

ᐃᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ  
ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ  
ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ ᑲᑲᑦᑦ

Ayka ahoochi kitonaniwak ka ishkwa itakwakee  
kiskeenoo-ahmatowikahme-ookaw ahshay minawaneesh kaneekahtayo  
ahyamewin ay tipacheemoostatoonaneewak ahneeskay  
tipacheemooweena ootanak kakee paychee  
eekeek ka-ahnimootahkeek oomashkaykoowak  
oopay-ya-kootay isiwiniwak katashekaycheek Ontayriooak

***The silence that followed Indian Residential Schools:  
Sharing our stories and reconnecting oral history among  
O mushkego Cree family members in Ontario***

**A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
Lakehead University in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**By  
© Doris O'Brien Teengs  
Lakehead University  
Orillia, Ontario**



### Abstract

For many Indian Residential School (IRS) survivors, there is a pervasive silence surrounding their childhood experiences. The first research question, *what childhood stories pre-existed Indian Residential Schools for Omushkego Elders and community members in Northern Ontario*, unearthed childhood experiences in order to (re)animate oral storytelling and cultural practices within Omushkego communities in Ontario that were systematically eliminated/reduced for IRS survivors during their school years. The second research question, *what Omushkego cultural knowledge and/or themes can we (re)learn and (re)claim from these stories and storytelling experiences with Omushkego Elders and community members*, explored the various impacts of (re)claiming oral storytelling and cultural practices for IRS and intergenerational survivors from Northern Ontario, as well as examined common themes and storytelling practices among the collected Omushkego stories. The last two questions, *what are some key outcomes for individual Omushkego community members when they have shared and (re)created oral storytelling and language cultural practices within our community*, and *how can Omushkego people identify and assert cultural reclamation in our lives and work as Omushkego people in Ontario, and by extension, Canada*, highlighted cultural and identity affirmation through storytelling and confirms that healing opportunities can take place during these processes for Elders and community members who lost storytelling and cultural practices because of IRS experiences. This project included three Omushkego women who are from the Hudson Bay Lowlands and were born between 1933 and 1954, as well as me as an intergenerational survivor of Residential Schools and ongoing colonization. I used storytelling methodologies, Kovach's (2010) conversational method, sharing circles and Indigenous epistemologies to guide my

practical and ethical choices. I relied heavily on Indigenous ways of knowing and an Indigenous informed autoethnographic approach. Therefore, I am included within this document through my own stories, my reflections, and my actions which assert my Omushkego Cree identity right from the beginning through to the end. I am not alone and follow in the footsteps of Indigenous scholars who feel the need to situate our selves within research.

**A note on language terms**

During the last decade, the convention of referring to 'Indigenous' peoples has changed from 'Aboriginal' to 'Indigenous' in common and academic use. I use both of these terms interchangeably when referencing older works, as they can refer to the same populations (First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples) in Canada and the United States (Native American), unless otherwise specified. The terms, 'Native' and 'Indian' have also been used to label these populations in the last 150 years or so and will be used as referenced in Canadian legislation, such as, the Indian Act or author's use. When referring to myself, I will use 'O mushkego Cree' to specify my individual journey, and also as 'Indigenous person/scholar' to demonstrate my connections with other Indigenous scholars who may be of different First Nation's, Métis, or Inuit heritage, as well as other international Indigenous peoples.

### **A note on reading languages in this dissertation**

There are some quotations of the conversations that occurred during the project that include a mixture of the Cree and English languages. When this happens, I have put the Cree words in italics and the English translation in square brackets. In some of these cases, the standard use of the square brackets to change or include a word to make the sentence read well and be understood are also in place. My aim was to make reading this dissertation as easy as possible to understand. For example, the participant, Omisimâw, says, “In some places I can’t address the things that are happening along the way [in English] ... *Waysketch* [Long time ago], ...I’m starting now okay” (Session Three). The spoken Cree language will always come first before the translation in brackets. And if there are words and phrases in square brackets assume they are there to make the statement understood as it was intended to the best of my interpretation.

I have also chosen to use the pronoun ‘they’ when referring to the third or other person except when using direct quotations, or I am obviously referring to a woman. The Cree language does not have male/female pronouns, and I would like to model ‘the other’ pronoun in this dissertation by using ‘they’.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
A note on Language terms .....	v
A note on reading languages in this dissertation .....	vi
Table of Contents .....	vii
List of Tables .....	xi
List of Figures .....	xi
List of Images and Digital Links .....	xii
Acknowledgements .....	xiii
Dedication .....	xiv
Prologue: My recollections: The Drummer .....	xv
<b>Chapter One: Beginning .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter Two: The search through Indigenous Storytelling .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Loss of Language .....	27
Indigenous Story Collecting/Translating .....	31
Loss of Culture in Storytelling Research .....	36
Finding Our Way Back Through Stories .....	39
Thinking Critically About Our Stories .....	45
Indigenous Ways of Knowing .....	49
Omushkego Cree Epistemology .....	57
<b>Chapter Three: Methods .....</b>	<b>63</b>
Project Details .....	64
Practical Considerations and Challenges .....	75
Methodological Frameworks .....	79
Autoethnography .....	79

Storytelling as a Methodology and Dissemination Product/Activity .....	92
<b>Chapter Four: Observations and Language Use in the Project .....</b>	<b>101</b>
Introduction to the Participants .....	101
Observations on Main Topics and Topics to Note .....	105
<i>Story on Land</i> .....	106
<i>Identity in Stories</i> .....	106
<i>Storytelling in the Family</i> .....	107
<i>Laughter Between Participants</i> .....	107
<i>Residential Schools</i> .....	108
<i>Sickness</i> .....	108
<i>The Storytelling Event</i> .....	109
Language Use Within the Project .....	110
<i>Gah</i> .....	113
<i>Simple Cree Speaking Phrases Used During Our Sessions</i> .....	113
<i>Cree Phrases Used When Ending Sessions</i> .....	114
<i>Participants Using Cree Language to Give Instructions and Information to     One Another</i> .....	115
<i>Pronouns in the Language and Translation</i> .....	117
<i>The Relational aspect for Cree speakers</i> .....	118
<i>Humour in the Language</i> .....	119
<i>Language Preference</i> .....	121
<i>Cree Words That Are Easier Used Than English</i> .....	121
<i>Cree Phrases Participants Used Because the Words Were Spoken in Cree     When the Story Happened</i> .....	122
<i>Learning English</i> .....	124



<i>Language Translation Profession</i> .....	124
<i>Language Loss</i> .....	125
<i>Syllabics</i> .....	126
<i>Teaching Me Cree</i> .....	127
<i>Cree During the Storytelling Event</i> .....	127
<b>Chapter Five: Stories, Traditional Knowledges, and Seven Generations</b>	
<b>Teachings</b> .....	<b>135</b>
Storytelling .....	136
Hudson Bay Walk .....	141
Stories on Land .....	147
<b>Where We Came From</b> .....	<b>148</b>
Connections to land – Mino Pimatisiwin – Living a good life .....	148
<i>Intergenerational Survival</i> .....	153
Traditional knowledges .....	158
<i>Teachings</i> .....	160
Boughs and Mice .....	160
<i>The changes that came</i> .....	163
Different impacts for Majitch .....	167
<i>Seven Generations Stories</i> .....	168
Predictions .....	168
Omushkego spirituality and conversion to Catholicism .....	170
Mysteries in the bush .....	173
<b>Chapter Six: Omushkego Identity in Stories</b> .....	<b>186</b>
Skirts .....	189
Magazines .....	193

Culture Loss and Learning About Culture Away From Home .....	194
<i>Living in Southern Ontario</i> .....	202
(Re)Awakening Identity Practices .....	205
<i>Tattoos</i> .....	205
<i>Rites of Passage</i> .....	208
<b>Chapter Seven</b> .....	<b>210</b>
Project Reflections .....	210
Making Connections Through Conversations and Stories .....	211
Living Reciprocity that Reinforces Connections .....	214
My Reflections .....	223
<b>Chapter Eight</b> .....	<b>226</b>
Bearing Witness to Silence and (Re) Awakening Voices .....	226
What Have I learned From These Elders? .....	244
What Omushkego Cultural Knowledges and Practices Did I Learn? .....	249
Finding Our Voices and Other Outcomes .....	254
How Can We Assert Indigenous Culture in Our Lives? .....	258
Truth and Reconciliation .....	263
Further Recommendations .....	266
Epilogue .....	268
References .....	269
Appendices	
A: Baptism and testament of faith records .....	287
B: The Grebe story read from George Kataquapit's <i>Some history, myths and legends of the Swampy Cree</i> .....	289
C: Marriage and Baptismal Records .....	293

D: July 1 <sup>st</sup> , 2021.....	295
E: Wasaykaycheck and the shut-eye dance .....	300

### List of Tables

Table 1: Order of Sessions .....	67
Table 2: List of codes/topics .....	71
Table 3: Incidence of Topics/Themes .....	74
Table 4: Years on the land, school years, and language use .....	104
Table 5: Breakdown of spoken Cree or had discussions about language use .....	111

### List of Figures

Figure 1: Session One: Topics percentage of time .....	72
Figure 2: Methodological Influences .....	79
Figure 3: Sacred Circle diagram .....	98
Figure 4: Sacred Circle Overview of project .....	100
Figure 5: Sacred Circle Cree Language Use .....	112
Figure 6: Storytelling .....	136
Figure 7: Story on Land .....	147
Figure 8: Identity in Stories .....	189
Figure 9: Project Reflections .....	210
Figure 10: My Reflections .....	224
Figure 11: Boulder of Assimilation going up the hill .....	229
Figure 12: Boulder of Assimilation rapidly descending the hill .....	230
Figure 13: Boulder of Assimilation stopped by shelter and foundation of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing .....	234
Figure 14: Stages of Life .....	210

Figure 15: Ways of Knowing .....	250
----------------------------------	-----

### List of Images

Image 1: Me and my siblings with our Kookoom Polaroid picture taken by a family member .....	9
Image 2: Miken Otaski Gathering. Photo taken by Doe, 1990 .....	13
Image 3: Doe and Colleen dancing at Miken Otaski Gathering Photo taken by Shirley Kamalatisit, 1990 .....	13
Image 4: Picture of Tayshipehtakan taken by Doe at the Shagamee camp in Spring 1991 .....	122
Image 5: Tetawin's older brother checking the fishnet on the river. Photo taken by Peter Kataquapit .....	150
Image 6: My daughter in a Tikinagan. Photo taken by Doe, Spring 2007 .....	152
Image 7: Photo of Shagamee River. Photo taken by Doe, Spring 1991 .....	175
Image 8: Doe in ribbon skirt teaching online. Photo by her daughter .....	192
Image 9: Beaded poppy made by Majitch. Photo by Doe .....	214

### Digital Links

Self-introduction in Cree:

<https://namedrop.io/eskwaokepaytatnodininao>

Google Earth Hudson Bay Cree stories pins

<https://earth.google.com/web/@54.13945692,-86.47527431,127.38555666a,1101388.53548509d,30y,0h,0t,0r/data=MikKJwolCiExTWIMc1FwWWdyV05UMXpxblUxcE5GSIJjRWs0QTBrb3cgAToDCgEw?authuser=0>

Hudson Bay Walk audio YouTube video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILQbzNjw5NA&t=285s>

[Digital recording of Omisimâw and Tetawin saying the rosary in Cree](#)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gOcXk8FCnAROmT1qP2iNRrhCjO9k1Bu/view>

## Acknowledgements

*Ninaskomin* [I am grateful]. I am forever grateful to my ancestors that lived before me. They survived many hardships, told many stories, and experienced much joy and laughter before I was even born.

Ninaskomin to Weenusk First Nation for supporting me for many years through different degrees. These latest stories are part of our histories, and I hope to bring more stories to our collective histories. Ninaskomin to the Ojibwe and Cree Cultural Centre in Timmins for your partnership and support.

My journey to achieve this PhD in Education at Lakehead University would not have been possible without Dr. Michael Hoechsmann. We sat together many years ago to decide whether or not we had enough in common for him to take me on as a PhD student. Luckily for both of us, he makes his choices through a social justice lens, and so when we got along on that first day, he agreed that we could figure this out and he became my supervisor. I think we have both learned a lot over our years together, and we have gained a mutual understanding of respect for the work that we both do.

I am grateful to the many Committee members, some of whom were only there in the beginning, the middle, or the end. Dr. Cam Cobb was there all the way through, and I appreciate his constant presence. Thank you to Dr. Lisa Korteweg, Dr. Frances Helyar, Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, and finally to Dr. Connie Russell, who I am adopting as my fairy godmother! You all played a role on my journey and either made me or my writing stronger during this journey. *Ninaskomin!*

*Ninaskomin* for the many people who came to my dissertation defence both in person and on Zoom. I could not see everyone, but I am told there were 32 people online, and 15 people in the room. I appreciate all of your community support. We don't do this community work alone.

I cannot measure the gratitude I have for my wife, Nancy, and children, Rowan and Ani, who spent ten years of their lives with a busy wife and mom. I sometimes had to have two jobs to support this work, and all of this affected my family. I will make it up to you for the rest of my life. You are all beautiful and thoughtful people and I appreciate you immensely.

*Ninaskomin* for the three Omushkego women who agreed to share their stories with me for this project. Your lives and humour will live within me forever. I believe that we have done something good together, and future generations will know your stories and understand these changes that happened in our lives in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Northern Ontario.

Kitchi Meegwetch,

~Doe O'Brien Teengs

## **Dedication**

To all the storytellers that came before me

and all that follow.

Ninaskomin

For my mom, Annie.

## Prologue

### My recollections: The Drummer

When I was in grade four, I ended up being one of the shepherds who saw Halley's comet, or as the faithful say, the shining star, during our Catholic School's skits and play about the birth of Jesus. It annoyed my sister and her friends who were in grade six. But they were shy and did not want to express wonder and awe at the 'sky' in the James Bay Education Centre (JBEC) gymnasium. My classmates were doing other parts of this story, but I ended up being a shepherd because my precocious 9-year-old self saw them practicing with the teacher and I said, "Do it like *this*," and my dramatic oohs and aahs impressed the 'director/teacher' who promptly decided that I would play that role. I think the girls were annoyed, but I would like to think a little relieved as well, because then they didn't have to act that way. I was happy to do it.

My siblings and I went to the Bishop Belleau School in Moosonee, Ontario. We had an annual Christmas 'concert' of events in collaboration with the Moosonee Public School, which was at the other end of the 'L' that was the JBEC building. I did not know there would be people in the community performing as well. And I had no idea that an interruption to this display of Canadian Christian culture would be a cousin of my mom's: a recluse of a man who spent most of his time up north in the bush and teased us kids when he would come visit. We were taught to ignore his teasing and to not take him seriously. He was an odd fellow, but I liked him most of the time.

I was feeling pretty good after my shepherding performance and went to find my parents to sit and watch the performances that followed. In my mind now, I don't remember any of the other children's performances. But I do remember George Kataquapit walking from the side of the stage into the middle with a hand drum. He was dressed in green pants and collared shirt, like a man would wear working or building something. I think he had a plaid lumberjack shirt over this as well, and a green baseball hat. I don't remember if there was a logo, but it didn't matter. He looked as he always did, and he didn't dress up for the occasion. I don't remember him saying anything at all. But I do remember that he started beating his hand drum, and then he started to sing. There were no words, just vocalizing, and I was mesmerized. I had never heard this type of music before. I turned to my mother, and I said, "Where did he learn to do that?"

He was sharing our Omushkego culture right there in front of us in between Christian recreations of the birth of Jesus and Christmas carols. My mother responded by laughing nervously and said, "Oh that George. He thinks he can do these things."

There were many times during our interactions when I knew that any more questions would not produce any new information from my mother. Her tone created one of those periods at the end of the sentence. I stared back at the stage in wonder at George as he walked off the stage. The audience clapped politely, but no one cheered in appreciation. Thinking back on it now, there must have been some level of discomfort. I did not understand where that was coming from. I was overjoyed and buoyed up by his singing.



No one ever mentioned this performance ever again. He went back up north, and continued to live alone, and would occasionally visit his Elders from time to time, including my grandfather, at their winter camps. Looking back at this event now, I am grateful for his efforts and resistance to ongoing colonialist practices. In 2003, he published a collection of stories from Omushkego Elders called *Some History, Myths & Legends of the Swampy Cree*. He translated Cree stories told to him by different Elders into English and preserved them through this publication. A grief that I carry is that he had a second collection that was ready to be sent to the publisher when he suffered a heart attack and died in 2016. The caretakers of the old age home in Moosonee did not know of the importance of the papers on his table, and before anyone in the family could respond (he had no children, and his brother was in a nursing home in Timmins), the papers and his belongings were removed and thrown out. Another set of stories from the older generation lost.



We are never in this alone, and our academic journeys affect many people in our circles and is part of a legacy of our colonization as Indigenous peoples in Canada. As Hunt (2014) notes,

Processes of colonialism in North America involved representational strategies that transformed Indigenous peoples and their lands conceptually and materially, in order to facilitate their displacement and to render them less human. This ideological imposition has been central to the violent suppression of Indigenous peoples' vitality and sovereignty, through such spatialized strategies as the dispossession of Indigenous peoples off their lands through forced deterritorialization, as well as the displacement of Indigenous children from their families to residential schools. (p. 29)

This PhD journey has included the attempts to return to an understanding of what it means to be an Omushkego woman by sharing different kinds of stories, along with personal, family, and community experiences which, I hope, has and continues to lead to growth opportunities, which will be discussed in this dissertation.

It became clear to me during my first Seminar course that for me to thrive in this program, I needed, as an Omushkego Cree woman, to engage with Indigenous knowledge systems: what does it mean to know something from an Indigenous perspective? And as I began this search, I realized that the priority had to be to understand our collective histories to appreciate what was lost, what was maintained and what we have (re) gained as Omushkego women. And in a nutshell, that is what (re) claiming stories from my traditional territory is about.

Indian Residential School experiences have disconnected many First Nations, Métis and Inuit families from their languages, cultural activities, and land practices: these various losses can lead to poor physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual outcomes (Canada, 1996; Greenwood, 2003; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). A lot of families live with this loss as it manifests differently for each family and community. In order for Indigenous individuals, families and communities to heal from these past and current outcomes from these experiences, we must face our collective pasts, both individually and together. Many researchers have found that providing cultural engagement activities and/or strategies often lead to better healing outcomes for Indigenous peoples (Centre for Addiction & Mental Health, 2002; Menzies, 2014; Proulx & Perrault, 2000). Therefore, it is essential to use and (re)create cultural practices within our communities to promote individual and collective healing.

This project is the culmination of my lifetime curiosity born out of an historical silence about family and community histories that is common among Residential School survivor families (Newman & Hudson, 2019). My research aims to (re)create oral storytelling practices about our own storied lives that were interrupted because of Residential School experiences and assimilation into Canadian living. What followed these experiences was a loss of a linguistic Ojibwe Cree cultural identity in my childhood and community, which is a common experience felt by many Indigenous populations that were colonized (Hernandez, 2003; Rowe et al, 2019). As I worked through this project, I began to realise that I am as much a part of this project as my participants. Like others before me, I was struggling as an Indigenous person within the walls of academia and debated several times if these institutions were the place for me

(Grande, 2004; Henhawk, 2013). But then I realised that if stories make us who we are (Bayer & Hettinger, 2019; Episkinew, 2009), how has this silence impacted the Residential School survivors and the next generation(s) that follow? I know this silence very well and the longing and searching that followed created energy towards finding these words in the absence of stories in our lives.

Inevitably, this project includes my understandings as I sift through my own identity since childhood to demonstrate what was missing and how this project became necessary to fulfill my own and also the Omushkego Cree Elder participants' sense of cultural identity and connection to our histories together through the practice of story telling with one another. I borrow from autoethnography practices which include acknowledging my own position and community responsibilities in this research project (Bishop, 2021; Ellis et al, 2011; Hayano, 1979). I am part of the same Omushkego community and culture as my participants. I am an intergenerational survivor of ongoing colonialism and Residential Schools. My use of autoethnography assumes an ethical response to my community's position and identity. I also deeply engage in Indigenous ways of knowing and doing (Archibald, 2008; Baskin, 2005; Bird, 2005; Kovach, 2010; Tachine et al, 2016; Wilson, 2016) to understand and explain the loss and (re)awakening of Omushkego Cree cultural identities through our oral storytelling practices.

I did not understand during my formative years (childhood and teenage years) why I never learned about my mother's own childhood. I believe that as individuals, communities and as a country we are collectively beginning to understand now that it was because of the deliberate absence around knowledge of British and Canadian

colonization and oppressive policies in our schools and broadcasting media (Battiste, 2013; Godlewska et al, 2010; Hernandez, 2003). In our family and community there were no good stories told about Omushkego Cree peoples. And there were no bad ones either. There was just a complete absence of Omushkego Cree tall tales, truths or anything to tell me there was a young girl who became my mother. My classmates and I did not even learn about the history of the Hudson Bay Company in school, and yet we were shopping at the Bay store for our clothes, household needs and food in Moosonee.

Sure, my siblings and I knew our relatives, and my mom made moccasin slippers and mitts for us to wear throughout our lives, but there was no context beyond our very moment to draw from. We were living from one day to the next in the now very trendy, 'living in the moment' way. That being said, most of my childhood was good and our house was the gathering place for Christmas and Easter extended family dinners and holiday parties among my parents' families and friends. Our sense of Native community and connectedness was still very present: it was just white-washed and framed by Canadian and Christian society with chocolate bunnies, turkey dinners and stockings filled with toys under a decorated tree.

Growing up in Moosonee, Ontario in the 1970s and early 80s created my first worldview. It was an enclosed place with tamarack trees and the Moose River as boundaries. I was raised in an English-speaking household and learned to read, write, and speak in English in the Catholic elementary school. My family regularly attended the Catholic Church, and I loved the stories that exist in the bible. They were the stories that taught me how to be a decent person like the Good Samaritan. I also understood as a

girl born of a Cree mother and white father what it meant to be a little bit different in a Cree town. As a child I did not understand why some families were mean, but I understood that being different made me a target some days and made me special on other days.

I was no different than most children in the 70s: I learned to escape into other stories regularly. On Sunday nights at 6:00 p.m. we were glued to our television to watch the *Wonderful World of Disney*. I remember one Christmas holiday they were airing an animated version of the *Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* on TV, and it fascinated me and my brother. I learned through these stories that there is a world outside of Moosonee, just like the entire world that existed through the back of the wardrobe. And it was these experiences and stories that shaped and defined how I would think.

Maliseet scholar, storyteller, and teacher Bernard C. Perley (2014) describes the ongoing assimilation and language loss as “[the] extinction of the Indigenous cultural and spiritual experiences of the everyday lives of community members” (p. 32). Canadian language translator and scholar Jo-Anne Elder (2006) notes that every generation that follows has the threat of ongoing loss through the assimilative colonization practices that ultimately erase the Indigenous ideas that exist within these stories and languages. These challenges are why I needed to ask the **first research question**. *What childhood stories pre-existed Indian Residential Schools for Ojibwe Elders and community members in Northern Ontario?* Without these stories, I (we) may remain lost in Canadian culture that we live and breathe every day

without any effort because all of us are surrounded by Canadian culture in almost every facet of our lives.

As described in the opening narrative of this work, the first time I saw something that was Ojibwe culture beyond the sense of community in our town was at the Christmas concert when I was in grade four. George Kataquapit walked up on the JBEC stage carrying a hand drum. He started to beat his drum and he sang a song with no words that both filled and created a hole in my chest. My heartbeat raced faster than his rhythm. That was the first time that I understood that there could be something more: that there were songs and practices that were part of our Native identity. But despite that event, I didn't know where else to find it. There were no obvious wardrobes that I could walk through. George was a man who spent most of his time up north on the land and only periodically came to town to visit. And in Moosonee during my first 12 years of life, that was the only time I ever saw anything like it. And then, like most children, I became distracted with other things once school started up again in the new year.

A couple months after I turned 12 years old, my family moved to Timmins. And then I was in the next world beyond the wardrobe and was thrust into learning to live like they do on television. Although I knew white people in Moosonee - they were the teachers, the bank manager, the priest and Ministry of Natural Resources workers – I was now surrounded by them everywhere. Part of this feeling was natural, of course, because my father was white, but part of it was overwhelming in both good and scary ways. It was scary because everything was new, and my siblings and I had to start from a place close to zero. We knew no one and had to make friends with children our age who had no sense of the small northern worldview where we came from. The familiar



element was the school system, and I did make friends in school. As a fair-skinned optimistic child, I could easily blend in with the other students. Not the high-tiered popular students, of course, but the kids who were middle of the road ordinary.

