1994) speaks:

The Indigenous ideal of living “a good life” in Indian traditions is at times referred to by Indian people as striving “to always think the highest thought” ... Thinking the highest thought means thinking of one’s self, one’s community, and one’s environment richly. This thinking in the highest, most respectful, and compassionate way systematically influences the actions of both individuals and the community. It is a way to perpetuate “a good life,” a respectful and spiritual life, a wholesome life. (p. 46)

At the time of this writing, I had not yet started this autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences as a graduate student. This was written before I began this more thorough interpretation and analysis of my chosen field text: the personal life writing, the final papers, and the response journals created over the two years. These concluding thoughts, created for a course project, captures the reasons why I am drawn to this methodology as well as why, for me, it is coherent to the ethical responsibilities I feel for research with humans, especially Aboriginal humans. In Indigenous research methodologies, one has to consider “all [their] relations” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177) when completing the final research text. In my striving to “live the good life” as Cajete (1994, p.

46) speaks to, I imagine that I get closer to becoming mindful of all who will be impacted by my thesis, by this research text, this autobiographical narrative inquiry, by my stories. From the process of this inquiry, I am more able to see possibilities of engaging in indigenous research, never arrogant with confidence and self-assurance but with a quiet determination that as long as I strive for this good life and am mindful of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity, I will more likely “do no harm” and I can imagine engaging in further research. The relational ontology, the research inquiry space, the writing for, keeping in mind the need to benefit “all my relations” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177) hold me accountable.

At the writing of that paper, after having engaged in one more research project with Aboriginal people, I was coming closer to understanding. Now having carefully read, reread, revisited, recalled, and relived those experiences in this autobiographical narrative inquiry of my graduate life experiences, through the writing I engaged in during that two-year period, I also begin to see the comfort I feel is not just because of the coherence between the two methodologies—Indigenous research and narrative inquiry. The comfort may have more to do with the space I created through the process of narrative inquiry that made room for my stories, and for my lived experiences inside the prescribed curriculum of graduate studies.

### **Attending to the Living Curriculum in Graduate Studies**

I read Chung’s (2008) narrative inquiry Master’s thesis at the beginning of my inquiry to try to imagine what my thesis project could look like. However, it

was not until I reread her words again, after having analyzed the field texts and created the first draft of my research text, that I was struck by something she wrote. I began to see how her story paralleled mine in ways that I was unaware of in that initial reading. Her words awakened me to the concept of “living curriculum” and “planned curriculum” (Aoki et. al., 2005, p. 420), and articulated for me that graduate studies is a planned curriculum. Within that planned curriculum there was my “living curriculum,” and that much of my field text and research text spoke of those tensions that arose every time my lived experience bumped up against the planned curriculum. With my “less than,” “not belonging” stories to live by, I felt the “planned curriculum” always took precedence over “the living one.” Chung (2008) describes her inquiry journey as becoming awake to the silencing of that living curriculum. She says:

As I travelled backward to my early landscape and then forward, I realized I had been silencing my lived experiences. For anyone who has silenced their living curriculum, their lived experiences, has been on the margins.  
(p. 64)

The constant requirement to look to the literature, to understand through others’ words, appealed to me and my love of books and ability to willingly and immediately world travel (Lugones, 1987, p. 3), but often also caused great tension within me as I couldn’t see in the ways that I felt was being asked of me. The words used were simple and it appeared as if the others around me understood when I so obviously didn’t, or at least not in ways that felt coherent

with my narrative way of viewing the world. I still feel great anxiety when I am told to look to the literature as I story it in ways that I imagine literature being more valued than the story of my lived experience, and it isn't coherent with how I see such great possibility in both. Greene, too, shares the importance of giving students the time and the space to begin to tell stories of "what they know and might yet not know, exchanging stories with others grounded in other landscapes, at once bringing something into being that is in between" (1993, p. 218). It is this "in between" space that Greene describes that allows us to discover who we are and who we are to one another as we write between the margins in our interwoven webs of relationships. (Chung, 2008, p. 65)

While Chung (2008) and Greene (1993) are speaking of a classroom full of children, and her experiences as teacher, her story and Greene's words bring a little more coherence to the story of my lived experience and an understanding of how in graduate studies one also needs to be aware of the "invisible, voiceless" (Chung, 2008, p. 70) curriculum.

I increasingly began to experience a different curriculum, one almost invisible, voiceless. However, these vibrations grew strength, as the children's stories of their lives inevitably crept into the classroom curriculum that was already mandated and for which I had carefully planned. (p. 70)

Indigenous research is not an exclusive club to which I can't belong<sup>51</sup> (Champagne, 1998), and yet the way I internalized the principles, and storied myself, I didn't live the mandated curriculum just intellectually. My living of the curriculum evoked feelings and emotions and unease. Theories were meant to broaden my thinking and to encourage me to "think small" as well as "think big" (Greene, 1995). Yet I often felt distressed viewing my loved ones as mere "pawns" unknowingly heading towards "a lifetime of poverty" (Mendelson, 2006). I above all was striving to become someone who lived "the good life" (Cajete, 1994),

... thinking in the highest, most respectful, and compassionate" ways, doing no harm. I didn't know how to attend to these tensions with respect and care to those whose mandated planned curriculum was indeed guiding me towards becoming a researcher, awake and mindful to all the complexities that entailed. It was important that I not lose sight of seeing 'big' (Greene, 1995), because when it is "applied to schooling, the vision that sees big brings us in close contact with details and with particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable. (p. 10)

Chung (2003) describes hearing "these vibration" (p. 70) and not knowing "how and when to make spaces for these stories while still attending to the "planned curriculum" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 79), and how she tried to "attend to this 'other' curriculum, the one that was shaped by the lives of the children as

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<sup>51</sup> "Indigenous methodologies do not reject non-Indigenous researchers, nor do they reject Western canons of academic work" (cf. Chippewa American Indian scholar D. Champagne 1998) (cited in Porsanger, 2004, p. 109).

much as [she] could, while still keeping the mandated, planned curriculum at the forefront” (Chung, 2008, p. 70). I too attempt this balance in my thesis, and I wonder at how this can also be attended too more carefully in graduate studies. Without safe places to tell, these hard stories remain hidden and we too must then question the place of subject matter “in composing a curriculum of lives. Does the subject matter ... have any relevance at all in composing a curriculum if we do not attend to lives ... as starting point and move from lives to subject matter?” (Chung, 2008, p. 71).

The predominant plotlines that shaped the way I saw the world before engaging in this narrative inquiry; the “less than” and “not belonging” often strangle my attempts at becoming. They constrict and I can’t breathe, they cloak my world in darkness and I can’t see, and sometimes when a space is made where I can articulate that and it can sit as a form of knowing, my lived experiences becoming the teaching, light, and air begin to seep back in. These stories to live by are very powerful, “stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to the stories as long as I live” (King, 2003, p. 9). From this position, attempting this autobiographical narrative inquiry was a very scary undertaking. I had to reveal this somewhat hidden story; a secret story;<sup>52</sup> a story I feared would cause distress and unease in others. I feared that it would take away from the other absolutely

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<sup>52</sup> “Cover stories are narratives often told to mask secrete stories in order to portray and uphold acceptable images of one’s life, both on and off school landscapes. Secret stories are told to others in safe places both on and off the school landscapes” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 7).



fabulous experiences I was fortunate to have, and would not be viewed as a form of knowing. To one who already feels “less than” and “not belonging,” the potential rejection of this “saving story” (King, 2003, p. 9) in some ways would feel coherent to the “less than” stories to live by that I lived, but in other ways it could also be a fatal blow to seeing possibilities of a future on this graduate studies landscape. Careful attending to the curriculum of lives within the mandated planned curriculum could be a means to ensuring that “living stories of people” are also legitimized as a form of knowing. As stated by Chung (2008):

Aoki (1993), too, reminds me of how we are all holders of knowledge when he states that we must “give way to more open landscapes that offers possibilities by, in part, giving legitimacy to the wisdom held in lived stories of people who dwell within the landscape (p. 267).” (p. 72)

I must note also that in this autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences as an Aboriginal student in an Indigenous Peoples Education program, I chose to focus on the tensions so that I could understand them. The lived experiences were not coherent with my stories to live by, and the unease was also not coherent with the many moments where I marvelled at the lived experience I was privileged to be in. My story is unlike some stories in that I did attend a graduate studies program dedicated to the understanding of Indigenous education and to creating capacity of Indigenous researchers. It was a program which had Indigenous instructors whose pedagogy included moments of sitting outside on patches of land that could be found on the university grounds, or sitting

in circle engaged in learning through conversation and through stories of lived experiences. I learned what it was to be an Indigenous researcher from those who guided me from the very beginning, and I yearned to become the kind of researcher I imagined was being shown in those moments. It is, however, the tensions that existed along side of those moments which caused so much unease. It is also my own stories to live by that created an imagined concept of Indigenous research to which I could not belong. There were moments where my lived experiencebumped up against various notions of research that didn't feel coherent to my way of understanding, and yet felt expected and encouraged. At the time, it caused much unease and those are the moments that I needed to understand. I am aware that I story others in the telling in ways that are not intentional. It is because there was this Indigenous Peoples Education program, and because of the opportunities that were given that I can come to this place of knowing and attempt this narrative representation of my knowing. Without those glimpses of the Indigenous epistemology, ontologies and pedagogy which existed within the institution of university, I wonder how I would have been able to find any coherence or relief from those tensions at all. I shall forever be grateful to the humans within that Indigenous Peoples Education program and in the larger university as a whole, the humans who supported and believed in me long before I believed in myself.