The second time I learned something cultural was when my mother got a job as a librarian at the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre (OCCC). I went to look through the library one day and I found a short story book on Nanabush and the Birch Tree. It was a story about how the Birch tree got its black marks. I forget how, but the tree upset Nanabush, and he lashed out and whipped the Birch tree when he lost his temper. I was fascinated. I asked my mother if there are more books with legends and if there are Cree stories. The story was clearly outlined as an Ojibway story, and so I immediately wanted to know what *our* stories were. Again, she said she really didn't know, and I should look through the library. I think my 13-year-old self was too insistent and urgent, with too much energy for my mom at the time. I didn't know why she didn't know or didn't want to share. I read what I could, but it was a small library. Unfortunately for both of us, she did know about Wesaykaychek, our trickster, but she was unwilling at that time to share that information with me. I didn't understand that taking her back to these stories also took her back to a time that she was trying to forget.

By this time, I suspected Cree people had their own stories. But I never heard them and could not find them in English. No one told legends in our home or at our school. And understanding the Cree language was not accessible to me as a child. I think my class learned a little bit of Cree in Grade four and Grade six. All I remember learning were the names of animals. Deer or caribou was *atik* and dog was *atim*.

Anishinaabe scholar, Jean-Paul Restoule, Canadian scholar, Sheila Gruner, and Cree

activist and writer, Edmund Metatawabin (2013) explore the severity of language loss for this current generation that followed me. They found that older words are being lost because they have fallen out of use, and everyday conversations in Cree are happening less and less with the youth of today in the western James Bay region.

One of the most painful legacies for me of the IRS intergenerational experience is that as a child, I did not learn to speak Cree. I have heard Cree all my life, and although I know its rhythms and sounds, I do not *yet* speak it fluently. The elimination of Indigenous languages was a goal of the Residential Schools and many children who attended the schools did not choose to speak their Indigenous language once they left the schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). An unfortunate consequence for me was that I could not communicate well with my grandmother, who spoke very little English.

During most of our childhood years my family was lucky to have my mother's parents come and stay with us during Christmas. They would fly down from Fort Severn and stay in my sisters' room and fill it with their old soft skin and the smell of sweet earthy worn clothes and fried chicken that they would buy at the Hudson Bay store in Moosonee and then later Kentucky Fried Chicken in Timmins. I could not speak Cree. My *Kookoom* [grandmother] did not speak English. So, I would

Image 1:

*Me, my Kookoom holding my hand, and my siblings, Marnie, Patrick, and Valerie.*



hold her hand and smile. I must have chatted sometimes because I talked all the time as a child, and she would smile at me and nod. She had the softest old hands I had ever felt. I would try to push down her veins on the top of her hand, and she let me do this repeatedly.

My *Mooshoom* [grandfather] could speak English well. He ran a goose camp in the Fall and American hunters would come to stay to hunt, so he spoke English regularly. He would have known English already from trading his furs at the Hudson Bay Company post in the village of Winisk since his childhood. English was often the language of trade and money. One thing that was amusing to my mom and Mooshoom and must have been endearing was that as a child, along with my siblings, we called him Kimooshoom. We thought that is what he was called. We did not understand Cree grammar and my mom was actually saying, “your grandfather” when she was referring to him. So, we repeated the word like you do in English. And they laughed and accepted it. And I called him that until I was in my 20s when I finally understood the basics of grammar to know the difference. When you put the ‘ki’ in front of ‘mooshoom’, the ‘ki’ means ‘your’. It makes me sad and amused at the same time that they let all of us do that. I am sad because we did not learn the difference. And I am amused because I can still hear my grandfather’s giggle and it reminds me of happy feelings between us.

For this dissertation, I will be looking towards Cree Scholar, Verna Kirkness’s (1997) guidance on language and culture:

What do we lose when we lose a language? The short answer is we lose our culture. As the noted linguist, Fishman (1972) stated, ‘Most of culture is in the language and is expressed in the language. If you take language away from the

culture (a people's way of life), you take away its greeting, its praises, its curses, its laws, its literature (legends), its songs, its proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers. You are losing those things that essentially are the way of life, the way of thought, the way of valuing, and a particular human reality” (Kirkness, 1997, p. 17-18).

The use of a dominant language and literacy as tools for control have been used for both freedom and oppression in many contexts in history. Italian scholar, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) was appreciative of his local Sardinian roots in both language and culture, but he also believed in the unifying ideal of a nationalist language for Italy. Mayo (2015) suggests that Gramsci's writings helped to develop a critical perspective on the use of language and literacy and showed that language and literacy can be used to bring people together through mutual understanding and when a society educates people, the people can improve their contributions to society. Gramsci also understood how the use of literacy is also used to maintain oppression by not giving a group of people access to literacy, thereby limiting the group's abilities to use their voices and intellect to engage politically. Ironically, the same oppressive result can occur when a dominant society extends language and literacy to a marginalized group when it is introduced at the elementary level. The children grow up to be adults who do not question why things are the way they are (Noddings, 2012); thereby, ensuring the same result of domination through an unchallenged acceptance of the dominant culture as normal. Paulo Freire (1970) revealed that one of the major challenges to this type of domination is that the domination is absorbed into everyone's subconscious, and it is not visible. If you cannot see (understand) a thing (oppression), then you cannot

challenge or change it, because you do not see the need. Add to that, the experiences of Residential School survivors who were punished for speaking their Indigenous language contributed to the “thought that by not teaching [their children their] own language, they were protecting [them]” (Newman & Hudson, 2019, p. 124).

Therefore, the belief that the English language would be better for me, and my siblings became a normal thought for my family members and many of my childhood friends’ families, even though we lived in a community that was approximately 85% Cree identified people. In the 2011 census of the town of Moosonee where I grew up, only 18% of respondents living in Moosonee learned Cree as a mother tongue, and the number of respondents who were over the age of 50 were 20% (born before 1961). These percentages could suggest that after 1961 many (82%) Residential School survivors in the region did not teach their children Cree as a first language (Census Program, 2011). It was not just in my family that language was lost and/or diminished, but also many of the social and political systems that existed for the Omushkego Cree up until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century that live within the language. When looking at these statistics, I was shocked. But thinking back on my childhood, most of my peers did not speak Cree at home. And I didn’t think anything about it, except wanting to know what the few Cree speakers were laughing about.

After listening and learning from the participants in this project, I am only beginning to understand the vastness of what the language contains.

The third time I experienced another shift in cultural learning happened when I was seventeen. The Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre got funding to have an Elder’s Gathering on land they own in the bush outside of South Porcupine. For me, it was a

weekend of camping with teenagers from the James Bay communities that were attending high school in Timmins, as well as youth from Moosonee, Moose Factory, and other communities from Southern Ontario. There were drummers, an arbor, and an area around them for dancing. Beyond that were simple benches that were built so people

could sit and watch or listen to Elders share knowledge. I listened intently to the rhythms and canter of Cree, but all that knowledge sharing was lost to me. A lot of my Cree friends and cousins from James Bay First Nation's communities could understand, but there were many, like me, who were clueless. My cousin, Susie, would say, "He's just talking about how to predict the weather."

I'm sure there was more to it than that as each Elder talked for almost an hour, but no one was there to translate for those of us who did not understand. Those of us in

Image 3:

*Doe and friend, Colleen dancing in the evening, 1990. Photo taken by Shirley Kamalatisit.*



Image 2

*Miken Otaski Gathering. Photo taken by Doe, 1990.*



the dark did our best to hear what we could, but we mostly just practiced listening respectfully. Later in the day and evening our ears were filled with the sounds of drumming and we learned to dance our simple two step and it was enough to fill our hearts with belonging and Omushkego cultural connection.

That was the same year that I first heard the term, Residential School. My uncle mentioned it and said he hated it there. He didn't get to see his sisters and he was lonely all the time. He said his favourite time was Christmas because it was the only time that he saw the girls when they came and sang Christmas carols through the school. Then he saw his sisters singing as they walked by. I was baffled and upset. I never heard that they were taken away and put in a school far from Winisk. I asked my mother and she said, "Oh yeah. That happened."

Again, I knew from her tone that this was the end of the conversation. It was not an angry statement. It was a tone that stated a fact but did not lead anywhere: it was like walking into an alley that just led to a brick wall between the buildings. You just turn around and go back out the way you came. So, the questions bubbled up inside me with no where to go. I learned to ignore it for the moment and be distracted by other things, like getting involved in the Youth program at the Timmins Native Friendship Centre. There was enough crafting and socializing to keep any 17-year-old busy with laughter and emotional entanglements.

The fourth time I had a deepening cultural shift was this journey with my aunt up to our family trapping area in Northern Ontario near Hudson Bay. And that was when I first learned that our family did have some of these stories. It was the first time that I heard of the trickster, Wasaykaychek. I had seen the story about Nanabush in the OCCC but did not know who our trickster was. And if my mother knew I don't begrudge her in any way because I love her unconditionally, and I just accepted that she could not tell me those stories then.

But I should have known that eventually, this silence would need to be filled. Not only for myself, but for those that wanted to tell their stories and have an opportunity to finally be heard and (re)claim our Omushkego Cree identity. The silences led me to my second research question: *What Omushkego cultural knowledge and/or themes can we (re)learn and (re)claim from these stories and storytelling experiences with Omushkego Elders and community members?*

Ultimately, this project grew out of my own life experiences, and the need to know about the lives of those who came before me. Like many Indigenous scholars, relational ways of knowing guided my direction and actions (Moore, 2014; Wilson, 2001). It has also become necessary to acknowledge Indigenous and Canadian histories and reveal the historical accounts from our Indigenous perspectives to (re)claim identities and to reveal the colonial histories of violence towards Indigenous populations worldwide (Battiste, 2013; Sinclair, 2009; Smith, 1999). I have started the painful journey with the many emotional burdens of learning these histories: I needed to take that step further and peel back the layers of these histories for Omushkego individuals and our communities. Most Indigenous scholars do not come to the academy to simply 'know' things or create knowledge. We are often community oriented and driven by our family or community's needs. My search for these missing stories were necessary because they were not only missing for me.

During this PhD journey of mine, I've had to face my own fears about diving into the historical traumas of the Canadian and Christian Indian Residential Schools. And as a country, a lot has changed since my childhood. Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for the harms and mistakes of the Residential Schools systems, and the



Truth and Reconciliation Commission documented stories and celebrated cultures across the country during their large and small events (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). I started teaching the Indigenous Education course at Lakehead University in Orillia in the Faculty of Education, which provided many emotional hurdles and challenges for both me and my students. Working through all these things did not prepare me, though, for the finding of the 215 images underground at the Kamloops Residential School. We knew, as Indigenous peoples that these deaths occurred, but finding the physical proof forced everyone in Canada, and globally to look at these deadly institutions where too many children did not come home. I was so angry, and I hated everyone around me in my neighbourhood. I had to do something, or I would remain in this traumatized state.

I decided to invite my neighbours through our neighbourhood Facebook page to come and learn about these histories of Residential Schools in my driveway and garage on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. It was apparent that my Canadian neighbours were impacted by these histories as well, and it is something that as an emerging Indigenous scholar and person, that I cannot ignore. You can see some pictures from the event on [X @wrterdoe](#) and read more about my grappling with these experiences in Appendix D. Through teaching and in my neighbourhood, I learned that I need to act and tell these stories. These actions led me to my **third research question**: *What are some key outcomes for individual Omushkego community members when they have shared and (re)created oral storytelling and language cultural practices within our community?*

This project aimed to identify and (re)create the Omushkego Cree oral storytelling and cultural practices for Omushkego Cree IRS survivors and their children;

to preserve Omushkego storytelling, culture, language, and history; and promote healing and improve communication practices for IRS survivors and intergenerational survivors. The (re)creation or (re)awakening of oral history and storytelling practices has the potential to provide Omushkego community members with a (re)connection to Omushkego cultural identities that have been negatively impacted by IRS experiences. The idea of reclamation led me to my **final research question**: *How can Omushkego people identify and assert cultural reclamation in our lives and work as Omushkego people in Ontario, and by extension, Canada?*

These four questions are all related, but their various foci allowed me to sift through their differences with a fine-tooth comb. I have been searching and longing for these stories all my life. I understand that there were families and communities where these storytelling roles were not completely silenced or lost (Andrew & Buggy, 2008; Archibald, 1997; Iseke, 2013), including some of our own community members from Winisk, like storyteller Louis Bird (2005, 2007). There are Elders who hold onto the canons of their orature and there are those who have not. Muskego Inniniew scholar, Gladys Rowe, Canadian scholar Sylvia Straka, Cree scholar, Michael Anthony Hart, Cree Elder Don Robinson, Ojibway Elder Garry Robson, and Cree Elder Ann Thomas Callahan (2019) point out that this generation of Indigenous peoples need to make these efforts to hear the long stories which contain many teachings and time is working against us: we need to get the stories before the Elders are gone.

This project was for those older people who were silenced or maintained silence and in doing so, perhaps they could (re)claim not only their stories, but their roles as Elders. Rowe et al (2019) point out in their research that “[a]t the heart of this process is

the recovery of the traditional role of Elders, who are both the knowledge keepers and knowledge transmitters (Smylie et al, 2004). Part of our process for (re)awakening our cultures is to consider that not every old person is an Elder (Wilson, 1996, 2008)” (p. 3).

Canadian scholar, Thomas D. Andrews and Canadian Parks historian and scholar, Susan Buggy (2008) also note that Elders are knowledge holders who are cornerstones to knowledge and the legacy of *cultural landscapes*. Cultural landscapes described by Davidson-Hunt (2003) as “interactions between societies, environments and resources. This is a complicated way of saying that cultural landscapes emerge from the resource management systems of different societies” (p. 35). In this context, Elders who have grown up on the land and learning how to survive and thrive with the land carry ecological knowledge frameworks. For example, knowing how to survive walking 70 kilometres across the Hudson Bay Lowlands at the end of summer.

If I also use a broader example of the role of Elder in Indigenous communities, then I can find useful knowledge from *all* Residential School survivors. And as Restoule et al (2013) have found, there are Elders who have been waiting to tell their stories and share their knowledge up in the James Bay communities. I don't believe that our Indigenous communities, both on-reserve, rural and urban, can exist as strong communities without acknowledging these generations of Elders' stories within the historical context and learn from their experiences. All of us need to understand that “Elders are important in this process of recovery and resistance” (Iseke & BMJK, 2011, p. 18).

The participants that I have been able to work with during this project are considered Elders in their communities: the oldest who was born in 1933 and returned

later in life and lived in her First Nation for the last 30 years and participated in activities such as teaching the youth in the Choose Life Program how to make shot bags. These are sewn bags to hold ammunition for hunting geese. The next participant who was born in 1943 regularly gets asked to do opening and closing prayers for community events in Timmins. The last participant who was born in 1954 has joined a Residential School survivors' group in Toronto, and they have started a drumming group that recently (post project) started performing opening songs for different community events. Therefore, they qualify to be called Elders, as Wilson (1996) notes, "the difference between Elders and the elderly is not only the role they play in the community, but in the individual characteristics with which they make their role culturally relevant" (p. 53). Although not a direct goal of this project, I aim to acknowledge these Elder roles and see what I can learn from their stories and the changes that they experienced during their lifetimes. The blank slate that was created out of Indian Residential School survivors' silence will be replaced with words. Together, the participants and I will create a repository of stories to hang in our wardrobe during our time together. Obviously, it won't include everything, but it is a start; we will initiate a reboot of our oral storytelling practices and record what happens when we do.

## Chapter Two

### The Search Through Indigenous Storytelling

The absolute absence of Omushkego storytelling in my family and community life is part of the intergenerational effects of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in our family and community dynamics. The (re)telling of family and community's lived experiences through storytelling allowed us the opportunity to (re)create Omushkego worldviews within a modern context and saved these stories from disappearing; and thereby provided opportunities for healing and resurgence through the connection to our collective past, and strengthening our sense of who we are as Omushkego women. It is through my search for stories and storytelling which led me to stories and storytelling in research for and with Indigenous peoples.

It is essential that our community members who are both IRS and intergenerational survivors have various opportunities to heal from the trauma they experienced because of IRS experiences and the resulting systemic racism that continues to exist in our society through the ongoing legislation of the *Indian Act*. The ensuing negative physical, mental, emotional and spiritual damage has concrete consequences that can lead to various detrimental health and social outcomes (Pearce et al, 2015).

I am not the first to notice, feel, or look to fill the absence of story and truth telling (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Canada, 1996). In 1990, the head of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Phil Fontaine, broke the seal of silence when he shared of the abuse he experienced during his time in IRS (Loyie et al, 2016). Other Indigenous scholars and allies have also revealed that Indigenous peoples who inhabit the lands known as

Canada have been subjected to assimilationist 'education' programs in these institutions (Auger & Faries, 2005; Canada, 1996; Chadwick, 1998; Hernandez, 2003; Rowe et al, 2019; Warley, 2010). Subsequent generations of both Indigenous peoples, Canadian, and Immigrant peoples have had this information hidden from them because it was not part of the approved Canadian curriculum. What was included was benign approved histories and stories of before and after the founding of this country (Godlewska et al, 2010) up until 2013 when Ontario changed the curriculum to include these Canadian histories of the *Indian Act* and *Indian Residential Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). It is essential for all of us to understand Canadian settler and Indigenous relationships and explore the power dynamics between the systemic and social relationships that have historically and currently marginalize Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2010). Only through these critical explorations, can both Indigenous and settler Canadians move forward together to build a better future for all.

Indigenous children as young as 4 and as old as 16 were legislatively and forcibly removed from their homes and taken to institutions where they were taught that their cultures and languages were not worthy of the new Canadian education and social systems (Haig-Brown, 1988; Rowe et al, 2019; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Consequences to these actions relevant to this project include:

- the loss of language from one generation to the next (Elder, 2006; Field, 2013; Iseke Barnes, 2004; Krupnik, 2005; Perley; 2014; Restoule et al, 2013)
- the loss of Indigenous cultural practices from one generation to the next (Elder, 2006; Moayeri & Smith, 2010)

- a silencing and/or quieting of Indigenous identities (Greenwood, 2003; Hernandez, 2003)
- and the loss of storytelling traditions (Archibald, 2008; Dion, 2009; Perley, 2014; Rowe et al, 2019).

It is necessary to acknowledge these Indigenous experiences and reveal the historical accounts from Indigenous perspectives to reclaim identities and to reveal the colonial histories of violence towards Indigenous populations worldwide (Battiste, 2013; Perley, 2014; Settee, 2011; Sinclair, 2009; Smith, 1999).

These activities are just getting started. Indigenous peoples have been digging, recreating, and breathing new life into these stories and my project is a verse in an epic that takes place across these great landscapes. As Mohawk scholar and intergenerational survivor Louellyn White (2018) asserts, Indigenous peoples must keep telling their histories about these assimilationist institutions because they are the best examples of our colonial histories and the cruelties that were inflicted upon Indigenous children and peoples in both Canada and the United States.

As Indigenous peoples, we can tell these stories in various ways. Kwakwaka'wakw and Stóllō carver, Carey Newman created the *Witness Blanket* with funding from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is a monumental physical installation that holds pieces and pictures from most of the Residential Schools in Canada. He and his team understood implicitly that bearing witness to the 'truth' of these schools is our first task before all those who have been impacted, and those who have benefited can move towards reconciliation activities (Newman and Hudson, 2019). Newman (2019) says,

I'm not sure if it comes from the pain and power that are held with truth, the fragments of hope that slowly build, one upon another, or the whispers of my ancestors, but I have begun to realize that we each bear witness by our own experiences. We are responsible for learning from and remembering them. (p. 152)

Just like I have inserted myself into this research project, Carey Newman contributed a piece for the *Witness Blanket*. He cut a branch of an apple tree which was on the grounds of St. Mary's Residential School where his father was forced to stay and attend. Newman says,

Along the way, many other people contributed their pieces and stories, but this was my contribution. You see, almost from the moment I had the idea to make the Witness Blanket, I knew that one day I would be right there, in that orchard, cutting a branch in honour of my father. (p. 145)

A lot of our work as intergenerational survivors stems from our family's and community's experiences in the face these colonial traumas.

Anishinaabe/Métis scholar, Lynn Lavallée (2009) proposes that telling these histories and stories are part of the process of decolonizing the academy, which also includes the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges into research. Part of these truths include the signing of Treaties and the government's implementation of assimilationist legislation through the Indian Act. *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Canada, 1996) points out that at the turn of the 19th century, treaties were signed between First Nations groups and the new Canadian government, which involved giving up claims to the land in exchange for medicine, supplies and education.



My not so distant ancestors signed onto Treaty 9 in 1937, which included the understanding by the Anishinaabeg and Mushkegowuk peoples, together known as Nishnawbe Aski Nation, that they would still be able to hunt and fish to live off the land, and that the Crown (the British monarchy with whom many Indigenous populations developed relationships with, and subsequently, responsibilities taken over by the new Canadian government) would provide schools and teachers for the children, along with annuities, a copy of the Treaty, and a flag (Auger & Faries, 2005). The wording of the document has provided the government with the ability to interpret implementation of education according to their own understanding: “His Majesty agrees to pay such salaries of teachers to instruct the children of said Indians, and also to provide such school buildings and educational equipment as may seem advisable to His Majesty’s government of Canada” (Auger & Faries, 2005, p.16). The people of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation interpret this clause as a treaty right to education (Auger & Faries, 2005).

During the ‘Treaty making’ era, the new Canadian Government also implemented the *Indian Act* (1876). This legislation included relocations of Indigenous populations onto small plots of land called reservations (also known as reserves), which ensured an erasure from the common public consciousness of this history of colonization as well as interrupting their traditional hunting/harvesting practices on the land (Canada, 1996). Although the reserves were mentioned in the Treaty 9 consultations with the Nishnawbe Aski Nation peoples, there was a misunderstanding between the land-based hunters and the government officials, who interpreted the reserves (or land allocation) differently. The hunters were assured that their hunting and gathering lifestyles would not be interrupted, however, the government officials neglected to say that the

government wanted to isolate the peoples to stationary living on miniscule, unsustainable tracts of land (Auger & Faries, 2005; Long, 2010).

In the end, the Indian Act's implementation of the reserve system, Indian Residential Schools (IRS) for education, as well as Child Welfare policies which resulted in the adoption of Indigenous children outside of their communities into white families (aka the 60's scoop) and the intergenerational effects of these policies ruptured the lifestyles, vitality of languages, and cultures, including individual and communal events of Indigenous peoples on this land (Canada, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The outcomes of these policies, systemic racism and discrimination have and continue to contribute to high rates of negative health outcomes, an epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and violence and high substance use in our communities in attempts to numb the pain of colonization (Barlow, 2009; Bucharski, 2006; Chavoshi et al, 2013; Mehrabadi et al, 2008; Menzies, 2014).

What followed these events in the last 150+ years in Canada was the promotion in popular culture and through the education system of the English and French cultures as the Eurocentric templates for Canadian governance and lifestyle (Godlewska et al, 2010). Mi'kmaq scholar, Marie Battiste (1998) calls this cognitive imperialism: "It has been the means by which the rich diversity of peoples have been denied inclusion in public education while only a privileged group have defined themselves as inclusive, normative, and ideal" (p. 20). Just over a decade later, Battiste (2009) goes on to say that it is "also known as cultural racism, is the imposition of one worldview on a people who have an alternative worldview, with the implication that the imposed worldview is superior to the alternative worldview" (p. 193). In response to these daily subversions of

our Indigenous identities and practices, the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges and languages need to happen in the places where the next generation learns (Battiste, 2013) and lives (Gray Smith, 2017; Perley, 2014; Toulouse, 2018). Indigenous peoples need to reclaim Indigenous identities and cultural power that have been impacted and/or lost through colonial practices (Wilson, 2008). Every year that I was in this academic journey, it had become increasingly urgent that I try to determine my connections to our collective histories in the context of my immersion into academic traditions to both decolonize and assert Indigenous experiences in academic spaces, but more importantly to provide a time and space for our families and communities to (re)learn storytelling practices and (re)claim our various Indigenous cultural practices that were interrupted by colonial assimilationist policies.

In response to ongoing colonialism and cognitive imperialism, this project bears witness to Omushkego Elders' storied lives in Northern Ontario. The participants shared stories about their childhood before and after Residential Schools. This project also explored their experiences of storytelling in their childhoods and families and examined how these stories and telling their stories are related to identity and healing. And finally, this project observed and studied the knowledges that are contained within their storytelling to see how they contribute to identity and cultural reclamation for themselves and as exemplars for others. To be clear, this project was not specifically *about* Residential School experiences. Some of those stories did turn up during our sessions together, but it wasn't just stories of Residential Schools that are missing in our lives. It is the personal stories and histories before and after those experiences that have often been missing.