### **An Interconnected Web**

I had to find a way to understand more fully the knowing that I was coming to, a way that I would feel comfortable and confident to report them and share this knowing with others. This too is an important principle of both Indigenous research (Anderson, 2000) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The more I spoke with other graduate students and the more I gathered stories in my own research assistant positions, the more I realized how closely interwoven all of our lives really are and how my stories would impact the web which connects us all. As noted by Setterfield (2006):

Human lives are not pieces of string that can be separated out from a knot of others and laid out straight. Families [all our relations<sup>53</sup>] are webs.

Impossible to touch one part of it without seeing the rest vibrating.

Impossible to understand one part without having a sense of the whole. (p. 59)

My personal lived experiences resonated with the stories I would hear.

The relief in the listener when I described my unease, the plea to tell more so they too could feel a validation to their own story reminded me in my moments of doubt that this story indeed would vibrate across the web and impact in ways that I would never even be able to comprehend. Just as one cold and rainy weekend, Chung (2008) and her story revisited me and only then did I learn the lesson her

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<sup>53</sup> “As a researcher you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research ... you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177).

story told because only then was I ready to receive it. Little did she know, wherever she sat that same weekend how much her words helped me negotiate through my “less than” stories to live by and begin to write again. A tiny vibration, reaching across the years, and across the miles into a whole other landscape, becomes now entangled and entwined in a new story.

### **Reporting the Findings—Fulfilling Responsibilities**

I was forming early understandings that day in June, understandings that I slowly came to in the “living” of graduate studies, I then attempted to inquire narratively into this lived experiences. I wanted to return again to those early understandings and deepen the interpretation and analysis that I had only just began with those writings. I also attempt to illustrate again the temporal nature of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and of Indigenous research<sup>54</sup> (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 207) with this revisiting of that moment when I had come to some initial conclusions, only to deepen understandings when I retold and relived with intention to interpret and analyze carefully. Barton (2004) points out:

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that thinking about a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space is like imagining a dynamic, living space—stretching and changing. Focusing on a three-dimensional

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<sup>54</sup> “We will not know where we are going, unless we know where we come from. The traditional values that sustained First Nations for thousands of years before contact are emerging as the foundation that will carry Aboriginal nations to recovery and renewal” (Fournier & Crey 1997, p. 207).

narrative space as interaction, continuity and situation, highlights the importance of storytelling as a conduit to the narrative quality of experience through time and cultural expression. (p. 522)

It is this dynamic, living space that has throughout the duration of my research story stretched and changed and yet, as is also proper research protocol, I must attempt to pull it apart and isolate the threads of understanding that I came to. This process is incredibly difficult for me. I pick up that single thread and I attempt to shake it loose, pull it out, and look at it in isolation. The other threads remain entwined and cling tightly. It is as if they know that the loss of that piece will leave something so abstract and incoherent that it will no longer appear to be an understanding. Without the narrative surrounding it, something is lost, and without the story, the lesson feels like it cannot be told. Nevertheless, just as in Chapter 1 despite the tensions of introducing myself and the complicated, intricate, long-winding process that I engaged in the telling of who I was as both researcher and Aboriginal person, I shall again attempt to attend to my responsibilities both as a researcher and as an Aboriginal person. This too, this need to be able to live and attend to responsibilities within both worlds, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, is coherent with the researcher I imagine becoming.

Somehow in the process, the rereading, reliving, and retelling, only very recently have I come to a personal understanding. My relational way of being, my narrative inquiry way of research, the temporal nature of my chosen methodology,

and the way I understand the world through stories is absolutely coherent with Indigenous research and with an Aboriginal worldview. My intellectual knowing of Aboriginal culture is emerging; however, my embodied knowing has always been there, and only now can I see it and understand what it is that I live. I have come to believe a teaching that I must admit I had not fully understood before. I have come to believe that the story itself should be the teacher (Archibald, 2008). As cited in Loppie (2007):

Since time immemorial, Indigenous cultures and histories were passed from generation to generation through an oral tradition. Storytelling or narrative was used extensively as a teaching tool. Within many Indigenous cultures, narrative symbolizes holism, in the sense that stories function to connect that which is central to individual, community, and social processes. (p. 276 )

The stories itself told to you in this research text of my autobiographical narrative inquiry into my graduate studies lived experiences documented in the writing I engaged in, and in the field texts we inquired into, feels to me like the teaching. It is exactly as I want the reader to experience it, through story. It represents my understanding just as it is; a storied knowing.

Reading the words of Loppie (2007), I am reassured that this one more tension I experience as a graduate student, this final negotiation between my desire to represent in stories and the requirements of “thesis” bumping up against one another is not an experience I alone must endure. Once again, words reach out

and vibrations are felt, and I understand what she is saying on a level that is deeper than just intellectually, as follows (Loppie, 2007):

One of the subtle lessons offered to me by the grandmothers was that any learning I gleaned from this inquiry should come from a deeply personal place. Although I was obligated to share findings in a meaningful way with a myriad of audiences, particularly Aboriginal peoples, I was also tasked with coming to “know” ... from my unique perspective.

Unfortunately, within Western science, most of graduate students’ learning about qualitative analysis tends to focus on the fragmented process of conceptual distillation and thematic expansion. Indigenous methods emphasize a more holistic process, which combines intuition, dreams, memories, and tacit learning that extend beyond the boundaries of cognition (Battiste, 2000; Castellano, Davis, & Lahach, 2001; Henderson, 2000). (p. 277)

I will attend to my responsibilities to my many readers, I will attempt to gather the threads that appeared and reappeared in the stories of my experiences, and I will try to articulate what understandings I came to. I hope in doing so that I fulfil my responsibilities to the thesis requirements as well as my responsibilities to “all my relations” (Wilson, 2001), including any reader who comes along one day and finds this, my story. Hopefully someday, somewhere, on this web<sup>55</sup> (Lyons, 1990) someone will find these words, and maybe someday, not

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<sup>55</sup> Cited in Murphy (2009).

necessarily right then, but someday, this story will become a ‘saving story’ for someone who is in need (King, 2003). The story will become the teacher I know it to be. Hopefully in the reading, they too will become world travellers (Lugones, 1984) and will say “I’ve been there too. I lived alongside of you” (Chung, 2008, p. 65).

### **Narrative Threads in the Storied Experiences**

The questions of “So what?” and “Who cares?” in “narrative inquiry, as in other forms of inquiry, raises questions of justification, the reasons why the study is important. Narrative inquirers need to attend to three kinds of justification: the personal, the practical, and the social” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 24). In Chapter 1, I justified my study. In this chapter, while still inquiring narratively, I explain my justifications, the personal justification from “the importance ... of situating [myself] in the study” which, as Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) put it:

...speak[s] to [my] relationship to, and interest in, the inquiry. I will try to show the threads, which impacted me personally in my journey to becoming ‘researcher.’ I will try to also explain how this, my research text, can be justified “practically ... that is, how will it be insightful to changing or thinking differently about [my] own and others’ practices. (p. 25)

Inside the field texts data, I sought out those moments of unease and those tensions, and I tried to understand more fully the impact of my graduate studies



experiences. I looked for threads which wove throughout the stages of my “becoming,” which helped me and will hopefully help others to pause and think about our practices as educators achieving the second, practical justification Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr (2007) speak of. The third justification, I attempted to illustrate requires thinking “about the larger social and educational issues [my autobiographical narrative inquiry] might address.” (p. 25) Through this inquiry, I wanted to “see big” as well as to “see small” (Greene, 1995), because I am aware of the impact of these larger social and institutional narratives have on lived lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They are part of what shapes who we each story ourselves as, and our understanding of the world. In my field texts (that is, my personal life writings), the course assignments, and the reflection journals, these larger social and educational issues were felt often, and I spoke to them regularly.

In this chapter, I weave the different narrative threads together to show the personal, practical, and social justifications (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 24). I especially keep in mind my responsibility to “all my relations” (Wilson, 2001, p. 177) who have always been in the front row of my imagined audience. The inquiry endpoint ultimately revolves around my quest for hope; in the evidence of restorying my “stories to live by” and in the need for relationship to honour those stories lived, told, retold, and relived. The concepts of safe places, hope, and possibility, and the honouring of lived experience, gleaned from an analysis of tensions and bumping points, are braided together to form a whole. It is this whole that I attempt to articulate here.

### **A Way to Restory**

On that cold winter day, when I hit ‘rock bottom,’ I was crumbling under the weight of a lived story that got too heavy. The cluster of stories (Anzaldua, 1999) that I carried (that is, the historical story of oppression and an Aboriginal life statistically predetermined), the media stories of ‘lost generations’ portraying much negativity and little hope, and a lifetime of feeling “less than” and “other” were in me. They bumped up against who I wanted to become, and who I storied myself and my loved ones to be. The continuous doubting of my knowing and then that one back-breaking, last-straw kind of moment writing on Indigenous languages, trying to be and to write in ways that did not feel coherent, pressed down on me. I lost, for a moment, my ability to see hope, and to imagine a forward-looking story (Clandinin, 2006). Yet there is something in narrative inquiry, in the process of it, and in the words that are used in the telling and retelling of it, that allowed me to find hope again. I found a way to imagine stories that pointed into the future.

Personally, engaging in the process of an autobiographical narrative inquiry was intense and incredibly difficult, yet it was an enlightening and empowering experience. Without taking the time to reflect on the rigid and inflexible way that I had storied Indigenous research, I might never have begun to imagine a future as Indigenous researcher. It is this process that I tried to show in a narrative representation of my understandings because it is this process which had such profound impact; allowing me to restory the lived experience and to see

with different eyes all that I been missing in the living. The representation of my lived experience as graduate student, and the autobiographical narrative inquiry process, is what I try to show the reader rather than speak about. This is, as I had always been taught in school as a student and as a teacher, good writing. The fact that the rule applies to narrative writing more than factual does not make it invalid in this moment. Showing you the process and the impact of that process on me personally encourages the researchers and educators who are reading a moment to ponder the knowing that is 'story.' Honouring the storytelling tradition that is a part of my Cree/Métis culture is also justification that I shall not dishonour by pulling the threads too much, causing an unravelling of all that I tried to do.

This personal justification attempts to honour the need for this inquiry for my own becoming as researcher. I also believe, however, this is important for all my relations and for all who wonder what it is to live as Aboriginal student in an Indigenous education program as well. In the telling of these stories, there is an opportunity to pause and see the personal impact on me, to view practically how our practice can make room for ones such as me, and to socially add to the larger Aboriginal context. Which thread I pull this time seems less important than knowing it is justified in three-dimensional ways, my past restored, my present practice rethought, and my future and the future of others re-imagined.

*I like the way Crites (1971) described past, present, and future. "Only the present exists, but it exists only in these tensed modalities" (p. 300). The*

*words he chose to link together: past as memory, present as direct attention, and future as anticipation, makes sense to me. It also perhaps gives a clue to what the process of narrative inquiry is like. We look to the past and search our memories, we share this within our groups and give it direct attention, and look as well at ourselves in the moment as the researcher, and then we anticipate what this means for our future selves and for our contribution to academic studies.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 3; February 2010*

I also hope to have allowed you, the reader, to come alongside and feel the angst that existed within me, for then you, as teacher, as researcher, as fellow scholar, and fellow human being can perhaps note that I, and perhaps others who laugh, and smile, and contribute, do so from a place feeling somewhat of an imposter, feeling somewhat unknowing and outside. And perhaps in the words you choose and the pedagogy you implement, you wonder about who is in your class and you might remember this one, stories to live by, this particular lived experience, and you might metaphorically or literally, in your way of being and your way of educating, allow space for loving world travel, and for differences and similarities to be discovered in the joining and co-creation of stories within your particular class.

### **A Story for Indigenous Research**

In the words of Loppie (2007):

Creativity is perhaps the most challenging constituent of Indigenous/Western research. Although creative expression is an essential component of Indigenous knowledge, (Battiste, 2002; Castellano et al., 2001), this creativity is often constrained by disciplinary boundaries and notions of acceptability within scientific literature. Thus, we must often conceptualize, plan, develop, and implement research on a tightrope that many do not successfully traverse. (p. 277)

I choose purposely to traverse this tightrope, because it is coherent and that I believe it is important. Accepting living experience and story as a valid form of knowing is very much the point of this thesis and the understanding I finally know intuitively and now intellectually. I believe that it is possible to attend to the requirement of thesis while still within the narrative. I am still a beginner and still in the process of becoming; but I know, because others have said, that one day I will look back on this research text from a distant future and smile, slightly fondly, at the knowing that was just in its beginning stages. This story will always be important to me because it took me from a rock-bottom, tear-stained, feeling hopeless moment to a more hopeful view of the future. It will be important to the practice of educators and researchers for its contribution to the larger research literature on story, on relational ontologies, and on narrative inquiry. It will exist comfortably alongside other Indigenous researcher literature,

not yet claiming the title Indigenous Research and yet speaking very much of the journey of one Aboriginal graduate student in the process of becoming Indigenous researcher and all the tension those lived experiences may involve.

I hope that I have also added a research story which can sit comfortably, having conversations alongside other literature which speaks to the importance of story, giving it, what I believe, is a rightful place of prominence. Yet, more importantly, the writings that speak of the connection of place, worldview, and story (Basso, 1996; Cajete, 2000; Cruikshank, 1990; Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1998; Marmon, 1996) fuelled for me an almost obsessive desire to find more literature written by Indigenous scholars born and raised and connected to the land in Alberta. Knowing, of course, that if I remove the artificially drawn borders, this land that I imagine, when viewed from an Indigenous perspective, is much larger and more inclusive than Alberta. However, my need for assurance, my insecurity and desire to belong, demands that I seek out those who I know existed, living and telling their stories, within these manmade borders. For that too, is the world into which I was born, long after nomadic lifestyles of the Cree had been reined and put inside these boxed pieces of land.

*The Pueblo people have always connected certain stories with certain locations; it is these places that give the narrative such resonance over the centuries. The Pueblo people and the land and the stories are inseparable. (Marmon, 1996, p. 14)*

*This article spoke specifically to land and the connection of stories to certain locations. This makes me ponder my absolute conviction that it is important for me and the children from northern Alberta to read literature set in the area, about the people from that area. As I read Marmon's (1996) words, I know there is something to the idea of the land you live on having an impact on your worldview.... I absolutely understand the value of learning from other cultures, other people and other stories. And I am aware that in the reading of these lived experiences I always hear echoes of myself within them, but I worry at what happens when you are not also given the perspective from the writings of those who are from your own 'land'?*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 5; February 2010*

Along with my desire to see story be given its rightful place, I hope to add to the literature of lived experiences, from those who come from this place in Alberta. Someday when I look back and I read my words and the words of others from Alberta, I will know that we existed, we lived, and we experienced here, and then we shared our stories for that newest beginner researcher to find them and begin to wonder about this influence of place standing on the very same land as the authors before them. Threads of connections to place, to family, to culture weave in a tie together more neatly, never constricting rather gently guiding the other threads into a coherent whole more recognizable when someone from a

similar world views it and sees the place, the people, and way of understanding that is similar to their own. This I imagine being possible through inquiring narratively.

### **Storytelling as Resistance—A Valid Form of Knowing**

#### ***Resist Being ‘Said’***

In this autobiographical narrative inquiry, I wanted most of all to belong. It is this process of inquiring narratively and reliving these early research experiences that I am slightly chagrined to find that I don’t want to belong in the same way that I had imagined after all. I want to feel accepted, welcomed, and valued, but I no longer need a checklist of criteria to aim for nor am I seeking to throw out all of the stories to live by that are a part of who I am. Donald (2004) speaks to the restriction of essentialist definition that I began to create for my own self through the understanding I was coming to:

In his statement [Restoule, 2000], *Aamsskáápoohkitópii* is clearly expressing frustration over the limitations of essentialist definitions and (mis)conceptions of Aboriginal identity, as well as the ambiguity of confronting the Imaginary *Indian* on a daily basis. As Restoule (2000) observes: “Aboriginal identity” can be constrictive and colonizing ... *Identity* implies fixedness; that the “things” that make one Indian remain the same and should be the same as those things associated with Indianness by the Europeans at the time of historical “first” contact.



Identity places power in the observer who observes Aboriginal people from the outside and defines them, giving them an identity. (p. 103)

As I revisit the moment of the writing of this next field text, I marvel at bit at the knowing that was there in this early field text that only through inquiring narratively into my own story did I become truly aware.