## Loss of Language

In her story work with Métis Elders, Judy Iseke-Barnes (2004) notes that her grandmother did not pass on the language to her children. Now, she and her children are trying to learn the language to reconnect the past and the future through language. As a scholar who is trying to preserve the Michif and Cree languages within her community of Métis peoples, she acknowledges the struggles of trying to learn the language that was denied because of assimilation. She promotes language learning because languages are the voices and knowledges of her ancestors. She says when Indigenous peoples are creating programs and working in their own homes to sustain the language, “they are attempting to retain the knowledges available in the language” (p. 60). I would add that for those that have some of these cultural teachings in English, they would be retaining *some* of that knowledge, but for those of us whose families had silence on the culture and the passing on of the language, we are left with the (re)awakening the knowledge that is held in our blood.

Perley (2014) notes that the loss of language use in common places like homes and community gatherings is equivalent to and results in the loss of cultural and spiritual practices in Tobique First Nation in the East Coast of Canada. In the same way, the lack of the common use of Cree was also reflected in my own household and community growing up. I heard my Cree family members speak it to one another, but they did not speak it to us as children, and so my siblings and some of my cousins and I did not learn to understand nor speak the language except in simple phrases. As mentioned in the first chapter, this language loss was true for most of my peers as well, even when they had two Omushkego Cree parents.

Many Indigenous scholars point out that when we use English to frame Indigenous ways of knowing or teachings, there are things that get lost in translation (Archibald, 2008; Ermine, 1995; Johnson, 2016). Therefore, using Indigenous languages brings back the Indigenous interpretations and understandings. Cree scholar Paulina R. Johnson (2016) adds that when Indigenous peoples revitalize their languages, they are reclaiming their narratives with their own interpretations. In their project in Fort Albany, Restoule et al (2013) also emphasize that the loss of words and phrases that exist in Cree stories and metaphors, or are related to land-based living, are at risk right now and efforts must be made to bring the language into common use among the children and youth of today. This loss of language use for the deeper meaning of phrases over the last two generations could mean that “the ability to form a linguistic connection to traditional territory could be at risk within a short period of time” (p. 78).

Jo-Anne Elder (2006) acknowledges that the influences of colonization are threatening the knowledge systems that exist within the languages, and the trickle down between each generation. Jonathon Solomon (2022) sees that it is accelerating in the James Bay communities. At the public Ininimo Speak Cree Virtual Conference, presenter and Omushkego Elder, Jonathan Solomon (2022) of Kashechewan First Nation shared that the younger of his grandchildren do not speak Cree and only understand a little. He lives in Northern Ontario and his children are language speakers but have not taught the language to their own children. Solomon worries that the Cree language in the coastal communities will not exist in use in 50 years if Omushkego peoples don't act now. Ironically, I only have the translation of what he spoke in Cree

because my colleague, Rosy Sutherland, was translating it to me in real-time as he was speaking, through Messenger chat. I understand that it was important to say these words in Cree, but without translation for those of us who are still learning the language, his important message would be lost. I can only infer that by choosing to speak Cree, he was trying to influence the Cree speakers to continue to speak and use Cree in common everyday interactions.

Anishinaabe writer Basil Johnston (2020) always promoted language use as much as possible. He strongly argued that our languages, and therefore, our ideas and ways of being, are one generation from extinction. I remember reading his essay in 1993 in my Native Literature class at Lakehead University. I was hurt and perhaps naively insulted by his assertion that our cultures would disappear when we, as Indigenous peoples, could not speak the language. A small part of me then, knew that his assertion was true. But because I was not fluent in my mother's language, I could not accept that my Indigenous identity, my Omushkego Cree identity would be void or extinct without the language. I am still breathing, after all. But I must also consider when Iseke-Barnes (2004) says that "[i]f language is an important aspect of defining ourselves as Indigenous people then whose definitions of ourselves are we using [if not in the language]?" (p. 63).

In 1988, Plains Cree grandmother, linguist and language preservationist, Freda Ahenakew worked with linguist Hans Christoph Wolfart to record, transcribe and translate stories by one Woods Cree and six Plains Cree grandmothers. In 1992, they published *Kôhkominawak Otâcimowiniwâwa Our Grandmothers' lives as told in their own words*. These were "intimate conversations" between Cree women in the Cree

language (p. 19). They tell stories of what is important to them at different times in their lives from their perspectives. These stories are presented to the reader in syllabics, in Cree words using the alphabet for spelling, what is referred to as Roman orthography, and in translation in English.

Ahenakew understood that she needed to record these stories of the grandmothers before the grandmothers were gone. Ahenakew's efforts have provided these grandmothers' stories and perspectives in the Cree language and in English; thereby, including for posterity the stories in Cree for future Cree learners and speakers. Writing these words and stories down remain an important example of cultural and linguistic preservation. I look to Ahenakew and Wolfart's (1992) example and aspire to do my best to honour the participants like they do in this tremendous book.

Plains Cree scholar, Neal McLeod's (2007) work in story preservations makes the connection between Cree words and landscapes more specific. The word *mistasiny* refers to the grandfather stones. They hold special meaning for the Cree peoples of the Plains. They provided the place for ceremonial and social gatherings. Anyone who heard this word would understand all the stories, ceremonial, and social references that went with it. If that word and the language become lost, all the understandings are threatened to erasure as well. Part of the Christian conversion efforts in the late 1800s involved blasting this stone and removing the pieces; thereby, interrupting these ceremonial practices. By documenting these stories, words and happenings, McLeod (2007) resists this absolute erasure and brings these histories carried by Elders that he talked to in Cree back into common and broader knowing through his translation of these ideas into publication in English.

Using Indigenous languages or the translation of these languages into English in research projects have their challenges. In her research on stories with Elders in the West Coast, Stó:lō scholar, Jo-ann Archibald (1997) notes that “many Aboriginal language speakers say that so much cultural meaning and humour is lost in translation to the English language” (p. 39). I know from my life experiences that my mother and her sisters laughed a lot more in Cree than they did when conversing in English. I also am very aware of another important aspect to translation. Blackfoot scholar, Nimachia Hernandez (2003) notes that the “mere translation of a cultural narrative into the English language has the potential to substantially distort its meaning” (p. 66). That is because the meaning of the words and phrases are held within linguistic contexts which are shaped by a worldview. These Indigenous worldviews are not the same as the ones that shaped the English language.

Hernandez (2003) further asserts that Indigenous stories “should be understood as giving meaning and expression to an understanding...based on a spiritual relationship between humans in their natural environment. Native peoples have always had stories that tell about why and how things are the way they are” (p. 77). Ultimately, learning and using Indigenous languages continues to be a priority for Indigenous cultural preservation and revitalizations. During our sessions, some language use did take place and grappling with these challenges remain at the forefront of my heart and mind.

### **Indigenous Story Collecting/Translating**

There are many different scholars and writers who have been working to preserve Indigenous stories. I will begin with an examination of three non-Indigenous



Canadian scholars and writers to examine some of the issues, both good and bad that are ongoing with these recordings/translations.

The first is Wendy Wickwire who worked with Okanagan storyteller Harry Robinson to preserve his collection of oral stories, which resulted in three books, *Write it on Your Heart* (1989), *Nature Power* (1992), and *Living by Stories* (2005). For the most part, Wickwire gets out of the way and allows Robinson's words flow across the page as they are spoken. Every time Robinson would pause, Wickwire would start a new line to try to emulate the oral nature of his storytelling. All of his storytelling took place in English. In this way, Wickwire was more like a diligent and thoughtful transcriber, and she provided him an opportunity to record his stories for posterity.

The second is Julie Cruikshank who spent decades working with Indigenous storytellers in the Yukon and supported events which brought storytellers from different nations together. She shares and analyses these experiences in *The Social Life of Stories* (1998). She worked with several linguists and the Elders to ensure that she wrote down what they wanted her to record. Her contributions towards storytelling and narrative practices in the Yukon likely increases the chances for next generations to learn from the Elders that shared these stories and who are now passed on.

The third is Robert Bringhurst (1999), a poet who decided that he wanted to read the transcribed stories of the Haida in the Haida language. So, he taught himself to understand Haida in order to read the texts written from 5000 pages of notes transcribed by linguist John Swanton in 1900 when he stayed with the Haida for eleven months. John Swanton used linguistic techniques like writing the phonemes to transcribe the stories, which Bringhurst was then able to translate into English after he

spent years learning the language. There are now three volumes in English of the Haida storyteller's canon of orature: *A Story as Sharp as a Knife* (1999), *Nine Visits to the Mythworld* (2000), and *Being in Being: The Collected Works of a Master Haida Myhteller* (2002). His translations were possible because the copyright on Swanton's work was expired; therefore, the Haida transcriptions were available to use. In other words, Bringhurst saw that the Haida canon collected in the year 1900 is now available to him, or anyone, for translation.

As you can probably sense, there are some issues to examine with these collections. I acknowledge that the works of these three non-Indigenous scholars and writers offer me glimpses of their interpretations of the Indigenous stories and storytellers. They also offer examples of relationship building that lead to important knowledges about Indigenous stories. Wickwire worked to recreate Robinson's words into text that reads like he speaks. These collections are his words in English, and she worked hard to recreate their oral nature. She had developed a close friendship with him, and he chose to tell her these stories to preserve them. Next, no one can deny the immense teachings that include storytelling protocols, connections between stories and land, the importance of these historical stories, and more in Cruikshank's work. It is obvious that these teachings come from the Elders that she worked with for many years. As readers of her work, we just need to recognize that her voice and choices might have influenced her work as well as the Elders she worked with.

The most challenging of these three writers is perhaps Bringhurst and his translation of Haida stories that were collected in 1900. In today's context, the call to examine the cultural appropriation ethics of this monumental translation comes into play

(Bradley, 2007; Young, 2000). Although Bringhurst (1999) names the original storytellers, Bradley (2007) points out that those who read these translations “must grapple with the tensions between oral and written traditions, with questions of ownership and copyright, and with notions of cultural rights and intellectual responsibilities of Native and non-Native communities” (p. 891). What is interesting is that the storytellers he translates were Elders in the year 1900. His translations take place almost a century later, when any and all of their original intentions to being recorded are unknown and belong in the year 1900. What is known is that everyone present at the time knew they were being recorded, and they were being paid for it. Bradley notes that Bringhurst’s “belief that careful, attentive listening constitutes a form of respect” (p. 893). But for members of the Haida Nation today, they were offended that he did not consult their governing structures about his translation projects. Knowing that the original storytellers have long passed, there is no way for clan or family storytelling protocols about these stories to be understood and followed, and because of colonization, there is no recourse because these kinds of protocols are not included in the dominant society’s copyright laws (Bradley, 2007).

So, what can I learn from these examples of intercultural exchanges? I can learn from the content in the stories, first of all. The stories shared were chosen by the Indigenous storyteller to be shared. I need to pay attention to that. I think that many Indigenous peoples are generous and willing to share their stories with non-Indigenous peoples. Many partnerships in anthologies, editing and writing already exist, and more are likely to follow (Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008; Moses et al, 2013).

Next, it is important to look at how the writer/editor is connected to the Indigenous community that they are borrowing from. Yes, I know that is too gentle a word. Many others would use the word stealing. Ultimately, it is important to do our research on everyone involved and think critically on what and how it is being shared. Who is the writer/editor? What is their relationship/partnership with Indigenous peoples? Once the words are published, it is the reader who will read and interpret the content from whichever literary tradition they choose. As Indigenous scholars and writers, we can encourage readers to learn about the Indigenous peoples/cultures for context, but how the reader will relate to the story is going to be up to them. I suppose I am directing these questions towards you, dear reader. I am aware of these tensions, and I think that anyone who listens or reads Indigenous stories, also needs to be aware that these tensions exist.

I think it is also understood that we can all learn from each other in one way or another. Although learning the language is not an immediate part of this project, I need to believe that I can learn more about O mushkego worldviews when I learn the language more fully. If that is what I believe, is it more acceptable for me to say I can learn and absorb these worldviews through language acquisition than a non-Indigenous person who learns the language and lives in the culture for a period of time? I believe that these language related to identity struggles is one of the main struggles for many of us who are trying to relearn the languages of our ancestors: the state powers that hold us down are also the powers that force us to resist the many disguises of cultural appropriation. As Indigenous peoples, we must protect our stories for our peoples. And until these power dynamics are no longer in our society, the struggle will remain.

## Loss of Culture in Storytelling Research

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples documented the way the lives of Indigenous peoples on this land have rapidly changed in the last 150 years (Canada, 1996). The Assembly of First Nations (1994) has determined a list of impacts from IRS experiences which are the “loss of memory, innocence, meaning, family, connection, language, childhood, feeling, pride, community, identity, trust, confidence, spirit, skills, morality, life, and control” (p. 167). One of the everyday impacts of IRS is the roles that people have in family structures. Gitxsan scholar Jane Smith (2004) explored the impacts of Residential Schools on two Gitxsan survivors and found that before Residential Schools, it was the grandparents that instructed the children how to live a good life in the world. Once the children were separated from their families and put into these institutions, the influence of parents and grandparents were interrupted and/or silenced.

One of the most energetic assimilationist strategies included the conversion to Christianity. The Churches were willing to administer the IRS for the conversion access to thousands of Indigenous children (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). Hernandez (2003) shares that the religious dominance of Christianity relegated Indigenous spiritual practices to the ‘other’ status and not worthy of the Western populace nor the Indigenous peoples who were converting to Christianity. In his memoir, *Up Ghost River: A Chief's Journey Through the Turbulent Waters of Native history*, Omushkego Cree activist and writer, Edmund Metatawabin (2015) writes that his great-grandfather was taken away for performing a sweat lodge ceremony and he was *never* seen again. “And then the generations never talked about it. There was a

fear of ‘being targeted by the police or stigmatized by the town’ (p. 243). The elimination of cultural practices and silence that followed is an example of the attitude that went into the *Indian Act* policy of forbidding Indigenous ceremonial practices. Metatawabin’s family and community’s silence give us some insight into the fallout of the implementation of these oppressive policies.

Cree Scholar and Canadian Senator Margo Greenwood (2013) noted that during this conversion period, many Christian Indigenous individuals chose to “take what is good and leave the rest behind” (p. 104), including Omushkego Cree storyteller, Louis Bird (2007). He says,

I still use the religion that they have taught me, as much as I can. Try to follow its rule, try to live by it. I shall add a little bit about a certain negative effect upon other young people that I went to school with, especially the women, and also the ones who have got mad at the residential schools, they have denied their Catholic church, they went to join the other churches or tried to go back to the traditional practices. Totally opposite. But I didn’t get that way. I stayed with my upbringing. (p. 54)

Conversely, in their study, Canadian teacher Maryam Moayeri and Gitksan Scholar, Jane Smith found that other IRS survivors rejected Christianity after they left and never entered a Church again (Moayeri & Smith, 2010). With the variability of human experiences there were different outcomes for different IRS survivors when it comes to the Christian faiths.

There were four denominations of Christian churches in the small town of Moosonee where I grew up. I was raised Catholic, and my mother and grandparents

were devout Catholics, along with many other community members who were their age. I have noticed that the different belief systems has created a cultural and generation gap between the youth who reject Christianity and the older generations who still practice these faiths. In the Hudson Bay Lowland communities, Omushkego peoples need to understand some of these histories to possibly bridge the gap with those who are choosing to return and (re)awaken Omushkego spiritual practices.

Another aspect of culture loss was the reservation system and people's relationship to land. When thinking of land, Anishinaabe-Métis scholar, Patricia D. McGuire (2010) notes that knowing where we come from gives us a solid foundation. Being able to say who you are is critical in understanding how we think about ourselves in this country and on this land. It becomes important then to be able to situate ourselves within the historical, political, and social contexts on these lands. Although Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred and Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel (2005) make it clear that Indigenous peoples have been and continue to be shaped by the political context of past and contemporary colonialism, part of our resistance to being defined and relegated to the margins is "remembering ceremony, returning to homelands and liberation from the myths of colonialism" (p. 601). For now, in this project, the return to the stories of where the participants came from reflects these experiences of their lives through ongoing struggles with colonialism. This is important because the relentless movement of 'progress' contributes to various resource extraction projects that continue to impact Indigenous peoples in Canada today (Myette & Riva, 2021). If Indigenous peoples connection to land lessens, it might be easier to push through resource extraction projects that harm the environment.

## Finding Our Way Back Through Stories

Cree health advocate, Shelley Goforth (2007) found in her survey of research that

according to the literature the key to healing from residential school abuse, and its intergenerational effects, lies in the area of reclaiming identity (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Waldrum, 1997). Reclaiming Aboriginal identity means recovering traditional values, beliefs, philosophies, ideologies, and approaches, and adapting them to the needs of today (INAC- P&R; Proulx & Perrault, 2000). This reclamation process encompasses both individual and collective identity. (p. 23)

I look to Iseke Barnes (2004) again who notes that recovering our individual identity is a productive form of resistance to ongoing colonialism. In my own struggles with identifying within the academy, Quechua scholar, Sandy Grande (2015) reminds me that “[i]n recognition-based actions, Native people are ‘recognized’ but, it is the settlers who are the ones recognizing and naming and the power remains with them” (p.5). These processes exist within the hegemony of Western culture and “only facilitates taking Native people farther away from Nativeness and assists Natives in their dispossession – often with their consent” (p.5). So, how can Indigenous peoples exist within these contexts differently? Mohawk scholar, Daniel Henhawk (2013) turns to ‘counter stories’ which can change the dominant story and therefore we can challenge Indigenous peoples’ marginality in this Canadian dominant world.

Anishinaabe scholar, Lana Ray (2016) shows us another way through crafting and beading to reclaim identity. Ray started beading and uses beading as a medium for the work that she does in community. What she found was that the activity was a place



where teachings and knowledge transmission happen, and community relationships were forged and strengthened. For my well-being during my PhD journey, I unknowingly at the time, followed Ray's example and started to entrench myself in artistic Omushkego endeavours. I transformed an old pair of my daughter's jeans into a beautiful bag with Indigenous designed fabric to hold my sage and later, my beading projects. I started beading more regularly – I finished my first pair of moccasins for my partner, Nancy, and in so doing, I am continuing a family tradition. I maintain contacts with my relatives in Peawanuck, Ontario who still hunt caribou and traditionally cure and tan the hides. I also initiated family Cree language lessons on Sunday afternoons – even though I am not a fluent Cree speaker. I have heard Cree rhythms and intonations all my life and I do know some of the language. I resolved to teach my family what I know, and then we could learn together from there. My mother and aunt could supplement our lessons when we are gathered for family dinners/visits. Finally, I decided to allow myself the time to write my creative stories one day of the week. Once I had done all these activities, and especially gifted myself the last tribute of writing, I could face the academy and stand on my ground and do what I needed to do to continue – because I was unsure of how Indigenous knowledge production and transfers exist in their natural forms and activities outside of living off the land in my traditional territories. I am far from home; therefore, I needed to immerse myself in cultural activities that reinforced my Omushkego culture during this journey.

To resist this domination in our daily lives and ultimately over the land, I turned again to Restoule et al (2013) who found that Indigenous peoples, and specifically Omushkego peoples “need to bring generations together to share, use and deepen

[Cree] knowledge at [this] critical point in the people's history as external forces seek to impose a different meaning of land and its 'utility'" (p.71). Non-Indigenous and self-proclaimed agent of change, Kristy A. Belton (2010) noted that Indigenous peoples still must fight for their lands, to practice their customs and beliefs, especially when these lands are now part of globalization and economics beyond these borders. What has occurred is that "entire communities often become separated from their common past and each other" (p. 192). These continual changes to 'land as resource' means that "Indigenous peoples are still fighting to retain lands, customs, beliefs in the face of ...globalization" (p.193). That is because whatever affects the land, will affect stories and vice versa.

Rowe et al (2019) contend that when Indigenous peoples from an oral culture lose the deep stories, parts of the culture that are connected to land and people at the local level are lost. Knowing about this loss is especially important because as Andrews and Buggy (2008) have learned from engaging with subarctic peoples in the Northwest Territories, these living landscapes are part of Indigenous cultural heritage and being. Hernandez (2003) also found that knowledge reflected in stories contained local environmental knowledge that is intertwined with social and spiritual lives of Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, White (2018) notes just like McLeod (2007) that location and places on land become mnemonic devices. In this way, places hold histories and being in these locations, or bringing them to mind, bring the past into the present. Donald Fixico (2003), who is a member of the Sac and Fox Nation, also mentions the mutability of time in storytelling, whereby stories can even transcend listener, storyteller, and content through time in ways incomprehensible to Western ideologies.

Archibald (2008) shares how Cree writer and scholar, Beth Cuthand (1989) recognized how there is more than just stories and information being shared during storytelling and sharing: “there’s energy, there’s strength being transmitted from the storyteller to the listener and that is what’s important in teaching young people about their identity” (p. 84-85). This storytelling energy is what you can feel when you enter a room where people are gathered and looking at each other over tea or making something with their hands. Archibald (2008) states that

This energy is a source of power that feeds and revitalizes mind, heart, body, and spirit in a holistic manner. The strength of stories challenges me to think, to examine my emotional reaction to plot and characters, to question and reflect on my behaviours and future actions, and to appreciate a story’s connections to my spiritual nature. (p. 85)

Potawatomi-Lenapé scholar, Susan Dion (2009) had to recover this storytelling energy when finding Indigenous stories in archives and libraries, where stories and Indigenous voices were waiting, having been lost to the reader/listener. Dion acknowledges that storytelling is a social event, whereby the listener has a responsibility to find meaning, and the teller has the responsibility to share a relevant story for the listener(s). These recorded/written stories don’t have that same living energy because they are literary and there is a disconnection to the listener/reader. Dion notes that the lack of tangible personal energy brings a new responsibility to readers to examine their positionality and how that impacts their reading of these stories. We must ask ourselves as readers, why did we not hear these stories in our Canadian social studies or history classes?

The question she is raising is about the current reckoning that is going on with the Canadian history of Residential School atrocities (The Canadian Press Staff, 2022; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). In 2009 when she published *Braiding Histories*, the Canadian public was still not ready to hear these stories fully. But the more scholars and writers started to publish these stories (Archibald, 2008; Dion, 2009; Haig-Brown, 1988; Metatawabin, 2015; The Royal Canadian Geographic Society, 2018; Wagamese, 2012) the Canadian public and policy began to change. The Ontario Curriculum changed in 2013 to include talking about the Indian Act and Indian Residential Schools. And after May 2021, with the finding of unmarked graves at the site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School, Canada and the international community can no longer sustain nescience and do nothing (The Canadian Press Staff, 2022).

Moayeri and Smith (2010) observe that in her earlier study, Smith (2004) contends that “storytelling can become a powerful means to overcome the legacy of the residential school system and to instill the self-confidence and competence that will assist Aboriginal students in developing lives worth living in both First Nations and mainstream societies” (p. 415). As Moayeri and Smith (2010) explored the healing journey of two First Nations women, they discovered that “[t]heir unfinished stories cannot be completed until the hurts and fears of their childhoods are expressed” (p. 408). They also assert that the Elders’ “unfinished stories will make a difference to others who faced similar struggles and help them complete their stories” (p. 416). Therefore, stories are the beginning of our movement forward into healing or a better way of being. And it isn’t just from telling our stories, Judy Iseke (2013) says that “by

learning from stories and storytelling, we are part of the process of recovering from colonization and its effects and of remaking ourselves” (p. 572-3) and that Elders are an essential part of these processes of recovery and resistance (Iseke & BMJK, 2011). Hernandez (2003) also makes these links between stories and who we are as a collective people. Stories hold the knowledge of our cultures, and knowing your creator, as told in stories, is knowing yourself. In this sense, stories hold the teachings on how to be an Indigenous person.

In her dissertation, Nlakapamux writer and scholar, Shirley Stirling (1997) explored the challenges and resilience of their Nlakapamux oral tradition despite Residential School and cultural interruptions. She states,

In an oral culture where knowledge is held by living tradition bearers, what happens when the tradition bearers die without having passed their knowledge onto the next generation? Education takes place in classrooms with a B.C. curriculum, a Western school system with little or no sacred content of any kind, which is as it should be perhaps. Parents will want to impart their own values and sacred knowledge to their children. However, sacred gatherings, rituals, and ceremonies have been interrupted also. Many Nlakapamux converted to Catholicism and other Western religions. Family and national gatherings such as festivals of the traditional Nlakapamux have been disrupted by change. (p. 77)

Stirling also states, “Sometimes the Elders face the reality that their knowledge will die with them if they do not share it with someone who can record it in writing.” (p. 77). This imminent reality may be why so many Indigenous Elders have shared their stories with non-Indigenous writers/editors. It is important to note that Stirling also

published a children's book, *My name is Seepeetza* in 1992 which tells her story of being a child at the Kamloops Residential School. This children's story reflects what Moayeri and Smith (2010) learned from other Residential School survivors that telling these stories is healing. What followed, was that Stirling spent much of her adult life preserving the oral traditions and stories of Nlakapamux peoples and is a great example to follow.