*I like idea of “trying to unsay [the dominant story], for if you don’t, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said.*

*(Trinh, 1989, p. 80)” (p. 133). I don’t want to be said. I don’t want the*

*blanks filled in because people are not doing a good job of blank-filling.*

*This generic Aboriginal learner they are creating on our behalf is just not*

*working for me and so I shall strive to “unsay” the [dominant story] with*

*efforts to not replace it and rather leave it open and ambiguous and “in*

*between”; at least that is what I hope I will do!*

*—Narrative Inquiry Course, Written Dialogue with Text 9; March 2010*

I knew intuitively, without an ounce of doubt, that this “Aboriginal learner” did not exist in the way that was being storied and understood. But I couldn’t, for a long time, understand this same idea applied to the imagined Indigenous researcher that I created. As Haig-Brown (2008) stated:

Makere Stewart-Harawira (2005) ... resists any essentialized, fixed notion, she focuses on enunciating a contemporary global Indigenous ontology.

Attributes which she ascribes to a global Indigenous knowledge arise from “... broadly shared beliefs about the meaning of meaning and the nature of interrelationships” (p. 35). These include beliefs that interrelationships between and among all things are fundamental to sense-making; that knowledge is sacred; that it cannot be found in a “codified canon” but in life itself; and that it is holistic in that it always already acknowledges four dimensions—the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. In sum, a refusal to divide and compartmentalize in any reductionist way is accompanied by adherence to recognizing all things existing in relation to one another. (pp. 12–13)

This too, this idea of Indigenous ontology does not need to be “said” by others. Instead, I like the idea of Indigenous research and the Indigenous researcher, and even my own identities to remain open and ambiguous and ‘in between’ for that place, that liminal place (Heilbrun, 1999) is coherent with my way of being, and now fills me full of hope and possibilities. I hope most of all others can find this as they travelled with me backward, forward, inside and outside, in this process of narrative inquiry. I hope they find a place to exist where hope and possibility permeates every dimension.

### ***Resist with a Counterstory***

Quoting Bruno (2010):

Scientists say we are made of atoms, but I think we are made of stories.

When we die, people remember the stories of our lives and the stories that

we told. With this in mind I want to emphasize the importance of stories and how we make sense of things. (Tafoya, 1995, p. 11)

Storytelling is a means of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, history, and visions to successive generations. It weaves generations together. Stories facilitate with great ease, and many times with humour, a recollection and recording of life experiences that are integral to indigenous people. (p. 29)

I hope that I was able to show how seeing big in that way that Maxine Greene (1995) speaks of (that is, seeing the particularities of individuals' lives), and seeing small (that is, seeing the trends and patterns) and the ultimate negotiation between both views feels suited to this process of narrative inquiry). With this attempt at seeing big and seeing small, I hope to add to the counterstories resisting those dominant narratives of Indigenous people. But more importantly, I hope, in my stories and my need for narrative inquiry as a way to lead me to Indigenous research, that I have not disappointed those brave Indigenous scholars who broke trail and stood up to defend, fight for, and create this space for me, as an Aboriginal person, to attend this institution of university. They left for me a space where I can now live more tentatively and more gently, not needing to fight so hard as the trail has been broken. It is a space where I have been given the time to learn the skills I need and to find the confidence that I lack through a methodology that resonates and shares common principles, but one that is not the same.

I am aware of how I “have been shaped by my individual history and the histories of [my] communities” (Bateson, 2000, p. 227), and especially by the history of Aboriginal people. And while I lovingly world travel and hope to have enticed others to do so as well, it is still important to me that the stories I tell, and the stories you, the reader, are reading, contribute to a disrupting of the “less than” and “not belonging” narrative of the Aboriginal world that might exist in the minds of those who haven’t yet visited.

*And that, of course, brings us to this fabulous phrase which seems to be growing on me each time it pops up in one of our readings. I am drawn to Nelson’s (1995) concept of ‘counterstory’ grounded within our stories to live by” (Nelson, 1995, Huber, 2000, p. 116). I like this idea of counterstory and resistance and its tie to writing. I am okay with slight resistance through writings, as it seems more realistic than staging a revolution to overthrow the state or the whole educational system.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 9; March 2010*

This writing of my lived experience, and of a future imagined where my stories, and their stories, and our co-created stories add to the literature, and adds to the counterstories as an act of resistance, feels coherent with my way of being. Through writing I can resist being pinned down, categorized, and placed with a restricting, limiting, view of the Aboriginal lived experience. Instead, I offer a

counterstory of my lived experience, from my view of the world inside my stories to live by, that I resist gently and lovingly through story. This thread of the importance of the counterstory weaves through my thesis more firmly. It is there alongside the thread of resistance. They travel together, protecting those within the perimeter of their path, not through conflict rather through steady determination, weaving in and out purposefully, helping to ensure there is always space made for the other threads; but most important of all, resisting through counterstory when rigidity, imposed or self-created, threatens to take over the fluid nature, the ever-evolving, the still always becoming, coherent whole. As Nelson (1995) puts it:

Counterstories take what has (for the moment, at least) been determined, undo it, and reconfigure it with new moral significance. All dominant stories already contain within them the possibilities for this kind of undoing; it is in the nature of a narrative never to close down completely the avenues for its own subversion. The construction, revision, and reinterpretation that are ongoing in dominant storytelling leave plenty of opportunities for counterstories to weave their way inside. (p. 34)

### ***Resisting with My Story: Adding to a Litany of Evidence***

With narrative inquiry and the lived, told, relived, and retold stories, I find a credibility that I was always seeking as a researcher, and as an Aboriginal person, and even as a writer. I found this in the reading, in the telling, and the reliving of my own and of other's stories.

*As Royster (1996) describes, “Individual stories placed one against another against another build credibility and offer ... a litany of evidence from which a call for transformation in theory and practice might rightfully begin.... [Our] stories in the company of others demand thoughtful response” (p. 30). This seems to also indicate to me how important it is that my research work ... that the stories of other humans come alongside. My own story, often silenced (often by my own self) and not usually valued (again usually by me) could not stand alone (in my eyes), and so I like the “litany of evidence” that demands a thoughtful response. It will be much harder to dismiss when it is more than just my story even if the only person doing the dismissing was possibly myself, this “placing stories against another and another” just feels better to me.*

*—Narrative Inquiry Course, Written Dialogue with Text 9; March 2010*

I hope that my thesis, my stories, add to this litany of evidence, and contributes thoughtfully, carefully, and lovingly to the growing body of Aboriginal research in the ways Bruno (2010) spoke of as she pondered the importance of engaging in Indigenous research in ways that are coherent to an Indigenous worldview.

This way of thinking can be expressed and shaped by our research as articulated by Martin (2001) who succinctly states, “We want to tell our

own stories, using our own voices. We want to use a research methodology that ‘truly celebrates our traditions, our worldviews, our knowledge, and our beliefs’” (Martin, 2001; cited in Steinhauer, 2003, p. 3). The research by Aboriginal people will contribute to a growing body of Aboriginal research and, as Merriam (1998) says, to the “mixed forest” of qualitative research (p. 5). (p. 42)

I chose to do a narrative inquiry for my Master’s thesis because it resonated so well with what I imagined Indigenous research to be. I wasn’t ready to dive headfirst into what I imagined, for it was too rigid and I imagined that someone might get hurt if I did. I had storied Indigenous research in ways that I felt I didn’t belong, and I had created rigid checklist to which I lacked most of the criteria I needed; narrative inquiry offered me a way in. At the time, I imagined it was a back-door way where my identification and proof of qualifications were not needed because I would enter into the research inquiry space so gently, so carefully, so mindful, and so awake that my imagined stories of lack of knowing of my own culture would not be more important than the knowing of the participant I had snuck in to work alongside of. Now having spent months and months, (really, the whole two years) immersed in the telling, retelling, and reliving of these two years of lived experiences as a graduate student, I see how narrative inquiry and Indigenous research are threads that weave in and out of my thesis, and in and out of my own stories. Narrative inquiry and Indigenous research are separate and distinct threads , but they play very well together, for

they are similar creatures. They enter into threads already in motion, weaving constantly, some firmly and fiercely, some gently and slowly, others more rapidly, and one or two barely moving. They enter and are so perfectly suited in this, coherent whole; they are seamlessly braided in. Sometimes they travel together seemingly as one, and sometime they move apart, allowing Indigenous research its place of honour while narrative inquiry slides gently around, entering when needed, and leaving when not. And sometimes when my stories of “less than” and “not belonging” create tension, and Indigenous research begins to feel unapproachable, narrative inquiry gently takes over, coaxing and supporting, caring for and creating space for healing and growing, until once again Indigenous research and narrative inquiry appear as one.

#### **A “Saving Story”<sup>56</sup>—Justification Coherent with a Relational Ontology**

I began my narrative inquiry class, as evidenced in this field text, drawn to Sarris’s (1993) words because of how they mirrored my own story. That one sentence: “I occupy a somewhat unusual and awkward position as a mixed-blood Indian and university scholar” (p. 7) is one that resonates deeply for me. It captures the angst of my early landscape where I moved often and lived tentatively. It speaks to the moments of tension and unease I experienced regularly in the university setting during this process of the autobiographical narrative inquiry. But most important of all, he is a publishing scholar, reaching out to me from within the page. He allowed me to imagine a future where one day

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<sup>56</sup> See King, 2003: “Because they are a particular kind of story. Saving stories, if you will. Stories that help keep me alive” (p. 119).



a published text would include my story that would resonate with a graduate student in ways that he or she could also begin to imagine possibilities and a future.

*When Sarris, (1993) says, "I occupy a somewhat unusual and awkward position as a mixed-blood Indian and university scholar"(p. 7), I saw my story mirrored in his. At times, it does seem to be a bit of a conflict trying to be both and not feeling very successful in either. I was reminded of this repeatedly as I called family members to 'check' if the latest news on Aboriginal education and Aboriginal people fit what 'we' believe. We, my family and I, were endlessly humoured by my awkward attempts at learning proper protocol for both a graduate student and for our indigenous communities; fully aware that I really didn't know either. It was sort of summed up when my mom, in her unique attempt and showing pride in my accomplishments, saying that it was okay that I didn't know much about the traditions because I was raised white and educated white and that she knew that. So is she proud? I think so. Would she rather I have learned our traditional ways instead? I think so. Can I still become knowledgeable and more comfortable in both worlds? I think so. I also think my story in this regard is not unique. There is a generation of us girls and a few boys in the 'cousins' who are the same as me. Some are further along in the traditional path and others more successful in the*

*educational system, and some who are managing both, but all of us represent a generation who struggle with the two worlds. So despite my realizing the need for me to learn more about my own history and background and culture, I also realize that I am an Aboriginal person and I add to the 'picture' one must hold when they imagine who the Aboriginal learner is.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 2; January 2010*

In the end, my most important personal justification, the one that attends to my responsibility to 'all my relations' (Wilson, 2001, p. 177), is my hope that those of you who straddle the line between both worlds and who exist in the borders of many others, that you too come across the words Sarris (1993) and marvel at the image of you reflected in his story like a mirror. I hope for others who attend university, those who find themselves not quite fitting in, to stumble across a story where they realize they are not alone, and they too bring a image to the bigger picture for which the lack of would be a loss. Sometimes those moments are all that lies between rock bottom and a world of possibilities. In the words of Bruno (2010):

The voices of Aboriginal women must be heard, documented, and valued in order to create useful and meaningful programs and policies that are life affirming and nurturing. This will not only benefit individuals but the

university and home lives and communities of Cree women as well. (pp. 18–19)

I hope the stories I tell in this thesis show the importance that providing opportunities to engage in that kind of setting, where researchers and scholars and guests all gather around a table sharing written words, telling stories, and inquiring into them in loving ways. I hope it is evident that gathering together creates a space where gaining a deeper understanding of ourselves and of the larger research world is possible. It is this time of reflection that has been the difference between a scholar and a tragedy, between my own self-elimination (Bourdieu, 1977) from research to a place where I could finally imagine possibilities.

### **What Will Your Mother Think?**

When answering the “So what?” question, this practical justification, I also wonder what my autobiographical narrative inquiry, will add to the idea of “research.” My hope is that my thesis will add to the literature, illustrating through story the coherence of Indigenous research and narrative inquiry. I hope that it will especially illustrate the need for all research methodologies to consider the ideas behind “what did your mother think” (Torgovnick, 1994).

*“So what did your mother think?” is actually one of my biggest worries of writing narrative inquiry. Everyone else will be fine with anything I write, but I don’t like the thought of my mom feeling like she failed me in some*

*way. Life unfolded for her and then for me as it had to for me to be who I am and to seek out the questions I have. In this wondering and this research, I don't wish to harm anyone; especially not my mom. As I write narrative accounts of my life, I will write them honestly but I will take great care in how things are said and what purpose it is that I tell them. And I will view them from this older, kinder, more understanding self and learn to not judge and instead to listen for the stories. What will my mother think in the end? That, I must say, is a very good question.*

*—Narrative Inquiry Course, Written Dialogue with Text 6; March 2010*

The idea of considering how one is storying others in their own telling and the co-created stories is key, especially when storying Aboriginal people who already come with a dominant social cultural narrative embedded deep within societies' collective memory, and indeed deep within their own. The whisper of these words, "What would your mother think?" surrounds all the tensions and unease that ebbed and flowed throughout my two years and throughout this thesis. Finding a way to do research a way that one's mother, or one's participant, or one's own story can sit comfortably and safely in the midst is coherent with all of my stories to live by, and with the imagined researcher that I am becoming.

### **A Picture Emerges—Can You Feel It?**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remark:

Many narrative studies are judged to be important when they become literary texts to be read by others not so much for the knowledge they contain but for the vicarious testing of life possibilities by readers of the research that they permit. (p. 42)

I have attempted in my autobiographical narrative inquiry into the lived experiences an Aboriginal graduate student in an Indigenous Peoples Education program, to tell stories, my own stories. What do I hope in the end to accomplish with this writing? I hope, just as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remark, that this, my research text, my story “be read by others not so much for the knowledge [it] contains but for the vicarious testing of life possibilities by readers of the research that they permit” (p. 42).

I will end this thesis drawing together all the threads to articulate what I hope it is that you are seeing; what I hope it is that I have done.

I hope to have created a picture that that is unlike any other picture you have ever seen. This picture I tried to create for you moves and evolves constantly. It is not made of paint or paper, and it is not a photograph or a video. It exists on a level that would be hard to touch. The threads are made of a substance that is hard to grasp. But exist it does, and it can be seen; but most important, it can be felt. When you enter into my story, and when I invite you in

to this picture that already existed, I am just showing you where to look—you might feel it more than you can see it.

There will be a brush of threads that remains more constant; the threads of the need for safe places, in which hope and possibility and honouring of lived experiences can exist. These you can imagine as your anchor, and they will hold you gently in place and center your being because they are essential to understanding my story, my creation, my thesis picture. As you stand inside where I place you, delicate threads of relationship and ethics of care will gently brush your hair off your forehead, caressing in the loving way that your parents might have at one time caressed you as a child. As threads of tentativeness and liminal and storyless places weave in and out, swirling around your calves, encircling your arms, and making you feel slightly off balance, don't worry—they are not going to stay, they are just reminding you not to get too comfortable, for soon the picture will change. Still, the ethics of care are mothering you, the safe place is supporting you, and you are anchored by hope and possibility, but you are not fixed and firm. The new threads are just giving a gentle reminder because in my picture there will sometimes be hard stories, sometimes there will be tension and anxiety and fear, and often there will be tears. But you will be okay; it is tentative, and liminal and in between, and in that space there is possibilities, and the tension will ease and the tears will eventually stop. You will be okay in that place, unknowing and storyless for a moment or for a lifetime.

As you sway, gently feeling the threads, anchored gently by hope and possibility, while cared for constantly by ethics of care and relationality, you will feel the difference in these next threads when they come firmly and fiercely with a purpose in mind. They may pull you. They may push against you. They will resist and they will tell another story, and the picture you just began to understand and imagined was coming clearer, will change. The new threads will insist and they will guide, and you will see that perhaps it wasn't as you imagined after all. They will tell you a counterstory, and you will know that the purpose is to resist being "said." But still, hope and possibility will be there to support you, and the caress of relationality will soothe you; you may get swept up in the resistance or you may get left behind, but you will feel those threads and they will be different than the ones that remain gentle yet constant. The threads of resistance and counterstory arrive and make their presence known, just in case you are someone who is dangerous to hope and possibility, someone who will not notice the gentle weaving thread of ethics of care, stepping on it and causing pain.

Threads of connections to place, to family, to culture will begin to weave and tie together more neatly, never constricting; rather, gently guiding the other threads into a coherent, more recognizable whole. If you are someone from a similar worldview, you will recognize the places shown and an understanding that is similar to your own. But if you are not, that is okay, too. Those threads are forming a picture; they are telling a story for everyone, not just for their own. They will call in other threads if they sense your unease. And these threads of

sameness and difference of home and of travel will weave in and out, back and forth, existing comfortably together within this coherent whole in which you are still anchored gently by hope and possibility, and enveloped by the caring arms of relationality. These new threads will create a space for you, allowing you to be different and yet a part of the whole; creating acceptance while encouraging you to travel to this unknown world in which the threads are trying to lead. The threads of resonance you will understand, either in the comfort it brings or the unease you are feeling at not seeing or understanding what this picture that I have created is showing. Either way, you will note its presence or lack thereof, and you will note its importance to the coherent whole and to the larger picture; the importance to understanding and knowing.