Ojibwe Nurse and scholar, Roxanne Struthers, and American scholar, Cynthia Peden-McAlpine (2005) also acknowledge in their research among Indigenous populations that oral tradition "has been a mechanism of relaying and passing on information in Indigenous societies since time immemorial" (p. 1265). What can be done then with this interruption and silence? What happens to a family/people when the oral histories/culture are interrupted/absent/silent and replaced with Catholic or Christian stories and culture? As Stirling (1997) notes, people may become soulfully displaced and must work to find their way back. I grew up in a family with three siblings, and none of us are practicing Catholics as adults because of varying levels of cultural and/or personal disassociation with that belief system. There is now a cultural gap between the generations, and a need to find the stories of the 'in between' to bring the generations back together.

### **Thinking Critically About Our Stories**

It isn't just the stories of IRS that are missing. It is the personal stories and histories before and after those experiences that are missing. Dion's (2009) recovery of lost stories asks us to consider who we are as readers in relation to these stories. She

makes sure to say that “[t]he purpose of our stories is not to assign blame or guilt. They are about healing and recovery” (p. 48).

Perley (2014) understands what Indigenous individuals and peoples need to do for our cultural recovery very well. He uses humour and storytelling in his art to practice everyday “critical Indigeneity [which] are engaged practices of self-determination against the daily traumas of colonial domination of Indigenous peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 53). He states that “my daily practice of Indigenous experience is my manifesto for critical Indigeneity. It is a commitment to living an Indigenous Maliseet life dependent upon mutually affirming social relationships between Maliseet community members” (p. 53). Perley affirms in his manifesto that we must resist everything that is surrounding and bombarding us that is not Indigenous:

If we are to survive as Indigenous Peoples:

We must continue to practice living our traditions on our terms, in our homelands, in our belief systems.

We must resist colonial and settler society’s unrelenting domination and oppression of Indigenous Peoples and their worlds by living our respective Indigenous traditions.

We must practice acts of self-determination every single day.

We must practice critical Indigeneity. (p. 53)

Perley’s first note is in relation to land. It *is* important to know where Indigenous peoples fit in our own space on these lands. Perley offers a guide for activating our Indigeneity every day with purpose. By giving voice to our personal histories and stories, we are engaging in practices of critical Indigeneity.

One day while working in the First Peoples' Gallery at the Royal Ontario Museum in the summer of 2019, I spent an hour trying to explain Canadian history to a Swiss tourist. She was trying to understand how Indigenous peoples have been and continue to be treated on these lands. She said that she just does not understand how people could 'give up' their lands because Switzerland has not been colonized and controlled by outside forces. I tried to explain that the government used influence and RCMP officers to take the children to erase Indigenous memories of the culture, governance systems, and treaties. And as Indigenous peoples and Canadians, we are now living with the many negative consequences of these oppressive and enacted legislation in the *Indian Act*. She finally asked me, "Do you have hope for a better future for your peoples?"

I told her, "I have no other choice but to have hope because the alternative is unthinkable."

These sentiments are also how I feel about my experience in academia and schooling. Anishinaabe author, Leanne Simpson (2013) writes, "I wonder how we can reconcile when the majority of Canadians do not understand the historic or contemporary injustice of dispossession and occupation, particularly when the state has expressed its unwillingness to make any adjustments to the unjust relationship" (p.21). And she further asks if Indigenous peoples are willing participants in processes that allow the state to bank on the suffering of the generations through their programs and projects, while at the same time are "criminalizing the inter-generational impacts of residential schools and ignoring the larger neo-assimilation project to which our children are now subjected?" (p. 22).



When I think about our modern schooling and changes in curriculum, I might believe as our ancestors did when they agreed to Treaty 9 which allowed for the education of Omushkego children to help their children in the way forward in this changing world. As Auger and Faries (2005) note that “The Band Chiefs and Councillors wanted their children educated so that they would fit into the changing economic order” (p.20). Shirley Stirling (1997) notes that this sentiment was shared in the West as well, when “Chief Yapskin, saw schooling as a benefit allowing the Nlakapamux to deal with the white man without weakness” (p. 134). At the time, these various leaders across these lands did not understand what would happen in Residential Schools, but they did understand the change that was coming relentlessly around them. But I must take heed from Simpson (2013) and Solomon’s (2022) warning that the younger generations are inundated with Canadian society and media and might think it is normal that they are learning Canadian focused content in school *in* English, and also engaged in social media *in* English, which is assimilating this current generation faster than when Jonathan Solomon and the participants in this project were in Residential Schools in the 1940s to the 1960s.

As Indigenous peoples, we are still one generation from extinction. This project explored the participants’ stories, and I discovered that changes in their life experiences during the early to late 20<sup>th</sup> century were apocalyptic: it was a shift from one way of living to an entirely new lifestyle that was unavoidable and socially complicated for 150+ years and continue to be for the generations that follow.

Documenting these stories and (re)creating storytelling practices within my community is my hope against full assimilation. I understood that there was going to be

challenges to working with language speakers. I hope that hearing these stories in Cree and English will establish a connection between the generations, which now includes you, dear reader, and into our collective futures for those who are following in their footsteps. Like many researchers before me, I want to eventually get to an understanding and practice where I can listen and understand these stories and conversations that took place in Cree and translate it myself.

### **Indigenous Ways of Knowing**

I am also finding my way through Indigenous ways of knowing, or epistemologies to guide my engagement with this journey. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that addresses ways of knowing and knowledge creation (Noddings, 2012; Wilson, 2008). In other words, how do we know what we know? Although I acknowledge that this branch of philosophy has a long-privileged Eurocentric/Western history, I will not compare my development of my understanding of Indigenous epistemologies with Eurocentric/Western epistemologies: I agree with Anishinaabe scholar, Kathy Absolon (2010) who states that, “[o]ur knowledge is valid, real and concrete” (p. 12), and any comparison may provide an opportunity for superior/inferior discourse. I choose to include my understandings of Indigenous ways of knowing in this dissertation because some of these stories will exemplify these epistemologies.

Indigenous epistemologies share many characteristics among the many Indigenous cultures across these lands and most include the following concepts:

- connections and relationality, including all things on the land, water, air and spirit (Absolon, 2010; Bird, 2007; Deloria, 1999; Ermine, 1995; Fixico, 2003)

- the importance of reflection of lived experiences with all things, including the land, air, and water (Bird, 2007; Deloria, 1999; Fixico, 2003; Ermine, 1995)
- the central role of stories and storytelling (Absolon, 2010; Archibald, 2008; Bird, 2005; Bird, 2007; Dion, 2009; Fixico, 2003; Lake-Thom, 1997; Norton-Smith, 2010)
- the culture is shaped by the language and vice versa (Archibald, 2008; Bird, 2005; Bird, 2007; Johnston, 2020)
- the importance of the personal (Archibald, 2008; Dion, 2009; Ermine, 1995; Wilson, 2008)
- and the use of the inner space, which includes intuition, dreams and ceremony to find answers and/or connections (Absolon, 2010; Archibald, 1997; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Deloria, 1999).

I will begin with our connections. In practice, Indigenous epistemology is most often *relational*. Shawnee philosopher, Thomas Norton-Smith (2010) exemplifies this in his book on American Indian philosophy by introducing himself and positioning himself: “Kiwaakomelepwa! niteskiΘo miyaaΘ natoke. Saawanwa nilla no’ki ni m’soma peleawa. Greetings to you all! My name is Owl Listening. I am Shawnee and my clan is Turkey” (p. 1). As you will have noticed, I have introduced myself in this dissertation in this way to acknowledge my relational ways of knowing and being as well. Furthermore, as Indigenous peoples, through sharing of who we are in relation to family, the places where we have been and our experiences, we will identify and sometimes authenticate to the listener/reader what we may know. Our relations are significant, and we need to

acknowledge our teachers and where our teachings come from (Marsden, 2005). Thus, Indigenous epistemological practices include 'referencing' your sources (relations) and is extremely important to validation as a knowledge keeper.

Indigenous relationality also extends beyond our physical relations: Absolon (2010) notes that Indigenous peoples engage with each other as spirit beings; and Fixico (2003), expands that to say that Indigenous people connect to the physical and metaphysical worlds; therefore, we act in ceremony when we follow Indigenous protocols and communication. The physical world refers to what we can observe through our physical senses, and the metaphysical world refers to intuition, reflection, dreams, and ceremonial experiences. Consequently, relationality acknowledges the natural world where cycles and interactions reveal that all things are related in the universe, and this often leads to metaphysical knowledge.

I also learned from Sioux scholar and author, Vine Deloria (1999) that, "[o]ur ancestors *observed* nature and perceived sets of relationships in the world. They used obscure correspondences to relate phenomena that appeared to be entirely separate and thereby derived a reasonably predictive knowledge about how the world works. Anomalies interested them and triggered their intuitional abilities" (emphasis in original, p. 11). The core of relationality is looking at how everything is connected. I was consciously aware (and perhaps subconsciously as well) to these ways of relationality throughout this project.

An obvious example of these connections takes place during Indigenous ceremonies all throughout North America: when anyone is present to hear the phrase 'all my relations', they are experiencing the concept of relationality. Deloria (1999) tells

us that “[i]n practice, it is a recognition that we are all connected [,] [b]ut few understand that the phrase also describes the epistemology of the Indian worldview, providing the methodological basis for the gathering of information about the world” (p. 52). When a person recognizes that there is a connection between oneself and every other entity in existence, it is the connection and not the individual that is important. It is a holistic worldview (Absolon, 2010; Deloria, 1999; Ermine, 1995; Fixico, 2003). Epistemology then becomes part of the moral fabric of everyday life because there is a responsibility to understanding and respecting how all things relate to one another and how maintaining the balance that exists within nature is part of *our* existence.

Therefore, it follows that Indigenous people did not devalue any experience. Every experience was included into the spectrum of knowledge of what is new and what is already stored and known (Deloria, 1999). Plains Cree knowledge teacher, Willie Ermine (1995) also suggests that the search for knowledge is not one where we can separate ourselves from the knowledge or the quest for knowledge. In this way, Indigenous epistemologies seek to find knowledge *through* every experience and people will recall knowledge in greater detail because of the entire experience, which includes emotions, colours, familiar sounds, and/or the people, beings and world that are involved (Deloria, 1999; Ermine, 1995; Fixico, 2003). Therefore, it is natural for me to include myself in this research project.

Furthermore, Indigenous epistemologies include *every* experience. “[W]e cannot ‘misexperience’ anything; we can only misinterpret what we experience. Therefore, in some instances we can experience something entirely new, and so we must be alert and try not to classify things too quickly” (Deloria, 1999, p. 46). It is the goal of a person

to learn to reflect and understand their experiences throughout their lifetime. This reflection will also happen through sharing and learning from others' experiences, and individual reflection, intuition, and dreams. All of these filter through the lens of experience, which happens through culture (Deloria, 1999; Ermine, 1995).

These knowledge systems transfer from Elder to youth through *story* (Absolon, 2010; Bird, 2007; Norton-Smith, 2010) and the teaching of this epistemology is part of the *creation* of it through storytelling:

Evidence of this belief system can be found in Native myths, legends, and stories. Here one can find reference to the animals and birds as 'people.' The Bear is our grandfather, Rattlesnake our aunt, Beaver our cousin, Eagle our uncle, Deer our sister, and Buffalo our brother. But in a deeper sense of ideology, they are not only our 'relations' but are also considered our teachers, protectors, guardians, supernatural aids, and sources of power and knowledge. This is not romanticism, it is reality...We communicate through praying, talking, singing, dancing, meditating, touching, smelling, and/or offering tobacco, herbal smoke, food, or some other gift to one of our relations. Since Nature's language is symbolic, it communicates back to us in a unique way, with natural symbols.

(Lake-Thom, 1997, p.8)

Norton-Smith (2010) explains how a "telling can put the experiences of the People into perspective, helping to make sense of the situation in which they find themselves. The performance is the vehicle for traditional knowledge and moral values, and it sometimes sees the future" (p. 65-66). Archibald (2008) and Dion (2009) also conveyed that storytelling is a shared social event to impart practical and life lessons.

Consequently, it is the responsibility of the storyteller to tell an appropriate story for the listener to hear and find meaning.

There are also rules about which stories to tell at which time and place, and to whom. Some Elders expressed to Archibald (2008) that the sacred stories need to be shared before they are lost, even though it might break these old rules and protocols. Bird (2005) also speaks of this urgency to save the legends, language, and culture of his Elders. He explains there are two kinds of stories: legends and oral stories. Legends are stories that have been part of Cree culture since time immemorial. Legends include lessons on living with all creatures in their environment and/or feature known characters like the trickster, Wasaykaychek, to teach moral lessons. Oral stories are things that have really happened to people in the past and the stories continue to be shared over the generations. It is with urgency that these legends and oral stories are being written down to preserve them. Both legends and oral stories were shared during this project and are explored in this dissertation.

Storytelling is more than a direct transfer of knowledge from the knower of an Elder to a receiver of knowledge in the youth or listener. To be a listener is also an important part of the oral tradition and they have just as much responsibility to find meaning in the story (Archibald, 2008; Dion, 2009; Fixico, 2003). As Fixico (2005) says, “[b]oth the storyteller and listener engage in reviving an experience of the past that becomes alive again, thereby transcending time from the past to the present. Both tenses of time blur, becoming one and the same” (p. 5). Together, they are (re)creating a vision of reality through the story in the minds of all the listeners present (Fixico, 2003; Ong, 1988). Thus, the worldview is continually (re)created and maintains Indigenous

epistemologies through telling *and* listening and eventual (re)telling. Moreover, the idea that time is not fixed is important to consider for Indigenous and other oral knowledge systems (Ong, 1988) because it is important to relate to the past, present and future generations. There is an obligation to teach future generations and embed the culture within Indigenous storytelling, epistemology, and relationality (Absolon, 2010; Lake-Thom, 1997). Thus, for me, I must reflect upon the participants' experiences now that I have connected to their worldview and experiences through them. These reflections are a small part of the intergenerational effects of the Indian Residential schools and our recovery from it.

Language is another aspect of epistemologies. Indigenous languages carry Indigenous epistemologies easily like a circle ball fitting into a circle hole. When Indigenous thought is forced into another language like English, it is a circle trying to fit into a square box. Some ideas will translate, but there is a lot of empty space that the Western square takes up all around to try to make it fit. C. Douglas Ellis is a linguist who has focused his studies on Cree since 1954. He points out that many Indigenous languages, like Cree are verb-based, and as such, the languages focus on how the world moves and interacts with people and all things (Ellis, 2000). Compare this with the noun-based English language and you have metaphors that are living in one language, which then become a word without a metaphor in English. In Omushkego Cree, for example, I have learned from family members that the phrase for chair is *tehtahpowin*. It translates as 'something that you sit on and is lifting you up'. The root verb, *tehtahshtah*, means 'put it on top'. To create the word chair (which would have happened at contact with Europeans), the Omushkego peoples had to look at the function, and so it also



means to sit up on top, and it is understood as a metaphor. Accordingly, for Omushkego Cree people, a noun is something that is also attached to an action and how we live our lives. Therefore, the chair is not just something that we sit on, but something that is lifting us up, and it is an expression of the human relation to the physical presence of the chair. Thus, in many Indigenous languages, relationality is implicit and does not need to be explained to be understood.

Another element to Indigenous epistemology is that it is *personal*. Cree scholar, Shawn Wilson (2008) writes that a “person cannot possibly know all of the relationships that brought about another’s ideas. Making judgement of [another’s] worth or values then is also impossible... Thus, egalitarianism and inclusiveness become not merely a norm but the epistemologically inevitable” (p. 92). Thus, Indigenous peoples have personal autonomy and integrity. Every individual has the right to live their life through their own experiences and it is their road to travel. The important action here for the individual is to *reflect* upon their experiences. Ermine (1995) refers to this knowledge as coming from an inner space, which becomes his/her subjective worldview. Thus, it is *through* the reflections from individual experiences that each person (re)creates his/her reality and knowledge, and it is through storytelling that knowledge is shared (Archibald, 2008; Dion, 2009).

The final element and perhaps the most important, and incidentally the most dissimilar to Western thinking, is that knowledge seekers learn to rely on *intuition* and other *inner space* experiences. Mohawk scholar, Marlene Brant Castellano (2000) identifies Indigenous knowledge as coming out of a number of sources, including teachings from Elders, observations, reflections gained from experiences, dreams,

visions, cellular memory and intuition. Dreams, visions, and reflections, have equal, if not more, value to physical experiences when creating Indigenous knowledge.

Absolon (2010) also points out that, “[t]he doorway to the inner space, where the ancestral knowledge sits, is through other realms via dreams, ceremonies, vision quests and rituals. The ancestors are there waiting to share their knowledge” (p. 78-79). Thus, it is through a variety of practices, which include culture, storytelling, language, reflection, and dreaming that an Indigenous person “can be said to travel from information to knowledge to wisdom” (Deloria, 1999, p. 14) and Indigenous knowledges and systems can be preserved in these inner spaces despite colonial practices which have tried to erase them (Ermine, 1995).

### **O mushkego Cree Epistemology**

As an O mushkego Cree individual, I must figure out what Indigenous, specifically O mushkego Cree, epistemology means to me. As I will show, all the above tenets of Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing also exist within the O mushkego Cree worldview.

Louis Bird and my family are from the same First Nation or O mushkego Cree community of Peawanuck, formerly Winisk. Louis Bird (2005, 2007) is a storyteller who has worked with scholars to document our culture through narrative and stories. I am grateful that he is engaging with people who are helping him preserve our knowledge systems by publishing his thoughts on stories and storytelling. It is through his published writings that I am able to confirm my connection to O mushkego Cree ways of knowing in academic form.

*Observation* and making *connections* are important elements to Omushkego epistemology and learning. Bird states (2007) “According to our ancestors, everything works in order, systematically. Nothing was overused, there was nothing that overextended its usefulness or its benefit to humans. We found a systematic way to survive in the area where we live, the Omushkego country” (p. 75). It is our understanding of our connections to the rhythms and cycles of life that are integral for surviving well and maintaining balance for the ecosystems that Omushkego peoples depend on. “Our ancestors understood each species and knew that they are all gifted. They also knew that a human is more highly gifted than animals. But not all people are equally gifted. Some were gifted just enough to survive” (Bird, 2007, p. 83).

Bird (2007) goes on to explain that “[i]n our code of ethics, or the principles in life, there was a thing called *maahchihew*. It means that, when you do something wrong or out of the ordinary to an animal, it will stop being available to you. And that is *maahchihew*” (Bird, 2007, p. 76). Thus, within our epistemology, balance among our relationships with nature and the animals that help us to survive is imperative. Recognizing the inherent value in the connection between everything is how we make it spiritual.

I am, in some ways, the embodiment of these Omushkego epistemic practices. Every person, and every place that I have come to know had something to give and I had something to share in return. The trick to our Omushkego Cree knowledge is to understand the meaning of each individual experience or interaction and accept that meanings may change over time with more experience. An example occurred when I was considering doing the PhD program: the only person available to supervise me

happened to be friends with a person that I was connected to through HIV research at the time. They were in the same Master's program when they were coming up. This kind of coincidence is meaningful to Indigenous ways of being and knowing. I have learned to rely on intuitive knowledge; therefore, I took these connected relationships as a sign to pursue this degree at this institution at this time.

The Omushkego Cree people lived communally within small family groups, but their individual epistemology was their own. The place where they went out onto the land becomes sacred. It is the place(s) where they communicate with spirit and is a place for reflection (Bird, 2007). Getting to know oneself and their place within creation was just as important as hunting and gathering for food. Bird (2007) also makes the distinction between the physical and metaphysical ways of being. He states, "Our ancestors' physical makeup is fifty percent, and the next fifty percent is a spiritual belief, that's what gives them strength, that's what gives them to be independent" (p. 7).

Omushkego spirituality comes from our relationship with the Earth:

the ground is very sacred to them. That is why they say the ground is sacred because there's places, particular places where they go by themselves alone...to commune with their spiritual belief. There is a place they used to go to where is nobody else walk on...There is no place that our ancestors have not used as their temple, I mean the church, or a place where to pray...so this is what the Christian missionaries did not understand. And so is today the politics, the major society doesn't understand that, and they don't understand why the Native has to have so much land. (p. 5)

Auger and Faries (2005) also share in the *History of Education in Nishnawbe Aski Nation* that it is the connections between the spirits, animals, land, hunters and other families that ensure survival through reciprocal obligations in their relationships. The hunters are obligated to the spirits of the animals that they kill, and the hunters share the large kills with other families, thereby ensuring their survival and creating opportunities for obligations for the receiving families to provide meat in the future when they are successful in hunting. It is understood that families need to take care of the balances among the spirits, land, animals, and humans to survive. I take these teachings of reciprocity and incorporated them into this project. I aimed to engage with my participants and community in a way that honours and enacts these ideals. Although our time together happened virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic, I endeavoured to make each participant comfortable and ready to share on the day of our meeting. I used the computer technology that was available to me, and I assisted participants with their iPads when they were logging in. I asked them the question prompts, but always followed their direction once they started sharing. I will also have a feast and presentation in Timmins as part of the dissemination with participants and community members. All of these, with respect and responsibility in mind, guided my choices and writing in this dissertation.

Another element of Indigenous worldviews that is shared with Omushkego ways is to obtain knowledge through dreams:

To survive, our ancestors acquired special powers, which we call *mitewin*. They did this through dreaming. It is in dreams that they find an answer to a question. Once they began to seek a deeper knowledge they could find answers in their

dreams. So they would begin a dream quest to allow them to seeking answers in dreams. And those who managed to do that became *mitew* and passed on their knowledge to the next generation. The first step in the procedure of acquiring knowledge was to find a dream, or to create a dream. This is how you found something that was supposed to be understood in life. (Bird, 2007, p. 74-75)

When a person needed to know something about nature, or what was going to happen, they would use *mitewin* to find an answer. Some people were more gifted to have power within their dreams, but it also took practice and discipline. It is shared through stories that the rituals Omushkego people use now, such as the shaking tent, or the singing with a hand drum, these were things that were learned through dreams (Bird, 2007). These metaphysical elements and avenues gives me hope that our cultural traditions are still accessible as Brant Castellano (2000) suggests through our dreams and cellular memory.

My two main guideposts in the (re)creation of Omushkego Cree epistemologies starts with the language and storytelling. In *The Spirit Lives in the Mind*, Bird (2007) states that

We take the stories that have actually been brought down for generations because they have a value. Even though some of them sound horrible and terrible to different cultures, for the Omushkego culture it is a necessary type of teaching system. It saves lives. It saves the families. It saves the children. It allows people to have a serious understanding about where they live. These stories are about shamanism (in English). As humans, when we listen to the exciting parts of a story – whether the story is bad or good – we always listen to

parts that are horrible and terrible. We remember them vividly, and we like those kinds of stories. (Bird, 2007, p. 4)

Stories are “here to help us to understand the Omushkego cultural experience and also to show our Omushkego history” (Bird, 2007, p. 4-5). These stories could be legends or oral stories which are individual or family histories that have been maintained and passed down over the generations (Auger & Faries, 2005; Bird, 2007).

Thus, I have learned that many Indigenous cultures share epistemological practices with the Omushkego Cree and therefore, can still live within me. It is vital as Indigenous people that we (re)create our stories and (re)claim our existence on this land (Simpson, 2013) and we can use storytelling to challenge cognitive imperialism (Battiste, 2013) and (re)connect with our ancestors and (re)vision our future for our children and communities. Our lives as Indigenous peoples are holistic and our storytelling is a part of the systems that ensure that our living culture transfers from one generation to the next (Auger & Faries, 2005); therefore, I have been focused on how reclaiming oral histories as individuals, family and community members can contribute to the preservation of Cree and other Indigenous cultures.