While you are there, inside the picture, this ever-moving, constantly weaving, all-encompassing picture, the threads of hope and possibility still anchor you, and you are cared for with the threads of relationality still surrounding you. Threads will guide you to inquiring narratively. They will weave a picture around you that might evoke emotions or bring up memories. They will tell a story, then rearrange themselves to tell another one or retell the same one in a different way. They will create a space for your own imagined self to begin to emerge, while telling the story of the process I engaged in while mine was emerging. All this will take place on another thread; a thread of a safe place (perhaps a research issues roundtable, but not necessarily), but a safe place nonetheless. This safe place allows all the other threads to all exist in a coherent whole, and is large



enough to make room for the complexities of this lived life; for this story to be told, for this living, breathing, always-evolving picture to emerge. But most important of all, we must never forget the whisper of the words, “What would your mother think?” that surrounds all the threads that are weaving continuously, some firmly and fiercely, some tentatively and gently, all surrounding hope and possibility in ways that one’s mother, or one’s participant, or even one’s self could sit comfortably and safely in the midst.

The picture I tried to tell is unlike anything you see in research literature. It is unlike any I’ve seen in narrative inquiry and in Indigenous research, because it is my picture and my stories, it is how I understand the world, and it is an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my own lived experience that I tried to show you rather than tell you about. Yet, I do think it is a picture that some will enter and feel that resonance and some will not, but either way they will understand the importance of finding a way of research that feels safe, and full of hope and possibility. They will hear my call for safe places in which these stories could be told, knowing that it is tension-filled and that these threads that are in my picture reach out and touch others in ways that I can’t even imagine, in ways that I will worry about endlessly. I will and do story others; I apologize to anyone who doesn’t like the story I told, and I ask the reader to remember that my picture is alive, the threads are moving, and they are always in the process of becoming.

I end now with a quote from Lopez (1990) that speaks to what I hope you realize informs my chosen research. It is more than just a need for me to

understand. It is mostly for another; for a beginner like me who arrives full of “less than” and “not belonging” stories to live by. I hope the threads of care and a gentles caress soothing the angst come just when it is needed most, and they can escape for a moment into my story and emerge rested, nourished, and ready to continue.

I want you to remember only this one thing,” said the Badger. “The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them anywhere they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other’s memories. This is how people care for themselves. (p. 48)

I put this story into your memory. Care for it. Learn to give it when it is needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive, and now you have one in your memory for you and for others who someday might need to be cared for. Saving stories (King, 2003) is all the justification I believe my thesis needs. It saved me; it possibly, someday, may save another.

## CHAPTER 6: HOPE AND POSSIBILITY

“People tell stories not only to remember, but also to hope.”

(Neal McLeod, 2002, p. 43)

### Future Wonderings

Through this inquiring narratively into my lived experiences as a graduate student, I come to a place where I accept that I am always in the process of becoming—becoming as a researcher, Indigenous scholar, teacher, parent, sibling, and daughter—and that this process is never-ending. From this tentative place and through the process of inquiring narratively where I recollected memories and writings of these last two years, to retell and to relive and thus to restory, I see such potential in this narrative inquiry process for future research alongside Aboriginal youth. I am now, and always have been, drawn to children for the unlimited possibilities they are able to easily imagine. Although when one views the statistics of Aboriginal children, another story is told and this seemingly predetermined future, statistically always “less than,” is one that I hope engaging in narrative inquiry with Aboriginal youth can begin to disrupt before it solidifies into something that leads them down that path to “rock bottom.” In the words of Anderson (2000):

Aboriginal children are precious to us because they represent the future.

They are not considered possessions of the biological parents; rather they

are understood to be gifts on loan from the Creator. Because of this everyone in the community has a connection to the children, and everyone has an obligation to work for their well-being. Each one of us has a responsibility. This work is urgent—not only because Aboriginal children have been (and are yet) assaulted, but because the focus on children and the respect that our society gave to children were so severely damaged with colonization. (p. 162)

There is much in the lives of others, in the lives of Aboriginal children specifically, that is beyond our control, and yet it is our responsibility to not turn a blind eye and to reach out. Together, in relationship and through stories, I think we can all begin to see a way of this becoming “otherwise,” of disrupting a potentially statistically predetermined future, and of the possibilities gained when one can see, and hear, and even relive the rest of the stories.

Looking back to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), when I recall the educational stories of my ‘go-to girls,’ and when I reflect on my own “less than” stories to live by, I believe these words are, unfortunately, very much valid today:

Education is seen as the vehicle for both enhancing the life of the individual and reaching collective goals.... As well, consistent with Aboriginal traditions, education must develop the whole child, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically.... However, rather

than nurturing the individual, schooling experiences typically erode identity and self-worth. (pp. 433–434)

From within the narrative inquiry process and due to the relational ontology, I see possibilities for our Aboriginal youth to learn the tools that helped me when I felt myself drawn down in the darkness of despair and when I began to lose hope. In that first year-and-a-half of my Master's study when I finally had to face the statistics and reports and the historical writing about the larger macrosocial world of my Aboriginal people, I lost hope not only for myself but for Aboriginal people as a whole. The depth and complexity of the problem is illustrated well in Brunanski's (2009) writing:

This legacy of colonization is one common factor that Aboriginal people share.... This genocide is not just historical—it continues with discrimination and institutionalized oppression of Aboriginal people in contemporary Canadian society (Waller et al., 2003). This has resulted in problems such as widespread poverty, low educational achievement, high unemployment, prevalent family dysfunction and child abuse, high rates of substance abuse, suicide rates 3–6 times the national average, and incarceration rates over five times the national average. (p. 4)

Inquiring narratively into my lived experiences, learning to see big and see small (Greene, 1984),<sup>57</sup> and the potential I saw in loving world travel (Lugones,

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<sup>57</sup> “The first is likely to look out on the world strategically, to see it “small” (as Thomas Mann’s Felix Krull puts it) like a chessboard or a distant battlefield. The second, the involved person, is more likely to see it “big,” without clear demarcations. Each face, for this person, is likely to be

1987) began to slowly pull me out of my own feelings of hopelessness.

Hopelessness is no place for children, either. I wonder at what life could have been had I learned early about loving world travel, and had I read stories of girls who live on the borders or in between but who just might have liked it there. As I ponder future wonderings, about the lived experiences of our youngest Aboriginal peoples, I worry about those statistics and I try to imagine another future for them. I wonder at how different their stories are from mine, and what can be learned from the co-creations of our new stories as we inquire narratively into their lived experiences alongside each other. I wonder if they too could find hope in the process of narrative inquiry.

This need to understand the lived experiences and identities of our children, our future, was important during the creation of The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), and will continue to be important long after the creation of this thesis:

The commission concluded that the: destiny of a people is intricately bound to the ways its children are educated. Education is the transmission of cultural DNA from one generation to the next. It shapes the language and pathways of thinking, the contours of character and values, the social skills and creative potential of the individual. It determines the productive skills of a people. (p. 433)

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magnified and distinctive; details overlooked by the outside observer—dusty windows, noises in the corridors, dog-eared workbooks, lesson plans—are inescapably clear” (Greene, 1984, p. 284).

As I ponder a future for myself in research, now that I am able to imagine myself as researcher, I look back again to my early writings to see what questions were making themselves known:

*In “The Narrative Quality of Experience,” Crites’ (1971) closing words sum up both his idea and mine very well. “It makes it possible to recover a living past, to believe again in the future, to perform acts that have significance for the person who acts. By so doing it restores a human form of experience” (Crites, 1971, p. 311). I think there is a need to believe in the future for our Aboriginal children and our Aboriginal educational systems and to restore a human form of experience; one which just might be a little different than the one that is currently going on.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 3; February 2010*

### **Counterstories—Coherent Form of Resistance**

Just as I hope my own story offers a bigger counterstory to the narratives which attempt to constrain and constrict my identities, identities that are always in the process of becoming, I am drawn to this idea for our youth as well. Lindemann Nelson (1995) speaks to this in the article, “Resistance and Insubordination”:

*What is a counterstory? It is a story that contributes to the moral self definition of its teller by undermining a dominant story, undoing and retelling it in such a way as to invite new interpretations and conclusions. Counterstories ... permit their tellers to re-enter, as full citizens, the communities of place whose goods have been only imperfectly available to its marginalized members. (Nelson, 1995, p. 23)*

*This sounds exactly like what I think is needed with the 'missing' Aboriginal literature. Of course, this is already happening with many Aboriginal scholars and with the steadily increasing literature, but I still think there is more work to be done. The grand narratives still seem to be very much the same. There are more and more people who have a broader view, but I also know there are just as many who hold those same preconceived ideas about what an Aboriginal person is and what will happen to those Aboriginal learners in the classroom, and these preconceived ideas are not yet very positive. So the need for counterstories does seem appropriate.*

*I am cautioned as well by the words:*

*... that we make a mistake, when we posit an "essence" of woman [or Aboriginal learner] because women [or Aboriginal learners] are never only women [or Aboriginal learners], but also rulers or slaves, artisans or academics, poor [or rich]" and all are*



*“inhabitants of particular societies in particular eras. When we forget this, the ‘essence’ becomes a norm against which those who do not fit will be measured and wanting. (Nelson, 1995, p. 29)*

*This I think is a most important idea. I know what I struggle with most is that I don’t really ‘fit’ into either ‘societies’ or ‘communities.’ I am neither the typical, traditional Aboriginal person who follows the teaching of the medicine wheel to guide me, nor am I non-Aboriginal who discounts all things Aboriginal and turns fully away from the traditions and culture. If we as educators continue to try to posit an “essence” of the Aboriginal learner or the Aboriginal scholar, then I will continue to “not fit the norm” and again I will be measured and found wanting. I would hope that as we expand the literature available with Aboriginal characters, we will see the variety of the lives lived and thus remove the measuring stick altogether.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 3; February 2010*

### **Impact of Children’s Literature on Forming Aboriginal Identities**

My future research wonders build upon this idea and upon my narrative inquiry journey engaged in during this thesis. I wondered then, and I wonder now, what the impact of children’s literature, and the missing stories telling realistic lived experiences of Aboriginal lives portrayed in the literature, has on Aboriginal children’s stories to live by. I also wonder what possibilities are created when

children are taught to love world travel through the realm of story, to see similarities and difference, and learn the skill of retelling, reliving, and restoring their own lived experiences.