## Chapter Three

### Methods

This community work is important and needs to be done. It is necessary for our communities to experience healing from the intergenerational effects of colonization and IRS. It was also part of what I need to understand as an Omushkego scholar. How do I engage in oral storytelling practices? How will I contribute to cultural resurgence and ongoing conversations? I am one voice in a chorus, and this project brought more Omushkego community voices into the dialogue that Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have begun. The start of my contributions was to answer these four research questions:

- *What childhood stories pre-existed Indian Residential Schools for Omushkego Elders and community members in Northern Ontario?*
- *What Omushkego cultural knowledge and/or themes can we (re)learn and (re)claim from these stories and storytelling experiences with Omushkego Elders and community members?*
- *What are some key outcomes for individual Omushkego community members when they have shared and (re)created oral storytelling and language cultural practices within our community?*
- *How can Omushkego people identify and assert cultural reclamation in our lives and work as Omushkego people in Ontario, and by extension, Canada?*

In this Chapter I discuss the methods used in this project, as well as my various methodological approaches and influences. I begin with the project details, which



include the origin of the project idea, community engagement, and design. I then describe the various processes of sifting and organizing the data, as well as practical issues that arose during the project. Subsequently, I offer a summary of each of the rest of the chapters before I move on to my methodological frameworks. I mainly used an Indigenous-focused autoethnographic-approach combined with Indigenous ways of knowing, specifically relationality and connection, to guide my direction and ethical choices. I also used storytelling as a research method, where I used storytelling as a focal point for knowledge transmission. I used these methods alongside the Indigenous research methodological framework of a talking circle. Other methodological influences include the Conversational Method by Margaret Kovach (2010) and the idea of 'mutual thinking' by Jo-ann Archibald (2008). I also describe my use of the Sacred Circle to visually represent my analyses and processes. Ultimately, all of these approaches are relational as you will see throughout this discussion.

### **Project Details**

As an Indigenous scholar I make every effort to respect the teachings of reciprocity and connection. Our ancestors lived in such a way that my relatives living in the Hudson Bay Lowlands are now still able to live on this land and use its resources (Auger & Faries, 2005). It is now our turn to give this same gift to our future generations. Omushkego peoples would not be here if it was not for our ancestors, and the survival of our future relations and cultures depends on our actions today and in the days to come. These teachings remind us that we are all connected through time and in the spaces where we live.

This project was born out of discussions with family members after my aunt and I attended the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's (RWB) performance in Toronto of *Coming Home Star: Truth and Reconciliation*. I was invited by my aunt, who is a Residential School survivor, to go to the Friday evening performance. While I was afraid I might not be able to handle the emotions wrapped up in the evening, as I was just learning to face IRS histories, I could not refuse such an invitation. It was a momentous evening full of different kinds of emotions. The most profound to me was the feeling that the event was so *public*. The non-Indigenous couple beside me had a conversation during intermission about the differences between the bodies of the RWB dancers and the National Ballet dancers, and it felt so trivial to me: I was glad that my aunt was out getting a snack and did not overhear it. Even now, I am still trying to understand my feelings about attending the performance.

I know that these artistic representations of Indigenous stories matter. I talked with family members about changing my direction of this dissertation towards reclaiming storytelling practices within our community. They agreed it was a good idea and suggested that having a talking or sharing event in Timmins would be welcome. I contacted the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre (OCCC) in Timmins. They are one of the cultural hubs for the Nishnawbe Aski Nations (NAN) which include the First Nations within the Treaty 9 territory. The OCCC has a library of resources, material cultural items and provide translation services, as well as hosting local events and cross-cultural education for the Timmins region. I thought that their agency, which represents all the Omushkego communities in the Western half of the Hudson Bay Lowlands was a good community touchpoint. There was not the budget to fly into any of the coastal

communities and engage with local Chiefs and councils. Dian Riopel, who was the Executive Director at the time, was open to the idea and willing to provide anything that I needed: guidance, a place to meet, a place for dissemination, publication, or anything else of which we could think. On a visit to Timmins, I had a follow up in-person meeting with the Executive Director and her assistant. She invited and shared the information with staff. We decided that we would do recruitment through the OCCCs networks and that the event would be for Elders local to Timmins. We also planned to have an Elder and/or support person on the premises for support.

There would be one storytelling session to collect stories from the participants which would be audio recorded. I would transcribe those stories for the participants. This session would also include a reflection on the sharing of stories as well. Then we would have a follow-up event for the public at the OCCC where participants would share their chosen stories to the people gathered. Subsequently, we would have a follow up session to reflect on what these storytelling sessions meant for the participants. I also wanted to give the participants an option to have their story published at a later date if they wished. We could do that through the OCCC or find another publisher. The idea of publishing these stories is important because the storytellers would have agency over their own stories that they want to share with the world to preserve their oral stories.

The Research Ethic's Board (REB) approved the project, and it was going to take place in Timmins in April 2020. But, of course, that could not happen because of the global pandemic of COVID-19. I consulted with my supervisor and the OCCC, and it was decided that we would move the project online and use Zoom meeting technology. The REB approved the change to Zoom virtual meetings. The original plan was to

include eight to ten participants in person, but with the challenges with Zoom and the pandemic, we were successful in recruiting three willing participants. The use of technology was a barrier for other Elders to join, and even then, one of the three participants would only talk on the phone, which led to individual conversations with her and Zoom meetings with the other two participants. As you can see in Table 1, the move to Zoom also allowed us to have more than one storytelling session: we had four zoom storytelling meetings, including two to three participants; three phone calls with one participant; a community zoom Storytelling Event, with three participants and seven community guests, who happened to have grown up in Moosonee or Timmins; and a follow-up reflection Zoom meeting with two participants. There were invitations sent to community members known directly to the participants, and three responded and joined, who had multiple guests in their individual homes who were 'present' in the zoom Storytelling Event. This storytelling event replaced the planned in-person event that would have taken place at the OCCC. Despite these pandemic challenges, I made every effort to adapt these practices to both honour their relational connections, but also to honour where these practices came from.

Table 1

*Order of Sessions*

Session	Participant(s)	Communication method	Duration (h:m:s)
One	P1 & P2	Zoom	1:17:11
Two	P1 & P2	Zoom	1:12:11
Three	P1, P2 & P3	Zoom and phone	1:54:44
Four	P1 & P2	Zoom	2:10:18
Five	P3	Phone	1:02:34

Six	P3	Phone	00:04:45
Seven	P3	Phone	00:28:47
Storytelling Event	P1, P2, P3, and 7 Guests	Zoom and phone	2:13:11
Follow up	P1 & P2	Zoom	00:57:27

Although it is antithetical to Indigenous methodologies, due to situational and institutional issues communicating these practices, in order to do this project, I had to adhere to REB requirements in which the participants are given pseudonyms in this dissertation. I will give a broader introduction to the participants in the next chapter. For now, here is some general information. All the participants are women. The pseudonyms are:

Participant One is Tetawin (b. 1943)

Participant Two is Majitch (b. 1954)

Participant Three is Omisimâw (b. 1933 - 2023)

Seven Guests attended the Storytelling Event (birth dates unavailable, but they are all younger than the participants)

I decided that we would use the list of questions outlined, but that we would also allow for natural conversation flow as well because the participants did not have a practice of sharing the stories of their lives in English, if at all. These questions were used as a prompt to get them thinking about stories that they could share during this project. With each successive meeting, the participants started to come prepared to share stories that had been on their mind since the last meeting; thereby developing

and reinforcing storytelling pedagogy from their childhoods. The sharing circle questions were:

**Storytelling Circle Number One:**

1. Please share a story from your childhood.
2. Please share a story from your homeland.
3. Please share a story you would like to tell.

**Sharing Circle Reflection Number One:**

1. How did that feel to share your stories in the circle today?
2. How are these stories connected to who you are? Did your parents share stories with you in your childhood? And/or did you share stories with your children and/or younger relatives?
3. Is there anything else you would like to share about this experience?

**Community Storytelling Event:**

1. Each participant will share a story of their choosing.

**Sharing Circle Reflection Number Two:**

1. How did that feel to share your stories with the community?
2. How does a storytelling event like this shape or influence your Omushkego identity/experience?
3. How do community events like this impact your well-being? How do you think storytelling or other social activities can promote healing in our communities? Have you experienced these types of events before?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share about this experience?

**Prompt Questions:**

1. Have you worked for or with an Aboriginal or Indigenous agency in your lifetime?
2. How important is it to you to be connected with Aboriginal or Indigenous peoples in your community?
3. How do you share your lived experiences with your community?
4. How important do you think it is to tell your story to your children? Your community? Canada?

The participants were generous with their time and enthusiastic to share their stories. There were some language challenges that the participants were willing to help sort out. For example, the participants are known to each other, so when the oldest of the participants, Omisimâw could not hear because she was on the phone, or needed clarification, sometimes the other participant, Tetawin would speak to her in Cree for clarity. It should be noted that during the third Zoom session, Omisimâw joined the Zoom meeting over the phone and told her story entirely in Cree. Unlike Ahenakew and Wolfhart's (1992) translation work, I then had to trust the other participant to translate this story into English. Tetawin spent most of her career translating both in person and in written documents, so she was very capable and willing to do this. I relied on the principle of reciprocity and trusted that she would translate this story to the best of her ability. Once translated, this story was validated by Omisimâw, who agreed that it was translated well. Allowing her to tell her story in Cree was the best course of action. As Ahenakew and Wolfhart (1992) assert, "asking for reminiscences to be told in English is worse: not only do many older people not speak English at all, but even when they do,

their command may not be equal to what they might wish to say” (p. 33). I will further discuss language use within the sessions in greater detail in the next chapter.

Once the project transcriptions were done, I had a significant amount of data. I used NVivo software to put the stories into codes. I read through each session transcript and created codes based on topics. For clarity, I will use the word topic from now on. As you can see in Table 2, I had created many topics whenever there was new content in their stories.

Table 2

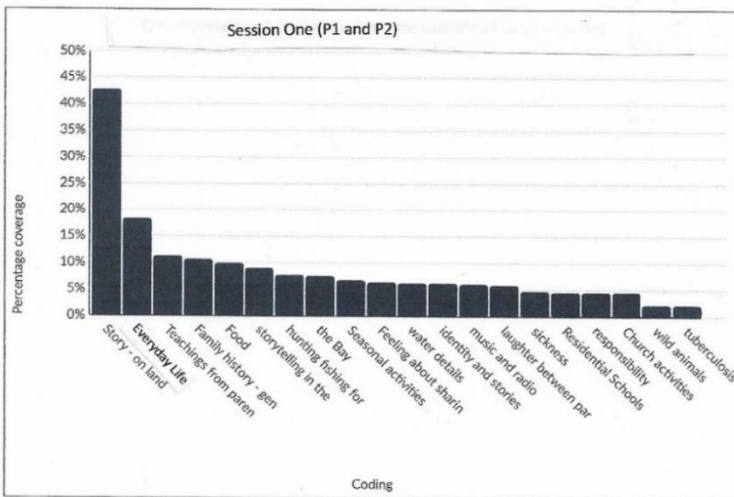
*List of codes/topics*

Activities while we are in session	Generation stories	Residential Schools
Army Base	Hunting fishing for food	Responsibility
Change	Identity and stories	Seasonal activities
Children at play	In the language	Sickness
Church activities	Land place names and connection	Sounds
Community and Connections	Language use	Stories
Day school or high school	Language	Story – on Land
Everyday life	Laughter between participants	Story from book
Events	Leaving the north	Storytelling in the family
Family Activities	Life necessities	Teachings from parents
Family dogs	Memories	The Bay
Family history – genealogy	Moon and stars	Tuberculosis
Feeling about sharing stories	Music and radio	Water details
Flood	Navigating and knowing where to go	Weather
Food		Wild animals
		Work



Funny story	New technology  People	
-------------	------------------------------	--

Figure 1  
*Session One: Topics percentage of time*



For example, every story that included living on the land was copied and put into the topic, Story - on Land. Another example is every time a Cree phrase was spoken, I copied it and put it into a topic called Language Use. I tried to follow the data and create topics that were distinct enough to warrant

their own topic. Once I started the analysis, I realised that the Everyday life category was too broad. I had included stories of living on the land in Everyday life during my first NVivo session. I knew that I had to go back and recode Stories of living on the land or connecting with the land into its own topic. I did not remove any of the coded stories that were already in Everyday life, therefore, as you can see the example of a chart from Session One in Figure 1, Story on Land then becomes the most significant topic. There is overlap between Stories on land and Everyday life, but the main difference is that a story takes place on land/nature, and Everyday life may include living on the land, but it can also refer to living in towns and cities, including work and community engagement. Considering this adjustment, my focus and analysis will focus on the clearly defined

topics. As a researcher, I also made the decision to keep Session Six in the data set. Even though the conversation lasted only 4 minutes, 45 seconds, there were significant statements about Everyday life and Community and Connection that contributed to the analysis in this project.

I chose to focus on the stories and topics that were most common during the sessions, because as discussed in Chapter Two, the storyteller chooses the story that they want to share, indicating that these stories were important for the participants to tell. The highest incidence for topics are in Table 3. The individual stories and lower incidence topics were still important to those storyteller choices, but I was restrained by the limitations of the length of this dissertation.

The four highest percentage of talking times of topics are shown in yellow, green, blue, and pink, so that you can see how these rankings changed through each session. I also included three topics which are thematically significant, but not as statistically significant topics at the bottom of the chart below the blue line. Observations on main topics and topics of note are discussed in Chapter Four.

I also had to decide whether I was going to do analyses on individual storyteller's stories or focus my analyses on the themes that emerged. I decided to focus on the themes that emerged because they were often common to all three, but in varying degrees, which was interesting and worth noting. For example, Omisimâw's experience with the Winisk village was that it was a place that they went for a short time in the summer to visit the Hudson Bay trading post, take part in Catholic sacraments, like baptisms, and visit with family and friends. Tetawin's experience with the Winisk village was much the same except that they stayed a little bit longer in the summer, and then

moved to Winisk in her later childhood with the introduction of the Army Base that was built across the river in 1955.

Table 3

*Incidence of Topics/Themes*

Topic/Theme	Session One P1 and P2 [1:17:11]	Session Two P1 and P2 [1:12:11]	Session Three P1, P2, & P3 [1:54:44]	Session Four P1 and P2 [2:10:18]	Session Five After lunch with P3 [1:02:34]	Session Six Afternoon with P3 [00:4:45]	Session Seven Evening with P3 [00:28:47]	Storytelling Event P1, P2, P3 and Guests [2:13:11]	Session Nine Follow up P1 and P2 [00:57:21]
Everyday life	2 <sup>nd</sup> 18.2%	1 <sup>st</sup> 38.88%	1 <sup>st</sup> 33.87%	1 <sup>st</sup> 48.24%	1 <sup>st</sup> 55.46%	5 <sup>th</sup> 15.88%	1 <sup>st</sup> 28.96%	1 <sup>st</sup> 56.55%	5 <sup>th</sup> 18.85%
Story on Land	1 <sup>st</sup> 42.78%	5 <sup>th</sup> 12.18%	2 <sup>nd</sup> 27.69%	9 <sup>th</sup> 5.13%	2 <sup>nd</sup> 43.35%	n/a	6 <sup>th</sup> 13.70%	2 <sup>nd</sup> 37.62%	6 <sup>th</sup> 18.2%
Identity in stories	12 <sup>th</sup> 6.13%	2 <sup>nd</sup> 26.96%	17 <sup>th</sup> 4.54%	4 <sup>th</sup> 25.49%	16 <sup>th</sup> 4.07%	n/a	2 <sup>nd</sup> 28.12%	11 <sup>th</sup> 4.97%	4 <sup>th</sup> 19.35%
Storytelling in family	6 <sup>th</sup> 8.91%	3 <sup>rd</sup> 14.68%	3 <sup>rd</sup> 27.03%	7 <sup>th</sup> 7.32%	3 <sup>rd</sup> 39.99%	n/a	4 <sup>th</sup> 25.29%	19 <sup>th</sup> 1.25%	10 <sup>th</sup> 2.37%
Family history	4 <sup>th</sup> 10.57%	4 <sup>th</sup> 13.01%	15 <sup>th</sup> 6.01%	18 <sup>th</sup> 2.59%	8 <sup>th</sup> 9.13%	n/a	3 <sup>rd</sup> 25.77%	7 <sup>th</sup> 8.27%	3 <sup>rd</sup> 19.93%
In the language	21 <sup>st</sup> 1.87%	7 <sup>th</sup> 10.29%	4 <sup>th</sup> 17.81%	15 <sup>th</sup> 3.3%	11 <sup>th</sup> 6.86%	n/a	10 <sup>th</sup> 8.57%	6 <sup>th</sup> 9.53%	7 <sup>th</sup> 6.97%
Community and Connection	n/a	n/a	n/a	2 <sup>nd</sup> 27.37%	21 <sup>st</sup> 0.68%	2 <sup>nd</sup> 30.24%	n/a	n/a	2 <sup>nd</sup> 58.27%
Teachings from parents	3 <sup>rd</sup> 12.83%	10 <sup>th</sup> 14.66%	5 <sup>th</sup> 15.97%	19 <sup>th</sup> 2.27%	5 <sup>th</sup> 12.37%	n/a	5 <sup>th</sup> 18.19%	21 <sup>st</sup> 0.96%	15 <sup>th</sup> 0.24%
Feeling about sharing	10 <sup>th</sup> 6.39%	17 <sup>th</sup> 3.26%	10 <sup>th</sup> 14.24%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9 <sup>th</sup> 7.16%	1 <sup>st</sup> 75.67%
Laughter between participants	14 <sup>th</sup> 5.78%	6 <sup>th</sup> 10.40%	20 <sup>th</sup> 1.59%	10 <sup>th</sup> 4.52%	9 <sup>th</sup> 7.64%	4 <sup>th</sup> 30%	9 <sup>th</sup> 8.98%	5 <sup>th</sup> 11.13%	12 <sup>th</sup> 0.49%
Residential Schools	16 <sup>th</sup> 4.55%	12 <sup>th</sup> 6.69%	n/a	13 <sup>th</sup> 3.36%	n/a	n/a	17 <sup>th</sup> 1.9%	8 <sup>th</sup> 7.43%	9 <sup>th</sup> 3.71%
Sickness	9 <sup>th</sup> (sick + TB) 6.83%	n/a	14 <sup>th</sup> 6.5%	16 <sup>th</sup> 3.22%	18 <sup>th</sup> 3.89%	n/a	16 <sup>th</sup> 1.81%	15 <sup>th</sup> 1.92%	n/a

Majitch's experience of the Winisk Village was that when she was a toddler, the family started staying in the Winisk village all year round because of the wage labour

available at the Army Base, and her father stopped making his living through trapping. Therefore, her experiences visiting their family trapping grounds were limited, and she was more likely to experience summer visits from Winisk to Hudson Bay up the Winisk River for fishing and berry picking.

### **Practical Considerations and Challenges**

Contacting Omisimâw was like trying to pick up a fish with your bare hands. I would call her, and if she had a visitor, she would not answer the phone, or it would be a short conversation, as in Session Six. She would not commit to participating in the Storytelling Event because she was concerned that one of her regular visitors would come knocking on her door. For her, that visitor in person was more important than a phone conversation with the other participants and guests that she could not see, since she did not know who was coming. I had sent out invitations to over twenty people, but I did not know who would show up. In the end, I did call her, and she did not answer. Lucky for us, she called back and talked with us for approximately 30 minutes during the Storytelling Event. She was not available during the follow up Zoom, and unavailable in a timely manner before I had to end the data collection phase of this project. As you will see in the analysis, the way that she spoke or told her stories, she implied that what she offered in that moment was important to the conversation, but that was all that she was going to say about that. This is the essence of storytelling: what is given through stories at the time is what is given orally, and that is it. The next step is for the listener/reader to reflect on what was shared and find meaning (Archibald, 2008; Dion, 2009; Fixico, 2003).

When I share the stories as told by the participants, I tried to demonstrate their natural pauses when talking by going to the next line, much like Wendy Wickwire did with Harry Robinson's oral storytelling (Robinson, 1989). Wickwire started a new line to represent his pauses, and so it looks more like a poem than prose. Here is an example from this project that is in Chapter Six:

Tetawin: Now I want to go back and wear skirt now. [laughs]  
You know, when I, before I retired.  
I made a list of things I wanted to do.  
Like when I retire.  
One of the things was to wear a skirt or dress, you know. (Storytelling Event)<sup>1</sup>

I also created a project map using Google Earth [[Google Earth Doe Story Pins](#)] so that you can see where the stories took place. I then created a YouTube video which includes audio on the Google Earth map so you could hear one of the stories told in Cree and it is located in Chapter Four. I originally put tabs on a map of the traditional Lands of the Weenusk First Nation that is on Tetawin's wall, but using Google Earth allows you to visualize where these places are in relation to *your* understanding of the province and Turtle Island. I recommend that you open the Google Earth story pins, and then when you come across a place that is mentioned in the following chapters, you can see where these events took place; thereby, making your own connection with the landscaping of these stories.

Many of my teaching colleagues are using land-based and place-based education in the hopes to create a connection between the students and where they are

---

<sup>1</sup> As recommended by a committee member, the story excerpts can be both lengthy and short; therefore, contrary to APA format, I have chosen to use single spacing for the story excerpts. This spacing improves the readability of the dissertation and eliminates any confusion between my writing and the story excerpts.

learning and living. I thought that since all of our sessions took place outside of the landscapes where the stories took place, it was important to create a visual of these places for myself and for you. These Google Earth pins and the YouTube video are my attempt to demonstrate the connections between the stories and the land and how these stories in these places have created significant cultural contexts (Iseke & BMJK, 2011) for the Omushkego participants. I am also supported by the OCCC to have a dissemination event on their lands of Miken Otaski outside of Timmins when the dissertation is complete. There will be food, a fire and this gathering will actually allow me and invited community members to share these stories on Treaty 9 lands. By doing this, I would fulfill through my senses what it means to hear and share these stories on the land.

In Chapter Four, I explore the data and topics developed using NVivo. There were a lot of different topics, histories and stories told during this project, and using NVivo allowed me to see which topics came up the most. Also, I provide observations of the Storytelling Event and address the use of the Cree language in this chapter. I am not a fluent Cree speaker yet; therefore, I needed to provide a discussion and analysis of language use during this project.

In Chapter Five, I provide a broader introduction to the participants. I also explore the topics of Stories on Land, and Identity themes. It was obvious that I had to be more selective with the data because there was so many rich stories and commentary made throughout the project. I then sorted through the data with the four research questions in mind. From there, I mined through the stories and reflections to look for answers to the research questions. I focused on their early childhood experiences on the land and what

cultural knowledge or themes we can (re) learn because these stories are what was missing for myself and many of my peers while we were growing up.

In Chapter Six, I explore how storytelling was used as a pedagogy in the participants' lives. I also explore the various changes in their lives which impacted their identity as Omushkego women, and how their engagement with community has influenced their healing and growth in their lives. In Chapter Seven, I explore the participants and my own reflections of participating in this project. In the Conclusion, I offer a discussion based on the chosen stories' analyses and how it fits within the context of past and ongoing colonization and lived experiences in Canada for myself and the participants. I answer the four research questions and add a few more recommendations and my thanks. I have kept the stories in Appendices B and E in this dissertation for posterity purposes.

The limitations of this study are that these stories and reflections offer a glimpse into Omushkego lives in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. These stories and experiences cannot be generalized to all Omushkego or Indigenous peoples, but there will be some, along with other Indigenous peoples who may be able to relate having had similar experiences. And it is not unthinkable that there will also be different readers who will be able to empathize and learn from these stories. I am grateful and humbled to be able to put these stories into the written record for the next seven generations, and longer, I hope! I am grateful to have had these participants who are my doorway into their generation's stories. They are each part of a generation of knowledge holders who carry important experiences of living on the land and change. Their stories carry

multiple knowledges that I can carry forward to create knowledge to (re)create our identities, languages, and cultural practices.

With all of these thoughts and considerations in mind, I sought to do this research and storytelling work in a good way. I discovered Indigenous-informed autoethnography, which resonated with how I want to exist within this research and in academic spaces as an Omushkego Cree woman who is on a journey of learning about Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

### Methodological Frameworks

I use autoethnography and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing to inform my decisions and actions during this project. I have outlined in Figure 2 how I am in the centre of this project, and the methods that I used are all connected and used in tandem throughout this project.

#### Autoethnography

During the process of doing this study, I began to acknowledge that I am as much a part of this project as my participants. From a Western lens, this is the methodology of autoethnography, whereby, the goals of the research and writing is to describe and “systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis et al, 2011, p. 273). What is important when considering this approach is that autoethnography “acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s

Figure 2

#### Methodological Influences





influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (p. 274). In other words, paying attention to my engagement with relationships matters. In these contexts, it would be to my relations, my communities, and my Nation. In addition to our connections, I must also commit to a "deep reflection of [my] self as a (social) person." (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 351). Autoethnography emerged out of the need to challenge the conventions of Western research practices that assumed that researchers have a neutrality in their stance, which from a critical perspective, is actually the "White, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper classed, Christian, [and/or] able-bodied perspective" (Ellis et al, 2013, p. 275).