*Bateson (2001) says women's lives are changing. I also add that Aboriginal people's lives are changing. There is no constant to follow, no previous generation to follow because our worlds are different now. There is a need for more role models in literature. There is a need to make the invisible ... visible. I return to the topic of Métis or Cree girls because they will be future women and the future for my people. The world my generation lived in was different than the one my parents' generation lived. It had its own set of plot lines and adventures and is different. The lives of this next generation will also be very different than the life I lived. I wanted to see myself in a story; I deserved to be in a story. But I wasn't. I do know that through stories I lived a thousand lives, and I just wonder if I had seen myself inside that world, on a library shelf, next to Anne's flaming red hair, would I have had just a little more belief in myself, and would I have had to fight a little less hard to see that my future was full of possibilities? I wonder.*

*The part that sticks with me about this article which talks of stories being improvised is that "our children are unlikely to be able to define their goals and then live happily ever after; instead, they will need to*

*reinvent themselves again and again in response to a changing environment” (Bateson, 2001, p. 17). I’d like them to have a wealth of stories from which to draw on when these moments arrive.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 2; January 2010*

My love of literature and my wonders also center around more than just individual children, and extends to my desire to learn about my own Cree culture. I also recall Bruno (2010) “[not seeing herself], a Cree person, reflected in the books or in the classroom discussions” nor being able to “recall ... any of the books [from her childhood landscape] that had any kind of Cree content” (p. 7). The equally devastating effect of finding “either an imaginary Indian to which [her] *being* could not relate, or [finding images that were] not positive” (Bruno, 2010, p. 7). I think of Donald (2001) “reclaiming memories of [his] family and, by extension, Canadian public memory” and his desire to “[reread] history in the case of the Papaschase Cree” (p. 21). I ponder Young’s (2003b) words as she reflects on her 1997 Master’s thesis:

I could not bring myself to ask questions when I should have because I simply had no confidence in myself. Harris and Ordon (1990) suggested that:

Self-doubt is the soul of internalized racism; self-hatred is its substance. The self-doubt and self-hatred that result from

internalized racism determine how we react to just about every situation we encounter. (p. 306)

I imagine Steinhauer (2002) as she reflected on her formal school lived experiences, and her realization that “somehow this [formal] education [had] divorced [her] from [her] roots and that what [she] had was a partial education” (p. 69). And to their stories I add my own, the desperate longing to be “not myself,” instead to be like the others who I found in books. As we reflect on these stories, seeing the similarities even in their differences, there can be no doubts that there will never be enough written stories of the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples. More is needed in the university setting, and more is needed in the public schools accessible to children in their early school years; stories of Aboriginal people looking backwards to places on their early landscapes and forwards to their dreams and desires for the future.

Gergen’s (2004) words in “Once Upon a Time: A Narratologist’s Tale” speak to the importance of expanding the literature written about the lived experiences of Aboriginal children so as to build understand, before they too become adults riddled with self-doubt and seeking understanding of one’s very own identity:

*If story forms are produced within cultures to make sense of life, then central questions became ‘What are the stories available in a culture?’ and ‘How do the stories we tell influence how we live?’*

*Furthermore, taking feminist theory seriously concerning the patriarchal privileging of male voices, I was especially sensitive to the question of how silences and gaps in story forms can delimit who we are and can become. (Gergen, 2004, p. 269)*

*This author asks the exact question I am asking! This reading made me think a little deeper about what it is that I need to look at. I was only looking for books with Métis or Cree characters, but I know there are not many of the kinds of books I am looking for. So someone suggested that I need to know what exactly our Aboriginal youth are reading.... I was asking the question that this author presents: "What stories are available in my culture?" ( p. 269).*

*This author (Gergen, 2004) also states that:*

*While the right stories can create satisfying lives, so too the absence of good stories can have the opposite effect. Taking the notion seriously that without the right stories, certain lives cannot be lived, I have considered the fate of girls. (p. 270)*

*She began to wonder*

*...whether the missing stories in our culture had anything to do with the missing heroines. Is there something about our narrative traditions that has impeded women's progress in the public realm? Might this help explain why so very few women reach the highest professional, corporate, and academic positions?... What stories*

*are available for girls and would it make a difference if the stories were different? (p. 271)*

*This is exactly what I am wondering as well, but instead I add the element of Métis or Cree identity into the wondering.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 2; January 2010*

I believe in the process of inquiring narratively into the lived experiences of Aboriginal children as readers. As I imagine wondering alongside Aboriginal youth, I imagine that together we can come to an understanding of what stories are missing, what stories have they found, and how they are impacted in the reading and telling and living of those stories.

*All along, I state my belief that stories can transform lives but this article also introduces another idea that “stories can become so ingrained that it appears to the teller that there is no possibility of revision” (Gergen, 2004, p. 277). As I struggle daily with my ‘ingrained stories’—that I am not ever ‘enough’ in the eyes of either Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal—I fully realize the power of ingrained stories. I don’t want our children to grow up believing the grand narrative that Aboriginal children struggle in school and don’t do as well as non-Aboriginal. I don’t want that story so ingrained that it appears there is no possibility of revision. Can children’s*

*literature make a difference in the perpetuation of this story? I think so. At least I hope to show that this is true in all of my wondering.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 2; January 2010*

### **Stories to Live By—Hopes for the Children**

My stories to live by, “less than” and “not belonging” coloured all that I was able to see. Even writing a paper, summarizing an article, or verbalizing any tentative understanding was really difficult for me as a student, throughout my entire educational lived experiences. I couldn’t just summarize an article. First, I had to battle my internal self-doubt, I had to dig to try to find courage, and I had to breathe and force myself to relax. I had to phone a loved one so they could tell me that “of course I could do this,” and then, only then, hours later could I begin to try to summarize. I worry and I wonder if this same story to live by exists in the worlds of our Aboriginal youth, and I hope that it isn’t so.

*I like the idea that*

*... life narratives obviously reflect the prevailing theories about ‘possible lives’ that are part of one’s culture.... And the toolkit of any culture is replete not only with stock of canonical life narratives (heroes, Marthas, tricksters, etc.), but with combinable formal constituents from which its members can construct their*

*own life narratives: canonical stances and circumstances as it were. (Bruner, 2004, p. 694)*

*And so by exploring what I found in my toolkit, in this autobiographical narrative inquiry, we can perhaps be better prepared to restock and improve the toolkits of those littlest ones, the Aboriginal youth, and expand the stock of canonical life narrative to include endless possibilities of always becoming.*

*Eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very 'events' of a life. In the end we become the autobiographical narrative by which we "tell about" our lives. ... we also become variants of the cultures canonical forms.*

*(Bruner, 2004, p. 694)*

*I would hope that the "canonical forms" allowed for Indigenous people can include more than the ones we currently hear most often. "Achieving the power to structure perceptual experience" (Bruner, 2004, p. 694) is a mighty power to have. This is the same power that books, and stories, and novels had for me as a child, as did the stories I heard swirling around me as my nose was buried in the book. Stories told and stories read about me and to me had the power to structure my perceptual experience, and I*



*wonder if it has the same power now and if we can harness it and use it for becoming instead of restricting.*

*I believe that ways of telling and the ways of conceptualising become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future.... [In the end,] we cannot tell the dancer from the dance.*

*(Bruner, 2004, p. 708)*

*It is my hope that through literature we can have a say in just what kind of dance we want our children to learn and thus what kind of dancer we allow them to become. If it is true that we “construct” narratives and then narratives “construct” us, then I want to be a part of the blueprint planning.*

*—Narrative Inquiry, Written Dialogue with Text 3; February 2010*

Having only recently been able to truly feel that my identities are many, multiple, fluid, and not restricted, and loving this freedom, I turn my still highly anxious storied self to look at our children and to seek out ways to prevent the dichotomous trap, the “not belonging” stories to live, by from taking hold. For me, living more tentatively, in an in-between place, to lovingly and playfully world travel, feels coherent with what I imagine the lives of children are already, and should be, like. Inside little bodies, young minds hold a lifetime of becoming,

and I wonder how we can nurture this and have this become the ingrained story to live by.