Autoethnography then provides a method for researchers to give a voice to marginalized groups with the added advantage of an insider perspective (Ellis et al, 2013; Hayano, 1979) and Ellis and Bochner (2000) further state that researchers can use these methods for empowerment and resistance of the dominant culture. Gamilaroi scholar Michelle Bishop (2021) makes this work from an Indigenous scholar's perspective more explicit: she states,

it was the failure to identify knowledge as Western which led to unspoken and unquestionable presumptions that Western knowledges are superior, 'normal' and universal. *Incessantly assumed neutrality*. It is through such omissions that colonial discourses continue to be entrenched. (emphasis in original, p. 376)

Therefore, autoethnography offers a route for Indigenous (and other) scholars to share their authentic voices – which is especially important for Indigenous peoples who experience ongoing colonialism through this privileged assumed neutrality (Bishop,

2021; Whitinui, 2004) as well as in lived realities under the *Indian Act* in Canada, and other legislative experiences globally.

I relied on autoethnography to authenticate my experiences during this project. I cannot ignore that these stories hold value to me as an Omushkego woman. The stories that jumped out to me are reflected in the choices that I made during the analysis. Stories about the strength of strong female Omushkego predecessors for generations, for example, inspired and guided me towards which stories rose to the surface. I did not choose indiscriminately, though. As mentioned, I did use NVivo to separate their story content into topics. And as I then moved through hearing the stories told by the participants, it became apparent through their stories of cultural interruption that it was important to be able to acknowledge that Omushkego peoples are still colonized. And although post colonial theorizing is important because it is a move towards putting the colonized and marginalized voices at the centre (Chawla & Atay, 2018), it is only just the beginning.

As you will have already noticed in the previous chapters, autoethnography provided me with the opportunity to also share my own stories, and those of the participants as marginalized peoples who experience ongoing colonization while they were growing up and into their adult lives. Thereby, we are confronting and challenging the dominant Canadian discourse which for a very long time hid Canadian policies of the *Indian Act* from the public education system (Godlewska et al, 2010). Additionally, I agree with Tuck and Yang (2012) that the word post colonial assumes that the colonizers and their descendants are no longer in power or have left. That is not the

case in Canada. Therefore, post colonial theory is not enough. I feel as strongly as Michelle Bishop (2021) when she states,

I feel a profound sense of obligation to 'walk my talk' and using Indigenous autoethnography provides a way to centralise the 'core structures of (my) Aboriginal ontology as a framework for research (Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003, p. 206), rather than relying on Western Knowledges and paradigms. That's not the only way. (p. 368)

These principles of Indigenizing autoethnography appeal to me. I can share my learning as I worked through this project of reclaiming Indigenous storytelling practices among Omushkego community members (me included). These stories validate Omushkego experiences in Northern Ontario. But that is just the beginning. To incorporate autoethnography effectively, I was vigilant to consider subjectivity, reflexivity, the potential for bias, or rather the unraveling of our shared understanding of bias, and the reliability of my own voice within this text, and the potential roles that autoethnography has for Indigenous research.

It *is* important for Indigenous researchers to self-locate within their work (Kovach et al, 2013). In essence, this means acknowledging our subjectivity and sharing who we are right at the beginning. I am an Omushkego Cree woman who also has second generation Irish Canadian heritage. I am a daughter to an Indian Residential School survivor and a mother of two teenagers who have not grown up in Northern Ontario. I am a two-spirit woman and wife to my beloved Nancy, who is a first-generation Canadian with Dutch heritage. I am a granddaughter, daughter, sibling, niece, and cousin to many relatives who live in the Hudson Bay Lowlands – from Fort Severn down

to Moosonee and Moose Factory. Therefore, just like many Indigenous scholars, sharing our 'self' or 'our story', is not just about 'me'. It includes all those who are connected to 'me' relationally (Bishop, 2021, Masta, 2018, Whitinui, 2004; Wilson, 2001).

I have made choices relying on my positionality as an Omushkego woman. When looking at the data, I was always in relation to my participants and my community (Wilson, 2001, 2008). For example, I understood during our conversations which parts of the conversation were not part of the project and I excluded those comments. It was important to do this because at times there were confidential personal interactions between other community members that were mentioned during our conversations that might cause undue harm for those community members. My insider position allowed me to make those distinctions. A minor example was when one of the participant's granddaughter came to bring her a pop. Although in a phenomenological research approach these details would be included to provide the context of the data collection environment to capture all of the experiences during this project (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013), this project's parameters are directed towards collecting stories and storytelling practices.

One of the goals of the project was to recreate storytelling practices, and to find out what knowledges exist within the participants' stories. Therefore, I had a responsibility to know when the storytelling was happening, and which parts of our conversations had lapsed into regular conversations about people that we knew. My inside position as autoethnographer gave me insight to make these decisions. Some of these distinctions were made by the participants themselves when they validated the

transcripts, but as an insider researcher who is Indigenous, I made a few choices to eliminate regular conversations that happened in between our storytelling to maintain focus on the stories and storytelling. I was always critically aware of my own bias and role in our project relationships. I have a responsibility as an Indigenous scholar in relation with my participants to understand the difference and only include what was outlined in their consent form to be included.

Allen and Piercy (2005) also understand through the critical feminist perspective that the autoethnographer cannot separate self: culture moves through us and shapes us, and we cannot deny our cultural influences. Language, family, and our daily interactions come through our lens, which has been shaped by our culture, environment, family, etc. And it is through this personal lens and voice that we can, as researchers, make our culture(s) familiar to outsiders and possibly evoke empathy and make social change possible (Ellis et al, 2011). Therefore, when I was framing and interpreting the stories shared with me, I carried with me the experiences and influences of what it was like to grow up in Moosonee in the 70s and 80s and then move to Timmins in 1983.

In Moosonee, 80 to 90% of the population was Omushkego Cree or Native. And when my family arrived in Timmins, the numbers were significantly reversed: we went from total community acceptance at every level to becoming unknown and experiencing varying levels of racial discrimination (or not) based on our skin colour: each of my family members has a different skin colour because of our mixed heritage. I am pale-skinned, but I have Cree features, so my new peers knew there was something different (read *not entirely white*) about me but would never guess 'Native.' They always asked

me if I was part Chinese. I share this context with you so that you will understand the various cultural experiences I had while growing up. My Omushkego Cree identity was always asserted on my part: it was always something that made me proud, but it was not something that was always evident to the Canadians around me.

I also appreciate how Māori scholar, Paul Whitinui (2004) reminds us that for Indigenous researchers, the search for our 'self' is more complicated because our realities as colonized peoples conflict with dominant society: it is important to centre ourselves in our own culture in our work. One of the impetuses for my project was to (re)create what was lost because of colonization. My family and community of Moosonee did not tell our own cultural stories with each other when I was growing up. If there were families that did – and I am sure there were – they did not do it openly for community members to participate and learn. Our community events were either at a Church, school buildings or the Winter Carnival and mostly took place in the English language. Therefore, for me, (re)claiming these oral storytelling practices is what Whitinui (2004) calls 'necessary work' for Indigenous scholars. I, along with other Indigenous researchers, need to centre our 'selves' in our cultures: I centred myself to revive my connection to our cultural practices.

And indeed Perley's (2014) critical Indigenous Manifesto inspires action and provides guidance for various (re)creations and survivorships. I am grateful to have scholarly examples of these ideas. Stephanie Masta (2018) asserts her Chippewa teachings while using autoethnography to reflect on her research in what she refers to as Indian Country. Autoethnography gave her the opportunity to examine her own "experiences conducting research as an Indigenous scholar, as well as the discourse

between [her] racial identity, other Indigenous scholars, and the Western/European dominant research community” (p. 842), thereby, practicing what Perley (2014) refers to as critical Indigeneity. She speaks of the tension between what she was taught in school about the dominant narratives (Columbus, the Mayflower, Thanksgiving) and what her parents and relatives taught her about their history of resistance. She uses autoethnography to demonstrate how this method allowed her to see the connections between her “research practices and Indigenous teachings” (p. 842), specifically the Seven Grandfather teachings.

I have experienced similar attempts at indoctrination and lack of Omushkego Cree or Indigenous learning in the Canadian education system (Godlewska et al, 2010). Not once during my childhood years living in Moosonee (up to age 12) did I learn about the Hudson Bay Company and the Fur Trade. And yet, everyone in the community shopped at the Hudson Bay Store in town. It was the main store where you could buy clothes, household items, and food. And as it turns out, my grandfather for at least half of his adult life was still a trapper and fur trader. But I did not know that then. The silence around our relations’ lived experiences was pervasive. These experiences are in contrast with Masta’s (2018) family stories which included her relatives’ conscious resistance to American discourse.

Through these differences in my lived experiences, I chose to use autoethnography to put my (our) Omushkego stories at the forefront. At this specific time (the year 2024) these histories of the *Indian Act* and Residential Schools are slowly coming into common knowledge in the general Canadian consciousness (Canseco, 2020; Quinn, 2021). Now is the time to share our ‘insider’ stories for our own benefits of

healing, but also for those who have not heard these crucial stories (Pham & Gothberg, 2020). And not just the stories of Residential Schools, which are extremely important to know (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), but what happened to the children after they grew up, and the impacts that the dominant culture made in their lives. The stories shared in this study by the participants were not always the legends that is often expect our 'Elders' to know and tell. These are the stories of the impacted and changed lives from a sample of Ojishkego Cree women from Northern Ontario. And my reflections within this study are the experiences and reflections of an intergenerational survivor of the *Indian Act* and IRS as I try to sift through hearing their stories and doing this study at this time when communities are finding unmarked graves at former Residential School sites (Lee & Parkhill, 2022).

A researcher who did not grow up in Moosonee and was not known to my participants, would come from an 'outsider' perspective, and be influenced by their own 'social perspectives' that they grew up with (Ellis & Bochner, 2005). What I was searching for as an Indigenous scholar was a methodology that validated participant perspectives. As Indonesian scholar, Elizabeth Kristi Poerwandari (2021) states, it is important to ask "whose story are we telling and from what perspective? ...researchers need to realize that researching, analyzing, and interpreting human life is always related to beliefs, values and how we position ourselves" (p. 317). And that this "dynamic subjectivity [which emerges from] a deep understanding of theories and concepts related to the issues... operates at the individual and collective level" (Poerwandari, 2021, p. 317). This knowledge comes as a relational understanding to me. And I have taken into consideration very seriously my autoethnographer's role to acknowledge "the



tension between sharing personal stories and simultaneously showing how those stories can involve others” (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 356). Subjectivity is not only how we are shaped by our experiences and environment throughout our lives, but it is hard work of reflection on our experiences in our environments as well. Louis Bird (2005) calls this *maahchihew*, and there is a responsibility to reflect on our actions to maintain natural balances. I stretch this teaching to include our relationships with each other with our storytelling in this project. I put as much reverence and respect into my process that my ancestors did towards the environment and animals that they depended upon for sustaining life. I understand that these stories will exist to contribute to sustaining and revitalizing our cultural existence.

Reflexivity in research is being able to analyze my own positionality in the research *and* analyze these experiences (Ellis et al, 2011). Further, it is being able to examine “how participants’ perspectives of themselves and others shape cultural contexts and in turn examine their own positions [as researchers] in a way that is reflexive” (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, p. 72). My positionality as mentioned previously demonstrates that “locating [myself] in relation to the subject, participants, and research context and process” (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, p. 71) is important work. I sought tangible ways to connect with Omushkego cultural practices even when I do not live on my traditional lands. I can connect with Omushkego peoples and recognize *and* acknowledge that my participants hold knowledge in relation to my heritage, and I am grateful for the information and stories that they shared to fill this narrative absence in my life.

As an ‘insider’ researcher, I had the advantage of using “personal experience to offer a comprehensive longitudinal history of and commitment [to my relations] – and a history and commitment that may not be able to be captured by a survey, experiment, interview, or even traditional ethnographic research” (Adams & Manning, 2015, p. 357). The commitment comes from our relational connection with one another that existed before this study and will continue for the rest of our lives. All the while, I considered and modelled Bishop (2021) when she stated, “I must constantly be reflecting on ‘Who do I speak for?’, ‘Whose stories and knowledges am I able to share? alongside, ‘What am I speaking for? And ‘Who am I speaking to?’” (p. 372). My choices for analysis reflected the topics that were most relevant to the participants and the themes that I found within their stories.

Adams and Manning (2015) share that these insider accounts of familial, and I would include community, experiences have the advantage of immediate and intimate connection that outsiders would have difficulty accessing or trying to create. But there are also personal risks to this methodology. My stories include more than just me and my stories and reflections. Other individuals are in my stories. In accordance with my REB direction, I have taken particular care with a respect for relational accountability to my fellow community members. I used pseudonyms for my participants as outlined in the consent form. I have also asked if they want their names to be shown when someone else mentioned them. When that happened in the text, it is with their consent and unknown to the reader. My participants also reviewed all their transcripts and had the opportunity to change or exclude any information or story told during our storytelling

and sharing circle sessions. All three participants made edits, and all other previous versions I have discarded.

And the last consideration of risk in this method concerns my role as researcher and scholar. I risk being critiqued for my words, the stories, and the analysis of the stories in this study. As this project is deeply personal work, it can be difficult emotionally to put this work out into the academic field (Allen & Piercy, 2015; Bishop, 2021; Whitinui, 2004). As Whitinui (2014) says, “Locating ‘self’ as a ‘Native’ researcher is a deeply personal one, whereby culture, as part of one’s journey in life, is framed by our own perceptions and experiences” (p. 470-471) and as Masta (2018) experienced where it can be challenged as it will contest dominant discourses. I am ready for these critiques and academic study. Any perceived negative discourse is worth the cost of bringing these stories into the light from the darkness of silence.

Ultimately, I chose to practice autoethnography because, as Whitinui (2014) reminds us, “knowledge and knowing ‘self’ has in some way been influenced from within existing social contexts, structures, and environments over time and should not be overlooked” (p. 464). As an Indigenous scholar, it is not just about reflecting on my own and my participants stories that are shared, but to situate our experiences within our own cultural context, and within the broader context of Canadian colonization of Indigenous peoples of this land (Bishop, 2021; Whitinui, 2014). Furthermore, it is the valuing of the participants as equal (co)creators (Masta, 2018) and (re)creators of our storytelling practice. As Masta (2018) states, “research humility is recognizing that your participants have the knowledge you seek already – they do not need you, the researcher, to help them understand it” (p. 849). Therefore, I worked hard to ensure that

my described subjective view kept their perspectives at the forefront of what I did and in the knowledges that I sought after during this project. Furthermore, understanding the cultural context of being an ‘insider’ researcher helped me understand their perspectives as well. Poerwandari (2021) explains that:

Reflexivity as an introspection explains the importance of self-dialogue that leads to new findings. There is an ongoing reflexivity to monitor the research processes, and the researchers need to ensure their integrity and the degree of trustworthiness of their finds through critical reflection. (p. 316)

Thus, my reliability is connected and determined by my relational responsibilities. Masta (2018) states, “When analyzing data, practicing respect means using theoretical lenses that are centred on the experience of Indigenous peoples” (p. 846). Therefore, through sharing my perspectives and reflections throughout this dissertation, I have revealed my stance and bias to you, dear reader. Savin-Baden and Howell Major (2013) define stance as “a researcher’s position towards an issue that is derived from that person’s beliefs and views about the world” (p. 70) and bias as “a preconception or preference that limits one’s ability to consider alternatives” (p. 70). I have considered that I may have an unconscious bias when choosing which story and participant reflection to include. There is the concern that I may not want to share any story that might be socially uncomfortable, “even though the disclosure is important to provide a fuller understanding” (Poerwandi, 2021, p. 312). Therefore, I have made every effort to explain and make connections for the stories and reflections that have come to reveal significant and poignant knowledge for Omushkego Cree peoples of the Hudson Bay Lowlands during this study.

## **Storytelling as a Methodology and Dissemination Product/Activity**

It is a natural choice for me, as an Indigenous Omushkego Cree scholar to also choose Indigenous methodologies for this research project. I am grateful for the many scholars before me who established the importance of using research methodologies that reflect Indigenous scholars' research approaches and lives (Absolon, 2010; Archibald, 2008; Bishop, 2020; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999; Victor et al, 2016; Wilson, 2001, 2008). The concepts that guided me are the Indigenous epistemological conceptualizations of **relationality and connection**. Margaret Kovach (2010) says that “[w]hile certain Western research paradigms frown upon the relational because of its potential to bias research, Indigenous methodologies embrace relational assumption as central to their core epistemologies” (p. 42). An aspect of relational practice includes accountability that extends from the personal to each of your relations in the broadest sense for Indigenous peoples. A researcher should be focussed on fulfilling the relationships with the people and the world around them (Wilson, 2001). Victor et al (2016) also state that “Relational epistemology and accountability situate relationships as the foundation of ethical research with Indigenous peoples” (p. 424). Bishop (2021) also makes very clear there exists “very serious ethical considerations for Indigenous researchers; we are responsible and accountable first and foremost to our families, community members, Elders, Ancestors, and country” (p. 368).

Therefore, I am responsible as an Indigenous scholar to do research in a good way for *all my relations*. Although this relational practice often includes knowing and naming my cultural teachers, I was confined by the REB parameters to maintain anonymity and protect my Indigenous participants' identities. Working within these

institutional constraints, which are very real to me, and to other Indigenous students and scholars (Bishop, 2021; Henhawk, 2013), means that the reader is now responsible to assume some relational context for my research project. The three participants are known to me: they are from the same communities that I have either grown up in, or where my relatives did. In this way, the storytelling shared between the participants and me is relational. And as a reader of these stories, you, my dear reader, are now connected to us as well; therefore, you are also responsible for them as well. As Cherokee author, Thomas King (2003) says of stories told, “You’ve heard it now” (p. 60). I have done my best to guide you towards understanding in this dissertation, but you must lean in and come to your own understandings as well as a reader (O’Brien, 1999). In this way, the participants, my communities, my Nation, my ancestors, and my readers now and in the future are all connected to me and to each other through this work, and through our storytelling.

The other half of the equation or balance is the use of storytelling as a method of sharing and acquiring of knowledge in this project. The use of **storytelling as a method** has been used in many research projects with Indigenous populations in Canada (Archibald, 2008; Calliou, 2004; Christensen, 2012; Iseke, 2013; Iseke & Moore, 2011; Iseke-Barnes, 2009) and in the United States (Ballenger, 1997; Benham, 2002; Mann, 2002). Many Indigenous populations respond well to the use of storytelling with researchers and naturally engage in stories when they are together waiting for ‘research’ to begin. Storytelling methods have been used to tell current stories (Christensen, 2012; Corntassel, Chaw-win-is & T’lakwadzi, 2009; Iseke, 2011) and to preserve Indigenous cultures (Archibald, 2008; Ballenger, 1997; Calliou, 2004;

Corntassel et al, 2009; Cruikshank, 1998; Hill, 1997; Iseke, 2011; Iseke & Moore, 2011; Iseke-Barnes, 2009; Johnson and Beamer, 2013; Kovach, 2010; Leen, 1995; Wickwire, 2005; Zepeda, 2014).

I also included Indigenous research methodologies. I used the framework of a **talking circle** to allow participants to reflect on their individual and shared experiences throughout the project. Although, we were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and had to use virtual online Zoom meeting technology, I followed the basic practices for talking circles: one person talks at a time, and participants take turns sharing their story (Benoit & O'Brien Teengs, 2016; Loppie, 2007; Nabigon et al, 1999). This methodology has often been used by Indigenous scholars because they align with Indigenous conceptual frameworks like relationality. When you are listening to a story in a circle format, you are actively engaging in relationship with each person in the circle (Wilson, 2001).

The talking circles were used for two purposes and followed one another at each meeting. The first talking circle was used to (re)create oral storytelling practices with one another. The second talking circle was used to collect the participants' reflections on these experiences as we went through them.

I also chose to include the narrative Indigenous methodology of the conversational method described by Margaret Kovach (2010). This method uses oral storytelling to share information in a personal relational space with another person: each participant was given their turn to tell their stories in a talking circle format, and the other participants, including myself, would often acknowledge and react when appropriate. By doing so, this practice acknowledges the relational connection between the researcher and the participant and the information:

[W]hen used in an Indigenous framework, a conversational method invokes several distinctive characteristics: a) it is linked to a particular tribal methodology (or knowledge) and situated within an Indigenous paradigm; b) it is relational; c) it is purposeful (most often involving a decolonizing aim); d) it involves particular protocol as determined by the epistemology and/or place; e) it involves an informality and flexibility; f) it is collaborative and dialogic; and g) it is reflexive. (Kovach, 2010, p. 43)

Kovach (2010) acknowledges the significance of the relational factor and her prior relationships with the participants. When there is an established level of trust between the researcher and participants before the research begins, it enhances the research process and outcomes because there will likely be more intimate sharing during data collection and analysis (Kovach, 2010). One of the challenges that I faced in this project is to invite a level a trust in my relationships with known community members to talk about things (their childhood) they had never revealed in our regular interactions. Kovach notes that with more trust, there is the possibility for a higher level of intimacy and a greater understanding between the participants and the researcher.

I also kept in mind the lessons that Archibald (2008) experienced when engaging with Elders through conversation and storytelling. Archibald also learned that the time spent together talking, as well as shared cultural and social backgrounds, led to 'mutual thinking.' It was obvious when she and the Elder would be able to identify simultaneously story and/or social outcomes during their conversations. Through these experiences she says,



I gained an appreciation for four principles: (1) respecting each other and the cultural knowledge; (2) responsibly carrying out the roles to teacher and learner (a serious approach to the work and being mindful of what readers/other learners can comprehend); (3) practising reciprocity so that we each gave to the other, thereby continuing the cycle of knowledge from generation to generation; and (4) revering spiritual knowledge and one's spiritual being. (p. 55)

I carried these teachings with me throughout our storytelling and conversations during the project. I did have an interpretive advantage for relational analysis because I am known to my participants and our journey to mutual thinking did not take long; therefore, my position within this research enriched this project from beginning to end and contributed to Indigenous oral and written storytelling processes and outcomes.

Māori scholar, Alice Te Punga Somerville and Cherokee scholar, Daniel Heath Justice (2016) call it reflective research when we are in relationship with one another, including the readers and Indigenous peoples, both before and after the engagement. From an Indigenous methodological standpoint as an emerging academic and storyteller, I must continue to reflect upon my community's experiences when I am connected to their worldview and experiences through our shared storytelling events (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). I also knew that the use of conversations and storytelling as a method offers a space for the Elders to share their stories. Archibald (2008) states

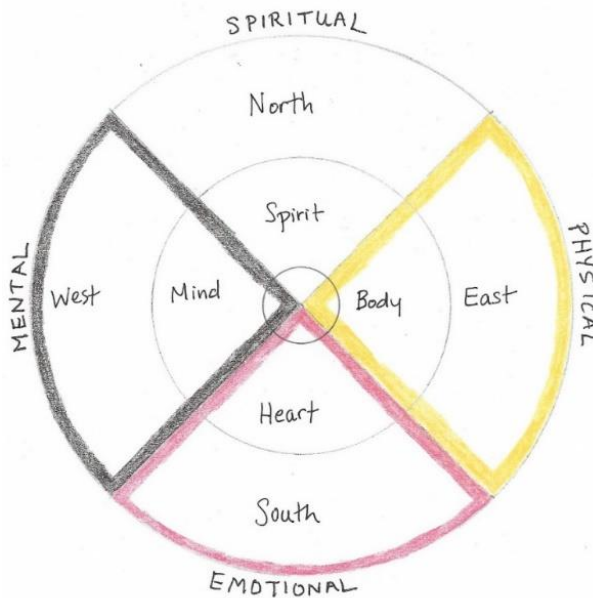
The historical and intergenerational effects of colonization and assimilation still affect our people and communities today. Elders' life stories can show how we, as Indigenous peoples, survived and how we can keep our cultural knowledges intact. Their life stories depict resilience and resistance to colonization. (p. 43)

I remain conscious that I have connected our stories to many of the broader histories and stories that have already been recorded by Omushkego community members (Auger & Faries, 2005; Bird, 2005, 2007; Kataquapit, 2003; Metatawabin, 2015; Snowboy, 2010) and non-Indigenous writers (Long, 2010; Rordam, 1998). I have been thoughtful to what Archibald (2008) and Restoule et al (2013) have said about being ready to learn from Elders who want to share their stories. The town I grew up in did not have obvious Omushkego Cree cultural knowledge sharers. I was raised Catholic in a town with four different Christian denominations, and many people who lived unstable lifestyles which did not demonstrate Elder knowledge keepers or cultural Omushkego Cree practices, like a sweat lodge or drumming/singing. My Omushkego Cree relatives were silent on cultural teachings, but lived certain practical and material culture, like hunting and fishing, beading, and sewing moccasins and mitts. Sitting in a room listening to a cultural knowledge keeper talk about legends or spiritual practices just did not happen in Moosonee in the 1970s and early 1980s. And if it did when my Omushkego Cree grandparents were visiting over Christmas holidays, I did not know because I could not understand the Cree language.

This project has helped me take a few steps forward to (re)claim these storytelling practices and Indigenous scholars, Amanda R. Tachine, Eliza Yellow Bird and Nolan Cabrera (2018) assert that “storytelling is the belief in a responsibility for the communal survival and progress of others and their future (Guillory, 2008) in cultures with oral traditions, stories have a compelling utility as a way to pass knowledge from one generation to the next” (p. 283).

I have also been thoughtful towards our shared experiences reclaiming these storytelling practices and what the outcomes may be for each of us. Hernandez (2003) suggests using teachings as healing strategies. “Native storytelling traditions also encourage healing through telling of traditional stories and connect Indigenous peoples to their ancient identities, thus ensuring their survival in the natural world” (p. 77). Iseke (2013) also asserts that “by learning from stories and storytelling, we are part of the process of recovery from colonization and its effects and of remaking ourselves” (p. 572-3). But it is more than that. It is about trying to figure out who we are as Indigenous people in the modern world. Iseke asserts, “We can become what we were meant to be” (p. 573).

Figure 3

*Sacred Circle Diagram*

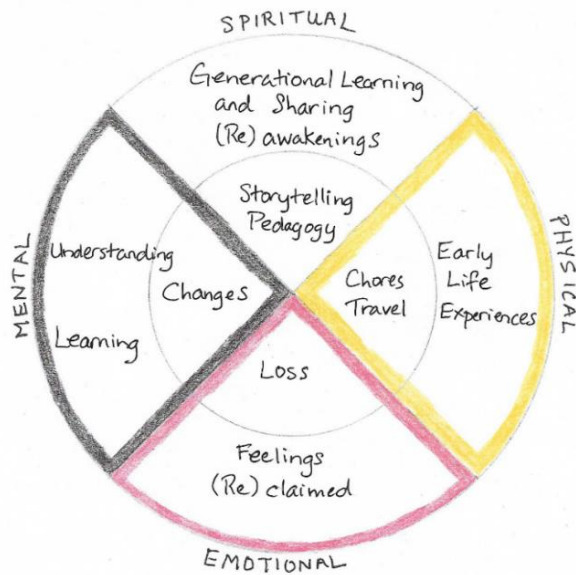
I have also chosen to use the Sacred Circle, or what is commonly known as the Medicine Wheel to figuratively frame the analyses. I am relying on Pamela Rose Toulouse’s (2018) Sacred Circle diagram where she shares the various teachings of each Medicine Wheel quadrant: Physical, Emotional, Mental, and Spiritual. We start in the East with the Physical reality. These include our experiences through our senses. If we are following the clockwise teachings, we would move into the South, where we would focus on what we are feeling in response to our experiences. Then we would move to the West and contemplate

what we can learn from these experiences: our goal is to come to an understanding. Finally, we would go into the North and reflect on how all of these experiences bring us into relation with all things and look beyond our self to the connections that we made with others in creation.

Another way to engage with this circle is to move across the axes. The smallest inner circle is where everything from each quadrant connects. Each one of us will experience these quadrants in varying degrees based on our personality and strengths (personal communication, Alita Sauvé, Tahltan and Cree traditional knowledge keeper, November 1999, Toronto). In this way, the circle is not necessarily following a particular order, such as a clockwise direction. For example, I am an insatiably curious person, and under stress, I look for information that will help me to understand. And a friend of mine is centred in her emotions. She feels everything first, and then moves to the other experiences that lead to understanding. The Circle does not limit our experiences by maintaining a particular order, although many of the teachings do follow a clockwise direction.

Figure 4 provides an overview of the chosen topics/experiences that came up during this project, which will be discussed in the next three chapters. The Physical quadrant often represents the participants early life experiences or physical activities (chores and traveling). The Emotional quadrant often represents what the participants lost, (re) claimed or felt in the participants' stories. The Mental quadrant represents understandings, changes and learning that happened in their lives and in this project.

Figure 4

*Sacred Circle Overview of project*

The Spiritual quadrant is in the North and represents the storytelling pedagogy, generational learning and sharing, and various (re) awakenings throughout this project. Although the circle can imply a direction of beginning in the East and ending in the North, many of the story elements can cross through and between these quadrants; therefore, there is not always a linear explanation for the stories even when I use this figurative framework.

These sacred circles are meant to be a guide for you to see the experiences and learnings during this project, but I urge you to hear Fixico's (2003) guidance and open your 'reading' to include the variability of time and experiences shared within storytelling.

## Chapter Four

There were a lot of stories shared that included many different experiences, teachings, ideas, and descriptions. This chapter will introduce the participants, provide general observations of the main topics, and highlight three topics that are particularly worth noting. As presented in the topic list in Chapter Three, I started by creating a topic when a new idea or experience was part of the story. Because there were so many different topics, I had to find a way to determine the focus of my analysis. NVivo helped by identifying the topics that were most talked about. I also provide observations for the virtual Storytelling Event. Finally, the last half of the chapter digs deeper into the various experiences and lessons learned coming out of Cree language use during the project.

### Introduction to the Participants

Omisimâw was born in 1933 and lived the longest of their childhood into adulthood on the land. She went to Residential School for only 3 or 4 different years in her life. Tetawin was born in 1943 and lived most of her childhood and into her late teens on the land, with approximately 7 years of intermittent schooling (Residential School and high school in North Bay into her early 20s). Majitch was born in 1954 and spent the first 6 years of her life on the land and in the village of Winisk, and then consistently went to Residential School from age 6 to 14 years old (summers spent in Winisk village). She then she moved herself at 14 years old to Toronto for a summer ECE program, then to North Bay for high school, and finished her high school in Toronto. The richness of their stories on the land reflects these experiences and how much they remember.

The first story they all choose to tell is about their experiences when they were younger, and their family was still living the trapping lifestyle. The oldest, Omisimâw's stories were full and complex and linked with teachings. Tetawin's stories were of their long treks from the Winisk village to the Hudson Bay and up the Shagamee River to their family trapping area. They are full of details, but they are not often a fully developed story in which there is a beginning, actions and tensions that are resolved, and then an end. The youngest, Majitch also tells these stories, but they are small vignettes, almost like a polaroid capture of a moment. The correlation to years on the land with family directly relates to whether the participants stayed in the north and how often they speak Cree in their daily lives. There are other factors, like how many years they were in school, and how many children were around when they were growing up which also influenced how far they moved from their village.

Tetawin was engaged throughout the project. Tetawin used a photograph as a mnemonic device during our second session (Session Two). She was bringing her experience of wearing a skirt that was documented in the photograph to life. Tetawin also said that she remembers more of the past when she is thinking of it in the Cree language (Session Two). At the beginning of Session Three, Tetawin showed us the book on *Myths, Legends, & Stories of the James Bay Cree*, by George Kataquapit. These storytelling ideas and prompts that she brought demonstrated that she was thinking about stories after our previous sessions, and wanted to make sure that Majitch knew about this book. She was going to send her a copy if she did not already have one.

It was challenging to have three participants in three separate locations and using different technologies. Omisimâw only participated over the phone and joined the other participants on two occasions: the first was during Session Three; and the second and last was during the Storytelling Event. The other participants used the Zoom meeting platform which included video and audio. I had to figure out which phone was best to use so that Omisimâw could hear the other participants, and although I tried, Omisimâw could not hear everyone during the Storytelling event. I would try to put the phone near the laptop speaker, but at 87 years old, and going through two different audio outputs, it was difficult. But I would say that Omisimâw's attitude towards contributing and being part of this study was great and her level of dedication to answer any of our questions was stellar.

Tetawin talked the most during this project. I have known her as someone who usually does not talk a lot; therefore, having the opportunity to share her life stories demonstrated that she had a lot to say. Another factor during the sessions that affected these outcomes was that whoever was in the session, the oldest participant went first. Therefore, in the sessions with just Tetawin and Majitch, Tetawin would always go first; and consequently, in Session Three, when Omisimâw joined the call early in the Zoom session, Majitch's talking time was delayed more than usual and we ran out of time and energy and Majitch did not say much. When Majitch did speak during the sessions though, she did not waste her time with pauses. Her words were the easiest to transcribe because they were spoken like written sentences, which makes sense considering that she started speaking English at a younger age, and lives in Toronto where she does not speak Cree very often.



Table 4 shows the correlation between the number of years each participant spent on land in their formative years of childhood, in Residential and High Schools, and their current language use in their adults lives. Although the trajectory of their lives include many other influences and factors, this information was striking to me because it made the varying experiences of assimilation into English Canadian society between the participants apparent. As will be discussed later, generations of Omushkego Cree intergenerational survivors living in northern Ontario continue to be impacted by assimilation through the pervasive and omnipresence of the English language and media.

Table 4

*Years on the land, school years, and language use*

Participant	Years on the land as a child	Schooling	Where they were living during the project	Speaking Cree
Omisisimâw	16	3 or 4 years of intermittent Residential School	Peawanuck	Spoke Cree every day
Tetawin	14	7 years of intermittent schooling	Timmins (midway between North and South)	Spoke Cree with people her age or older
Majitch	6	12 years of consistent schooling	Toronto	Spoke Cree intermittently

### **Observations on Main Topics and Topics to Note**

In the first four sessions that included Tetawin and Majitch, and Omisimâw for part of Session Three, Story on Land was the topic for their first stories. In the following sessions they talked more about their Everyday life, which included describing where they were living at separate times in their lives. After telling their early stories of living on the land, the stories started to get more specific on general details and activities from their childhood. For example, Tetawin recalled the priest bringing donated clothing to the Winisk Village. They would find warmer skirts to wear there. She also described their moosehide moccasins with canvas tops that kept them warm in the winter. Majitch mentioned the floater planes that would bring people to their community from other places, like Big Trout Lake. Majitch also mentioned that her mother had a portable singer sewing machine that ran by turning a crank.

They were also able to share stories about who was telling stories while they were growing up. Both their parents told stories, but their grandparents and sometimes visitors also told them stories when they were visiting. Two topics that significantly came up in the last joint session (Session Four) is Work and Community and Connection. The emphasis on these topics indicate the importance of their work experiences and building or participating in Indigenous community later in life, which comes out again in the Follow-Up session after the Storytelling Event.

When I compared the order of the three sessions with Omisimâw, the significant topics are like the first four sessions: Everyday life, Story on Land, Identity in Stories, and Family History. Omisimâw also had Work as a consistent topic in Session Five and

Seven. These consistencies confirmed my direction and focus for analysis of these stories which I explore in Chapters Five and Six.

### ***Story on Land***

Stories on land were significant for four of the nine sessions where they were the topic either first or second in duration of time. When I looked at the time percentages on Table 1, I can see that for Tetawin and Majitch, their first stories were talking about their early life on the land. The first time that Omisimâw joined was during Session Three over the phone, her entire story was told in the Cree language and was about traveling/living on the land. She did not stay to participate in the rest of the session and although the Stories on Land came in second on that day, with Everyday life coming in first, it should be considered that the first story that all three participants told were from experiences they had when they were still living with their parents on the trapline.

Another significant note to Session Three is that Tetawin read a story from George Kataquapit's book, *Some History, Myths & Legends of the Swampy Cree*, which was published in 2003. Tetawin would not tell this story orally, but when asked if she heard this as a child, she said, "Yes, and that it is funnier in the Cree language" (Session Three). Her choice to read this story of a legend from this book indicates that she did not feel comfortable telling a legend herself but thought that she should read a legend to be included in this project. This reading activity exemplifies Dion's (2009) work of bringing back written stories into the storytelling realm.

### ***Identity in Stories***

The data shows that when talking about Everyday life, they were also talking about their identity. The topic of identity showed up second or fourth in four of the nine sessions. All

three participants spoke about their identities as Omushkego women. This recurrence indicated that talking about or expressing their ideas around their identity was important to them. These ideas and experiences will be explored more fully in Chapter Six.

### ***Storytelling in the Family***

This project was about storytelling; therefore, it made sense to ask the participants about storytelling in their early years. All three participants in different sessions said that both of their parents told stories before they went to sleep, and that they would often fall asleep as children and did not hear the end of the story. There was a mixture of Omushkego Cree stories and Biblical stories that parents would tell them. And when grandparents or other visitors were present, they would also take a turn telling a story or two.

There were many other topics, but they did not happen with enough significance in time to be studied in this dissertation. The next three topics are worth mentioning, though.

### ***Laughter Between Participants***

There was laughter between all participants and the researcher throughout each session and the main storytelling event. All of the laughter throughout this project demonstrates that laughter is a common occurrence during all of the conversations and indicates comfort, familiarity, and lightness.

They either made fun of themselves or told a funny story from their childhood. As stated by Tetawin and Omisimâw, the humour originated in the language; therefore, learning the language is imperative to fully understanding and experiencing these

conversations again. One of my life goals is now to learn the language and listen to these stories and conversations again with a new understanding in Cree.

### ***Residential Schools***

Residential School experiences were mentioned in six of the sessions. The recurring mention of Residential Schools is significant because this project was not directly addressing Residential Schools as a topic. But because all the participants were Residential School survivors it did come up. Whenever the topic of Residential Schools came up during the regular sessions, the participants changed the topics fairly quickly stating that they don't like to think or talk about it. That being said, during the Storytelling Event, the guests asked some logistical questions about traveling to Residential Schools, which was not too intrusive so that Tetawin and Majitch did not quickly change the subject.

### ***Sickness***

Sickness as part of a story was not common but was important to their lives in relation to what was happening at the time all over the country. The sicknesses that were mentioned were unknown illnesses presumed to be lung infections or fevers, and tuberculosis (TB). Although they did not talk about being sick a lot in their stories, the fact that many of their cousins died of TB, and a brother and cousin survived it, is worth noting. These TB illnesses among their cousins took place in the 1930s and 1940s when attendance at Residential Schools was mandatory despite the threat of TB illness in crowded areas like sleeping dormitories and speaks to the deadly outcomes from attending Residential Schools. All of the participants had multiple aunts that died in Residential School in the late 1910s and early 1920s, which is when Duncan Campbell

Scott advocated that attendance at Residential Schools become mandatory (Toulouse, 2018).

### ***The Storytelling Event***

I sent private invitations through messenger to people who were known to the participants who lived all over Ontario. I did not realise that there would be graduation ceremonies in different schools across the province on this evening, so many that I was hoping would be present did not attend. Those who did attend were Omushkego people who grew up in Moosonee and/or Timmins. This Storytelling Event also took place over Zoom, so there were partners of guests present, as well as a few teenagers who grew up in North Bay, or Southern Ontario.

When looking at the Storytelling Event, which included all participants and seven guests, it is interesting to note that the stories that they chose or were prompted to share were mostly about Everyday life, Story on Land, Change, and Family Activities. This demonstrated the guests wanted to know what the Elders' lives were like growing up and what it was like going through the change from living on the land, to living in towns, and then cities. This type of information was important to ask and to hear because all the guests grew up towns and did not grow up living on the land having to hunt and harvest for their food.

The participants told some of the same stories that they shared during the regular sessions, but they provided even more details to their original story. And just as if they were visiting with one another, they had more people (besides me) who could ask questions; therefore, they were asked to expand on details that they did not want to

talk about during the regular sessions, like details about traveling to Residential Schools.

Tetawin focused on sharing details of her early life on the land and a couple of change stories, like when women started to wear pants instead of skirts. Majitch shared a little bit of her early life of living on the land, but then told her story of leaving Winisk and moving to Toronto, then North Bay, and Toronto again during her teenage years. Omisimâw shared exciting stories like what she would call 'spirit attacks' between people while they were on the trapline. They are described as metaphysical events: there were unexplained sounds surrounding them while they were out camping, or her father having seizures. These seizures were presumably sent by another person who was jealous because he wanted to originally marry her mother. And the solution to either of these occurrences was to use holy images and a crucifix for protection. After these images were set up around them, the sounds and the seizures stopped.

The Storytelling Event lasted for over two hours and the participants and guests were happy to share and talk with one another. So much so, that I had to finally initiate a closing of the event. During the follow up, Tetawin noted that it was like she had been visiting with everyone in her living room.

### **Language Use Within the Project**

Although it is not the topic of most of the storytelling, the use of the Cree language was significant in this project. The participants and I used the language together in greetings and for simple phrases. The participants spoke with one another for practical reasons like clarifying what we were doing, and for teaching me phrases

and grammar. It became clear during our conversations that the participants have real concerns over language loss in our communities.

Table 5

*Breakdown of spoken Cree or had discussions about language use\**

Session	Participants	Cree Time (hour:minute:second)	Overall Time (hour:minute:second)
One	Tetawin & Majitch	0:1:44	1:17:11
Two	Tetawin & Majitch	0:6:46	1:12:11
Three	Tetawin, Majitch & Omisimâw	0:20:38	1:54:44
Four	Tetawin & Majitch	0:4:30	2:10:18
Five	Omisimâw	0:4:28	1:02:34
Six	Omisimâw	0:0:0	00:4:45
Seven	Omisimâw	0:2:44	00:28:47
Storytelling Event	All, plus seven guests	0:13:09	2:13:11
Nine	Tetawin & Majitch	0:4:39	00:57:21

\*I am not included in this chart but participated in the language use as well.

When reflecting on which participants spoke more Cree and how they used the language during our sessions, it is obvious that the oldest, Omisimâw (87 at the time) would use Cree to get her meaning across better than she would in English the two sessions where the other participants were present. During our solo sessions, she would use a Cree phrase here or there to teach me words, but she mostly used English to share her stories when we were talking alone because I am not fluent in the language. When Omisimâw was able to join Session Three, she spoke in Cree with Tetawin, who is ten years younger (at the time 77) in conversation for clarity about what was happening. For example, she could not hear us very well, so Tetawin explained in



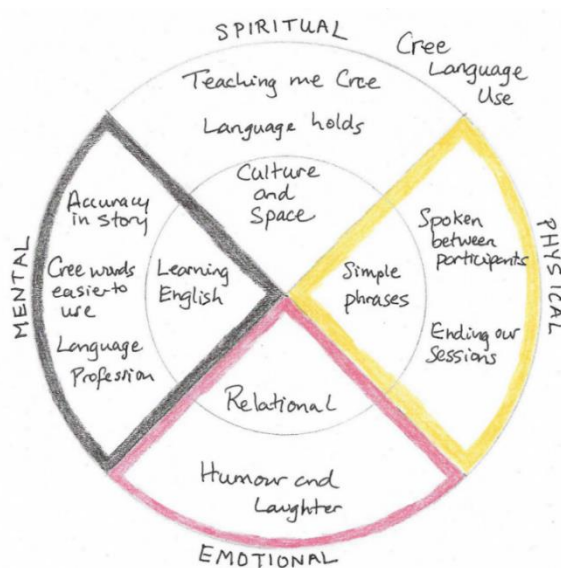
Cree that I was going to switch from my cell phone to my house phone. For them, it was easier and faster to explain it in Cree.

In contrast to their Cree conversations, when Omisimâw and Majitch would talk, either during Session Three or during the Storytelling event, it was done in English. The age difference between these two is twenty years (she was 67 at the time). And Majitch has lived all her adult life in Toronto where Cree speaking is limited. Therefore, it had become natural for them to speak English to each other, which indicates, like many other IRS survivors, some of their Cree language interactions were interrupted because of age and the impacts of Residential School experiences (Assembly of First Nations, 1994).

I created another circle in Figure 5 to demonstrate how the different experiences with language fit into the four quadrants. In the physical area I have placed the practical

Figure 5

*Sacred Circle Cree Language Use*



use of language: the simple phrases used during our conversations; the phrases and conversations in Cree that were spoken between the participants; and the words and phrases used at the end of our sessions. In the emotional area I placed the relational aspects of the language, the humour that exists bigger in the language, and the laughter that occurred from the words spoken in Cree. The mental quadrant holds the

importance of using Cree to be accurate in their stories, how using the Cree words was

easier to get their meaning across, their experiences as language translators, and when the participants started learning English. The spiritual quadrant shows how the language holds culture and connection to spaces and how it was important to the participant that they teach me a little bit of Cree during almost every session. In the next section, I offer short discussions of various examples of language use.

### ***Gah***

When I was at Lakehead University in the 1990s, the Native Student Association had a volleyball team. One weekend, we went to Sioux Lookout for a tournament. We stayed at my Ojibwe teammate Carl's house. His mother, Charlotte Blackhawk, after finding out my relations and who I am, asked me a question about an encounter she did not understand at the Sioux Lookout airport. There were two elderly ladies speaking in Cree and the one listening kept saying, 'Gah'. I laughed and told her that when people are talking in Cree, you acknowledge that you are following along by saying, *Gah*. She laughed and said she thought the one lady kept saying, 'no', to the other lady because *Kaawiin* means 'no' in Ojibway, and *Kaa* is a short version of that. In this dissertation, you may notice that the English version of this expression is, 'yeah'. It doesn't necessarily mean the word yes, but it means that I and/or the other participant are acknowledging our active listening.

### ***Simple Cree Speaking Phrases Used During Our Sessions***

The use of simple phrases like, *nesta nina* [me too] and *nesta kina* [you too] during conversations happened naturally throughout most sessions and during the Storytelling Event. Most of these are phrases that I already knew like *wachiye* [hello or good-bye] and *egotay* [that's the way], but there were new phrases used to teach me as

well: I learned words like *ostehsimao* [oldest brother]. And then the participants used words that were known to each other. Tetawin said, “*Ego nani?* [Is that it?]” and Majitch said, “Eguani. [That’s it]” (Session Four). This particular Cree answer indicated to Tetawin that Majitch was done, and Tetawin can either comment on it, which she did, and then moved on to tell more of her own story or reflection.

There was also a mixing of Cree and English conversations. Tetawin asked, “Hi. *Kipehtawin?* [Can you hear?]” and Majitch said, “Yeah, I can hear.” (Session Two) This exchange is an example of how one can ask in Cree, and the answer comes back in English.

### ***Cree Phrases Used When Ending Sessions***

Cree was often used when we began and ended a session with “*Wachiye, wachiye*” [Good-bye, good-bye] (Most Sessions). It was important to have an opening and closing greeting in Cree to all our conversations. In other words, it is good manners in Omushkego Cree culture to have formal words of greetings at the beginning and end of each conversation or interaction with one another. A session can end with official thanks in Cree and then personal greetings, and/or a practical statement of “*Ni wi michisoon nishi wa tan* [I want to eat. I’m hungry]” (Session Two).

Omisimâw left the Storytelling Event with our thanks in Cree and *wachiye* (Storytelling Event). The Storytelling Event ended in Cree with “*Kische meegwetch*” [big thanks] on my part and “*wachiye*” said by everyone, and finally Majitch said, “*Eguani*” [That’s it] And Tetawin said, “*Egotay* [That’s the way]” (Storytelling Event).

This last phrase could mean a lot of things in different contexts, but in this context, it meant we were done, and we did it the way we were supposed to do it. It was an affirmation of that's the way, or that's the way we do it.

### ***Participants Using Cree Language to Give Instructions and Information to One Another***

In Session Three it was easier to have Tetawin ask Omisimâw in Cree if she was ready to tell her story:

Tetawin: *Wachiye. Kaki toten na? Chiti pa chi moo yan anooch kakey ke shey pa yak?* [Hello. Are you able to do it? To tell your stories this morning?]

Omisimâw: *Mana oti, tangey osha ni wapa key nden tey tai, t nkey osha ni aya me hey ki shi kao nden tay tai. Sha kooch maka wee tota kay anooch nka to ten sha kooch maka tata kwa pi kay yao ndi pa chi moowin.*

[I guess so. I thought it's supposed to be tomorrow, for some reason I thought it was Sunday, but if she wants to do it today, I can do it, but it will be short because I need to go]

Tetawin: *Eko eesa.* [Okay]

Omisimâw: *Tani maka key itway yan ji ti pa chi moo yan?* [What should I say then?]

Tetawin: *We ka chi ti pa ji moowina ani moo ta.* [Just talk about old stories]

Omisimâw: *Weys katch a oochi yan is it way.* [Because you're from old ways, say] (Session Three)<sup>2</sup>

Most of this conversation was practical towards our activity. Omisimâw was 87 years old during this time and thought I had asked if we could talk on Sunday. But I chose Saturday because she said she is more likely to be home. But you must go with what they say, because it would be disrespectful to argue about such a thing. As you

---

<sup>2</sup> When the excerpts include many voices, I have included spaces between the speakers to make it easier to read.

can see from this conversation, Omisimâw ended this short conversation in Cree by making a joke about being old. This was an example of teasing – although it is a self-teasing joke, and Tetawin and Omisimâw had a chuckle together about it. Ahenakew and Wolfhart (1992) also found that when grandmothers often told stories about themselves, they were “funny, gently ribald and full of (self) mockery” (p. 25).