In my autobiographical narrative inquiry, I was truly, as Greene (1995) says, “straining towards horizons: horizons of what might be, horizons of what was” (p. 73). Now I wish for our next generation of Aboriginal children, the ability to see possibilities in the past, and in the future while living in the midst, here in the present.

*This following sentence does a very good job of capturing why I think my wonderings about literature are potentially so important for our next generation of Aboriginal girls: “A reader ... can rewrite the text of what she or he reads in the texts of her or his life.... We can rewrite our lives as well in the light of such texts (Barthes, 1949, pp. 62).” I like this idea of rewriting what I read in the text of my life (Barthes, 1949) and also of rewriting my life (Barthes, 1949), and I also really like the idea of making this idea known and possible for also those little girls. There is much we cannot change in our lives, but I think this idea hold possibilities for what we can control and see in the horizon of what might be.*

*The narratives I have encountered in my journey have made it possible for me to conceive patterns of being as my life among others has expanded: to look through others eye's more than I*

*would have and to imagine being something more than I have come to be. (Greene, 1995, p. 86)*

*I do so love when people talk of the endless possibilities and imaginings for one's self. It soothes my soul and gives hope in sometimes a less than friendly world. From the words of Emily Dickinson (1861): "Hope is the thing with feathers, that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without words, and never stops at all" (p.254 ), and this is what I would wish for myself and for everyone, and especially for the next generations of Aboriginal children to whom the world's spotlight has decided to shine for a while ... "hope, that never stops at all." (p. 254 )*

*—Narrative Inquiry Course, Written Dialogue with Text 9; March 2010*

*"But choosing to see past these childhood experiences in new ways (Green, 1995), we recognized how they "reveal[ed] the inner life of a girl inventing herself—creating the foundation of self-hood and identity" (Hooks, 1996, p. xi)" (p. 119–120). This is what I strive to see. This is what I seek. The story of that "inner life of a girl inventing herself [and] creating the foundations of self-hood and identity" (Hooks, 1996, p. xi) because this will give me (I hope) clues as to what things happen and what impacts, and I can then keep a watchful eye out for those "foundation-forming" moments within my niece and nephew and other little friends. I like that idea.*

*—Narrative Inquiry Course, Written Dialogue with Text 9; March 2010*

In my wonders, I imagine a narrative inquiry roundtable to which I invite Aboriginal youth. At this table, we share stories, we enter into relationship, and together we wonder and build understanding as we co-create stories. We resist. We lovingly world travel and we see endless possibilities. We disregard the limiting “less than” Aboriginal statistics as “not for the likes of us,” and we become “otherwise” and never stop becoming.

### **Looking Back**

Young et. al (2010) capture very well this process of inquiry that I bring you alongside of, so that you too could experience, through my words, this lived experience of one Aboriginal graduate student. I hoped to build both your understanding as reader and my understanding as inquirer, to expand the canon of stories we have available to us both as we continue to ‘become’; as we continue to develop our own stories to live by, stories created in our personal, practical, and social worlds. As Young et. al, (2010) states:

Through my proposal, I began telling my story and, as I relived significant moments in my life, I concluded narrative inquiry honours how Aboriginal people learn and gain knowledge. Battiste and Henderson (2000) wrote, “Stories are enfolding lessons. Not only do they transmit validated experiences; they also renew, awaken, and honour spiritual forces. Hence, almost every ancient story does not explain; instead it focuses on process of knowing” (p. 77). (p. 25)

In this autobiographical narrative inquiry, I hope that I have illustrated the deliberateness of this “research process founded on a set of ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions that are at play from the first narrative imaginings of a research puzzle through to the representation of the narrative inquiry in research text” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 33). I hope I also was able to show how through the process of inquiring the belonging I was searching for and the feeling of less than (as a Cree/Métis researcher) the stories to live by were that constricted and constrained, but in the reflection I found a way to see what was always and already there. I purposely chose a methodology called narrative inquiry because of the coherence with my way of being. Only now, through an autobiographical narrative inquiry into my lived experiences as a graduate student in an Indigenous Peoples Education program, do I realize that this same coherence is exactly what makes the relational and temporal ontologies of Indigenous research also coherent with who I am.

I love stories. People say to me now that I am storyteller. This story to live by is difficult for me to accept, and yet I know that I do love to tell, to hear, to read, and to retell, rehear, and to reread all stories. But, as Connelly and Clandinin (1998a) wrote in “Asking Questions About Telling Stories,” telling stories is not enough. We need to move to the retelling and reliving of stories; that is, to inquiry into stories. Narrative inquiry requires attention to narrative conceptualizations as phenomenon and method, and to the interplay of the three commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place in the inquiry process. It

requires a particular kind of wakefulness...” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 33)

Because I understand narrative inquiry “as both phenomena under study and a method of study” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 4), I wanted to try, through story, to take you alongside to live this phenomena with me. I hoped through this storytelling methodology that is coherent with the Indigenous researcher I imagine I am becoming, to have illustrated how “narrative inquiry does not isolate experiences to make meaning from them but rather we understand ourselves as ‘always *in the midst*—located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social’ in addition to being ‘in the middle of a nested set of stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63), which in this inquiry, consists of yours and mine.

Storytelling, and inquiring narratively, was important too because, as Bruno (2010) explains:

Storytelling is a means of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, history, and visions to successive generations. It weaves generations together. Stories facilitate with great ease, and many times with humor, a recollection and recording of life experiences that are integral to indigenous people. (p. 29 )

It was my intention for you to live alongside me and see the cloudy images that emerged as I tried to see through theoretical lenses, and I tried to place me and mine inside the theories. I hoped that you would also begin to feel the weight and the angst that builds when you story your loved ones as lacking in

some essential way (Bourdieu, 1977), or as too passive for the likes of Marx (1970) who seeks overt conflict between oppressed and the oppressors. Or the shame you feel knowing that coursing through your veins is a mixture of blood that includes those oppressive dominating colonizers as well as the blood of the oppressed, and to stand on one side or the other of this debate means a denial of a part of you. I hoped you would feel as well as understand, not so that you disregard the knowing that comes from understand theory and viewing through lens, but rather that you become more thoughtful in what is being said and what stories are being told. To ensure that within the theories and through the lenses, people who live lives can continue to be seen, be heard, be set free from the boxes that try to constrain and constrict.

I wanted you to also see the powerful impact of stories to live by as you came alongside, living through my words. I hoped you would not just read about them, but that you would become the little girl who didn't want to be the enemy of the settlers, and then become the adult whose "less than" and "not belonging" stories to live by blocked her view and her ability to imagine. I wanted you to hear, the difference in the words written, to feel the tension ebb and flow, as understanding and inquiring allowed the possibility of restorying, as she was drawn deeper into the Aboriginal culture to which she had wished otherwise when Anne and Laura beckoned her into their worlds.

I hoped, as you read of the Aboriginal graduate student, travelled lovingly to her world, you watched and waited and lived alongside as she came to a

knowing and an acceptance and found proof of her identities; I hope that you will remember the rest of her stories. I hope that it will begin to disrupt the grand narratives of this Indian imaginary, and a very diverse and complex Aboriginal learner. In my words, I hope to have shown a piece of a larger picture to which the lack of would forever be a great loss.

In “narrative inquiry,” as in other forms of inquiry, is the justification, the reasons why the study is important. Narrative inquirers need to attend to three kinds of justification: the personal, the practical, and the social” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007, p. 24). I hope that this is what I did. I hope in the end, I was able to justify that my stories, which are just one person’s stories, were absolutely essential to me personally as it coaxed me back up from “rock bottom” and I found hope and possibility. I hope that, in the end, I was able to justify that this autobiographical narrative inquiry fulfilled a practical role, and as educators and researchers and human beings we were able to take a moment and reflect on what we do and how we do it, and that we strive to remain more mindful and more awake to the powerful effect we have on the lived lives of others. Finally, I hope, in the end, that this adds to the grander narratives in a good way, and that within Aboriginal people as a storied “problem,” potentially full of statistically predetermined futures, we can find hope and possibilities in the ideas of playful world travel, and we can find joy in the process of always and forever ‘becoming.’



### **A Final Thought**

“I write, therefore, to drag into the light what eats at me—the fear, the guilt, the shame—so that my own children may be spared” (Sanders, 1989, p. 75).

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