Another example of participant Cree interaction was when my cell phone was not giving Omisimâw enough audio, and she could not hear me nor the other participants. So, Tetawin told me to go get the other phone (the house phone), and she told Omisimâw what I was going to do. After that was cleared up Omisimâw told her story in Cree. Once her story was done, Tetawin respectfully thanked Omisimâw and reassured her that it was a good story:

Omisimâw: *Waysketch, mona kiskenten* [Long time ago, I don't know,] I'm starting now okay...

[resumes talking in Cree and tells the story of the Hudson Bay Walk until she is done]

Omisimâw: *Eguani ehkishitayan nina* [Alright, I'm finished now.]

Tetawin: *Kitchi meegwetch! Mino tagwan!* [Thank you very much! It sounds good!]

Omisimâw: Okay. Maybe I forgot to say a few things, but I tried.  
[inaudible]

Omisimâw: *Wachiye*. [Good-bye].

Tetawin: She says, *Wachiye*.

Doe: *Wachiye*.

Omisimâw: *Wachiye, wachiye'*

Tetawin: *Kitchi Meegwetch*. [Many thanks.]

Doe: *Kitchi Meegwetch!* [Many thanks!]. (Session Three)

At this point, I do not know the content of her story, but I am very grateful to have listened to her as she tells this story. I felt left out and displaced by a language that is near to me, but just out of reach. Tetawin agreed to translate the story for me. As you can read in Chapter Five, it is a story about when Omisimâw was 16 and her brother was 14 years old and they walked their sled dogs across the land from Winisk in late August, 1949 ([See on Google Earth map](#)) to their family trapping grounds by the Shagamee River. You can also listen to the audio and see the map [here](#).

### ***Pronouns in the Language and Translation***

The Cree language has different ideas of pronouns than English. They are me, *nina*, you, *kina*, and that person, *wina*. When a person who has Cree as a first language, their use of English gendered pronouns is flawed. They sometimes use *he* and *she* indiscriminately. What they really mean is *that other person*. Tetawin told an old story told to her by her grandma:

Tetawin: My, my grandma said one time. Her grandma [inaudible - a name?] I don't know. I figured it would be like 100 years ago her grandmother, her grandmother said she remembers as a child.

People were just wearing the, you know, the leggings, men were just wearing leggings...

And she my grandma would say, oh, I remember my grandmother saying that you know men are just wearing like they didn't have any clothes. They were just wearing animal skins. She remembered that, and I remember her saying that.

And she said her grandmother said that as a child, she remembers all [or old?] men sitting around in a teepee with a pipe.

Doe: Hmmm.

Tetawin: And they were talking, and she said she remember hearing one of the Elder said one time. Oh, there's going to be people coming to our country. And there's going to be something really loud flying around here. She was predicting about the airplanes. (Session Three)

When considering the difference in pronouns in the previous quote, the last 'she' that was referred to is the old man talking with the pipe. He was the one that was predicting about airplanes. It is important to know this language characteristic for translation as well: context in the sentence matters for figuring out who they were referring to. The English gendered pronouns are less important than context. This knowledge was essential for understanding who was being referenced, but it also demonstrated their relational understanding of how they look at the world around them. There is me, you, and the other person, and whatever context that person existed in for that very moment.

### ***The Relational Aspect for Cree Speakers***

In describing who she spoke Cree with, for Tetawin it was all her older siblings. She said she thinks in Cree when she talked to them, and she said she thinks in English when she talked to her younger siblings or her children (Session Two).

Tetawin: Yeah, because we talked English mostly with [my kids].  
And then when I was at home.  
I still talk [to my] sisters in Cree.  
Today, and before that, we talk Cree.

Doe: Mm hmm.

Tetawin: I don't speak English when I talk to [my older sisters].

Doe: Mm hmm.

Tetawin: Or [my older brother]. (Session Two)

When this came to identity, her expression of herself would be different depending on which language she was using. This interaction between language and identity was important to consider because if the younger generation does not learn to speak Cree as Solomon (2022) has shared, parts of her identity will not be expressed when her older siblings pass away. It is important that we make efforts to learn the language so that Elders are not alone in their thoughts. Tetawin went on to explain that “what happens to me is that when I speak Cree – I'm there. I'm still there, or what happened” (Session Two).

Tetawin also said, “I know and when [Omisimâw] tells me her stories. She does tell me things from way back. Okay, and you know, we laugh more, I think. I think we laugh more when we, when we speak in Cree... There's more – more humour that, like when I was talking about my grandma's pants. *Opanacheeso* [bloomers]. Like, you know, it's kind of funny” (Session Two).

### ***Humour in the Language***

Tetawin read a story about the Grebe (Appendix B) from George Kataquapit's book. When I asked what the difference was for her when she heard it in Cree rather than in English, she replied,

I think it's more funnier when you say it in Cree.  
It sounds more funny, you know.



Like when it says

*he ja ki ko ney hooh ey ki sha pisk ke tay nic p wa pis ko niw...*

it means poking in the mouth with a hot rod –

*he ja ki ko ney hooh ey ki sha pisk ke tay nic p wa pis ko niw –*

it just sounds funnier.

Like you know?

Yeah, I think because of the words aren't like in English:

they're not as descriptive, I find.

You know? (Session Three)

The conversation about language continues:

Tetawin: It's almost not as funny when he, he just, he just had

[she motions to her head as she leans back]

you see a picture of a loon asleep with his open his mouth wide open.

And then he just stabs him in his throat. [she laughs]

And yeah, you know, it's a...

I think it's more descriptive:

that's what I think is the word for it.

When you - when you talk about when you say it in Cree.

Yeah. *Tapwe?* [True?]

Majitch: Yeah. *Tapwe.* [It is true]

Tetawin: Yeah. Yes, we have.

We have a very descriptive language: colourful,

I would say. *Mana?* [Isn't that right?]

Majitch: Yeah. (Session Three)

Reading this story in English, you might think, what is so funny about a loon sleeping with his head back who gets stabbed in throat? But the humour is what is missing for those who do not speak Cree. The context of the descriptions within this story *makes* it funny in Cree. And this is a story about extreme behaviour meant to teach us to act better, so that adds to the element of laughter towards outrageous

actions. Bird (2005) also said that these outrageous behaviours grab our attention and are meant to teach us how to behave properly or to teach children how to stay safe.

### ***Language Preference***

In my solo session with Omisimâw, she talked about why she didn't tell her story in English, "Oh, sometimes my English is no good. Some things that I can't explain." She went on to say that "I can say pretty well everything we did in Cree. You know? But not in English. Because I'm not that good in English. There's things that English don't have it" (Session Five). Therefore, to tell her story well, she chose to say it in Cree so that she can express everything that happened in the way that it happened just like Ahenakew and Wolfhart's (1992) grandmothers who were able to express everything that they wanted to in their mother tongue. This use of the Cree language also confirmed what Restoule et al (2013) found when they were talking with Elders in Fort Albany: Elders needed to use older words to describe their experiences on the land that are falling out of use, but presumably to be able to express all that they wanted to say as well.

### ***Cree Words That Are Easier Used Than English***

During the second session, Cree language was used when describing the elastic which help keep knee high socks up that they wore under skirts: "*Cheeskay pison*, they used to call it" (Session Two). It translates to 'string up holder'. Cree is a descriptive language that adapted to new technology and clothes. It was easier for Tetawin to use the Cree word to describe the socks. Another example is when Tetawin describes "A little treehouse. *Tayshipehtakan*, a treehouse which is a square 8-foot raft of logs where food is stored to keep safe in the winter from bears, wolves, and other

scavengers, you know those things?” (Session Three). There is not an equivalent word for this in the English language that she is aware of, so, she uses the Cree word and describes what it looks like, and what it was used for. She named it in Cree to be able to

Image 4

*A Tayshipehtakan in the middle right of picture.*



either describe it or see it better in her mind. She said that she can see things better when she thinks or speaks in the language. She later said, “because you see, I see. What, what happens to me is that when I speak Cree - I’m, I’m there: I’m still there, or what happened. Um, I can explain it better than in English, right”

(Session Three). This confirmed the idea that stories and language can bring the past into the present for either the storyteller or listener (Fixico, 2003).

### ***Cree Phrases that Participants Used Because the Words Were Spoken in Cree When the Story Happened***

The next type of Cree phrasing was when the language was used to enhance a story and they used phrases that were originally said in Cree. For example, there was a priest, Father Gagnon, who used to have his own dog team. He would travel up and down the coast and inland to visit with people within his Mission boundaries. He went to where Tetawin was born (location Ito Mameek on [map](#)) and baptized her there. This priest used to speak Cree and Tetawin said he would tease her, “*ne tey ndi mhik waysketch!* [way upriver long time ago]. He would say, *Kitchi waysketch!* [Very long time ago]! He was trying to tease me to feel old” (Session Two).

Another example was when her niece was born, and her mother described the baby sitting up at night when everyone was sleeping:

Tetawin: Yeah. But I was,  
*kape jeeit tah pit maka ehitwet*  
 [she was looking at me, she said]  
*ka ma tay jee pa ta pit maka ehitwet*  
 [she was sitting up, she said]  
 I thought I was seeing things.  
 All I see was a little face. (Session Three)

Tetawin was describing her niece, but she was also repeating what her mother said when she woke up and saw the baby sitting up. So, when she repeated what her mother, a Cree speaker said, she used the Cree words. In the story, they were all in an askeegan (winter dwelling), so everyone was sleeping on the ‘floor’ which was covered in evergreen boughs. Her use of the language here intimates that she needed to describe it better than she could in English. It was a remarkable story to her mother because the baby was good natured and did not cry in the middle of the night when everyone was sleeping.

Another example was when Tetawin was talking about taking her dad to the Sundance in Matheson. She recalled when her father talked with a Sundance leader. He asked, “*Oh, kiskendimin na?*” [Do you know me?] (Session Nine). Again, when Tetawin told a story about her dad, which happened in Cree, she used the Cree phrase that he used to describe the exchange.

The last example was when she told a story about her uncle, she repeated his words in Cree:

Yeah, it’s kind of sad when he said that.  
*Nistes* [my older brother], he said.

I used to see my  
*nistes ask o ni mooshte yen ten chi wapa mak nistes chi ma tway ahi ta pit pa*  
*paspoo winik.*

[my older brother - sometimes I would, I could see my brother looking out the window]. (Session Nine)

It became obvious that when Tetawin or Omisimâw repeated what others before them have said in Cree, it was important to repeat it as they heard it, and not a translation into English, which indicated that they valued getting it right.

### ***Learning English***

A guest during the Storytelling Event wanted to know when Tetawin learned to speak English. Tetawin said she learned English in Fort Albany at Residential School from the priests and nuns who were from Quebec and had French accents. But the students were still allowed to speak Cree to each other, and the nuns and priests also spoke Cree to them. Therefore, she was not forced to speak English until she was older and went to high school in North Bay.

Tetawin's language experience at Residential School is a different experience from Majitch who is younger than Tetawin by 11 years. The language practices changed, and the priests and nuns at St. Anne's in Fort Albany started to use English as a primary language and forced the children to speak English in the 1960s. Therefore, Majitch had to speak English from the age of 6 years old.

### ***Language Translation Profession***

When Omisimâw was working at the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre in the 1980s she was transcribing stories and talking by Elders that were recorded on cassette tapes. She also did the language training program at Lakehead University for three consecutive summers, and she got her teaching certificate. When she was done, all her

children were grown and out of high school, so she went to teach in Peawanuck, Ontario. She mentioned that “Everybody was speaking English and there was no Cree with the kids. You know?” (Session Five). This would have been in the early 1990s.

### ***Language Loss***

When I moved to Peawanuck to connect with my community in 1998, George Hunter, who was the Education Director at the time, did a presentation to the grade 9/10 class. He said that the language use changed when they brought in satellite television. It was apparent that year when I was in Peawanuck: the majority of teenagers were not fluent speakers of Cree, whereas their older siblings or cousins who were over the age of 19 were fluent speakers. Some of those teenagers and children might understand some Cree, but they did not speak it to one another when they were in class or at the youth centre in the evenings. All their social talk was in English.

Tetawin also reflected on the use of English in the communities now:

But now everything so easy.  
You know, like for our kids.  
And the kids are even up north.  
And they don't even want to talk their language anymore.  
Because their parents are speaking like that, I guess.  
Everything is in English, a radio, music, school.  
It's a big change for sure. (Session Three)

This was confirmed by Solomon (2022) of Kashachewan. He spoke in Cree about how he was genuinely concerned about the loss of language use in his community:

It was so sudden that it turned around that my grandchildren only speak English.  
The three oldest understand but respond in English.  
We hear that our languages are depleting in use...  
what will happen when our generation dies off?

What will happen to the young?  
In 50 years will Cree be gone?  
I am so concerned about this.  
Language is so vital to our nationhood.  
Manido gave us a gift of language – this language.  
What shall we do to revive this? (Ininimo Speak Cree conference, 2022).

Omisimâw also mentioned that the language was very large and at risk of great loss. She said, “You know, many, many words, they don’t have a word in English. What we have, yeah. That’s the only thing I know is Cree. From the old words. From what we used a long time ago. They don’t use it anymore” (Session Five).

Despite these ongoing challenges, Omisimâw continued her work as a language educator at 87 years old. She said, “You know I’m making a teacher’s handbook. You know? I’m using noun, and verb and adverb, whatever. You know family things and seasons and [inaudible] in Cree. All kinds of crap you know. It’s helping” (Session Five).

### ***Syllabics***

There was a time when communicating between parent and child in Cree was essential. Majitch shared how her mother taught her syllabics so that she could write to her mother from Residential School:

Majitch: Yeah, yeah. The reason why I know syllabics is because our mother – our mother taught me.

Tetawin: Oh yeah, that too.

Majitch: Yeah, yeah. Before I went to Residential School, so, I could write to her.

Guest: Ohhh.

Tetawin: Oh, yeah. (Storytelling Event)

By teaching her daughter syllabics, her mother asserted a Cree form of communication with her young daughter who was only 6 years old at the time. It was also the only form of writing that her mother knew. When her mother went to Residential School, they were taught to read the bible in syllabics (Session One). Their conversion to Christianity was more important to the staff than learning to understand/speak or write in English during the 1920s and 1930s.

### ***Teaching Me Cree***

Each participant taught me unfamiliar words and phrases in Cree during this project. Majitch used the word “*ostehsimao*. [oldest brother]” (Session Four) when referring to my son. She casually dropped the phrase in as a teaching. This is the word for oldest brother, and he is my first child. Another example of this was in conversation with Omisimâw. She and I often talked about food:

Doe: *Wekushin*. [It tastes good]

Omisimâw: *Wekushin meechim*. [The food tastes good]

Doe: Ah, that’s right.

Omisimâw: *Wekushin, meechim*. That’s delicious food.” (Session Five)

Omisimâw happily taught me the language. And then she said, “You should learn Cree” (Session Five).

And she was right.

### ***Cree During the Storytelling Event***

During the Storytelling Event, Tetawin used the language to know if she was allowed to begin. These Cree phrases opened the door for Cree to be used during the Storytelling Event by both participants and guests. She said, “*Nina na?*” [Is it me?] I



responded with “*Ehe, kina. Ehe. Mascha kina*” [Yes, you. Yes. You go] (Storytelling Event).

As Tetawin began to tell her story during the event, someone joined the room of Guest one. Guest one was motioning for a teenager to sit down on the couch:

Tetawin: *Awenakan owa?* [Who is that?]

Guest One: *Nikosis.* [My son]

Tetawin: *Kikipayshoowao?* [you brought him with you?] Nice.

Guest One: *Nikosis.* (Storytelling Event)

This interaction was the start of an engagement with Guest One where they spoke to each other in short phrases in Cree, and where Guest One would enquire about Cree phrases that Tetawin used:

And it was where I was born, was called ‘*ehtomamee*’.  
Apparently where there was two routes,  
two rivers where they merged and then they were they were going like  
they’re going different ways like that.  
[points her hands wide away from each other] So that’s why they call it  
‘*ehtomamee*’, you know.

Guest One: *Itomamee?*

Tetawin: *ehto mamme mammy, mammy.*  
*Mammy.* How do you say that? *Mammy, mammy, mammy.* *Ihmammic* is down  
the river.

Guest One: *mammic*, eh hh.

Tetawin: *Mammic.*  
So, they were like two *mammee*,  
they were going different ways,

like they merge like a big river, and then they went this way. So, I was born right there and the...

Right there, and there. [making motions with her hands]

Yeah. And I asked George one time, when he was Chief, my nephew, and he and she said,

when he was looking at a map,

what it's called in English,

*Aneegish* – Frog River.

*Aneegish*.

Guest One: *Aneegish*?

Tetawin: *Ehe. Aneegish sipi*. [Yes. Frog River]

Guest One: A frog.

Tetawin: Frog. Yeah, but that's not the way, that's the English. (Storytelling Event)

Tetawin shared the knowledge of what that section of the Winisk River was known in Cree for all of us in that moment. It was where a tributary joins the Winisk River. This knowledge was something that I did not know before, and the Cree word is descriptive. One of the issues of using Zoom is that people's pronunciation is sometimes unclear. So, Tetawin had to repeat the sound so that Guest One would get the sound properly.

When Omisimâw joined the Storytelling Event, contrary to her individual storytelling in Cree during Session Three, she spoke English during this group storytelling event. She could not join over Zoom, so she was again on the telephone. She could not see who was in the Zoom meeting. She just had to trust me when I told her who was present. I held the phone near the computer audio so that her voice would be heard by all those in the Zoom meeting. At the end of Omisimâw's sharing about

family histories, fur trade lifestyle and living on the land, Tetawin went out of her way to speak Cree to Omisimâw. They exchanged pleasantries, and then Tetawin asked her to tell a funny story about her brother who used to be silly during prayer times:

Tetawin: *Dande ehtayan?* [where are you?]

*Kipehtawin na?* [Can you hear me?]

Omisimâw: *ehe ehe kipehtahtin otah ka ishe kaskeekwasoyan* [Yes. Yes, I can hear you. I am here in my sewing room].

Guest One: [laughs heartily]

Tetawin: *Gah.*

Omisimâw: *kina maka wina?* [what about you?]

Tetawin: *otah kaishe apeyan nikihk* [Here, I am sitting in my home]  
*nikihk apeyan in Timmins* [I'm sitting in my home in Timmins].

Omisimâw: *ahh mino keeshegao chakasakao peesim kiyapich* [It's a nice day. The sun is still shining].  
*Espokojin kiyapich* [the sun is still high].

Tetawin: *Keeweekakwaychimititaye kaywan* [I wanted to ask you something]

Omisimâw: Okay. Shoot away.

Tetawin: *Anime n'dayamechikanan mana kaitwayapan ete tipiskak* [you mentioned when you used to pray every evening...]

Omisimâw: *ehe* [yes]

Tetawin: *kehtahtawin mana wantoh oche ito may kwatch eh iame che ka neewaninik* [all of a sudden Mike would fool around during prayer]

Omisiimâw: last time we had ...*naytay nemaschich egah paysheeyak pamashe otitahmahk* [The last night we stopped overnight before we reached] before we reached...what do you call that...  
*wachiwisipishishiik* [Small Hill River],  
*waywehwa mana naspito tahwao maykwatsh eyhaiya maychikayak eka wayusk ey nah skway wah shee hit.*  
 [He was imitating snow geese while we were praying not answering me]

Tetawin: she was saying that before that they used to pray every evening before they go to sleep, right,  
 and Mike would all of a sudden make a joke in the middle of the praying.  
 That's funny.  
 He was calling snow geese,  
 and he said he thought they were angels.  
 Oh, I remember him doing that.  
 That was so funny.

Omisiimâw: *mina peyakwa na* [another time] [inaudible]. *asha mina ayamischikaniwan mina nimichaytitan ashay maskooch kititanakoban mona eskwa ahow maskooch itahkohan Enisabet denden mina ayamischikanin ashay* [We were having a prayer again, there were lots of us by then, I think Elizabeth was there that time]  
*ketahtowin kitoheywewawao "kweo! kweo!"* [and again, while praying all of a sudden he was calling snow geese "kweo! kweo!"]  
*maykwatsh ehaimaychikanaywanaynik* [during prayer time]  
*Klitotahkanewan* [parent said, what did you do that for?]  
*kwaneh maka ehtwet ashaynew ehchikana* [and then he said he thought he was seeing angels]

Tetawin: Oh that Mike, he's crazy.

Omisiimâw: *ashaynewuk echikana maka ehtwet* [He thought they were angels, he said].

Tetawin: Oh, he thought it, yeah.

Majitch: They were Angels.

Tetawin: He was calling snow geese, and he said, oh those were the angels, I thought they were geese, snow geese [laughs]

Omisimâw: But in the middle of praying, *mana kahtotahk* [what he's doing]

Tetawin: Oh yeah, I know. I remember him doing that. My god, so funny [laughs] he'd going like, "*Kowuk! Kowuk!*" (Storytelling Event)

Up to this point in the Storytelling Event, we had been talking with Omisimâw for a while, but Tetawin still needed to check in with her in Cree before she asked her question, which demonstrated aforementioned Cree manners. Tetawin asked her where she was. I interpret these pleasantries as a grounding or conversation starter. And then Omisimâw mentioned the weather. After those pleasantries were done, Tetawin asked the question about the goose calling during prayer. It was clear that Tetawin just wanted to talk with Omisimâw in Cree, and she thought of a story that can be added. The choice was a funny story about Omisimâw's brother. This interaction was an example of my childhood where the adult Cree speakers would share a story or speak to one another in Cree, and then explain what they said in English. I am grateful that they had this conversation and that it was on record for us to learn from in this group setting. Perley (2014) advocates for these kinds of language interactions every day. Every time Indigenous peoples use our Indigenous languages, we are keeping the language and culture(s) alive; thereby, asserting our Indigeneity in spaces where English has become the common backdrop and language choice in conversations.

This was also the fullest conversation about a story that was told in Cree during this project. It demonstrated humour and family practices. It would be easy for her brother to do this during prayer. Every night the family would say the rosary in Cree.

Every *Hail Mary* was told in two parts. The first sentence of the prayer was said by one or two people together, and the second half would be a response by the rest of the family. Therefore, it would be easy for him to do the goose call when it was their time to respond. You can hear a recording of Tetawin and Omisimâw's praying [here](#). The practice of saying the rosary every night was also mentioned in grandmother, Glecia Bear's, stories (Ahenakew & Wolfhart, 1992) when they mention that her stories include many details and skills of daily living, "along with bedtime prayers when the entire household would say the rosary after her mother" (p. 24).

By this time, like Stirling's (1997) family in the Kamloops area, Omisimâw's parents were raised Catholic in the Hudson Bay Lowlands: Omisimâw's grandfather, Abraham, was baptized in Moosonee when he was six years old on July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1879. Abraham's mother Maggee could not be baptized but declared her love of the Catholic faith before the priest on the same day to be recorded in the Mission log. Maggee's husband, Robert, made no such declaration. Maggee's testament meant that her family would be raised with Catholic beliefs and practices, which included prayers every evening before sleep. You can see the baptismal and testament to faith records in Appendix A. These mission records reveal the story of conversion that happened *before* the implementation of Residential Schools in this area. Horden Hall Residential School in Moose Factory started in 1907 and St. Anne's Residential School in Fort Albany started in 1910 (Auger & Faries, 2005). These earlier conversions and intimate daily prayer practices could explain why some of the Elders are still practicing Catholics after having attended Residential Schools. It was these family prayer practices that reinforced daily rituals, Biblical storytelling, combined with family bonding and humour.

I recall when I was seven years old visiting my grandparents in Fort Severn. They had neither electricity nor plumbing. So, every evening of our visit, my mother and my Kookoom would recite the rosary prayers in Cree. The Hail Mary would be said in tandem between these familial voices going back and forth in Cree phrases. I had heard the Hail Mary prayer in English, so I knew what they were saying, but they were saying the prayer in Cree. And the rhythm of the prayers – the entire rosary before bed was like a song of syllables for me. It brings deep memories and feelings of devotion for my mother and Kookoom by the light of an oil lamp. These stories clearly demonstrate that their faith practices were linked and reinforced through daily family rituals of prayer in the Cree language. These rituals were similar to Glecia Bear's who was from Northern Saskatchewan, and she said, "in the old days, the Catholic Church was highly thought of. In fact, I myself still follow it all the way; what my parents had taught me, I would never let that go, and I will die with what my parents have left to me" (Ahenakew & Wolfhart, 1992, p. 127). These are familiar sentiments to my participants. Although, not said outright during this project, both Omisimâw and Tetawin remained faithful to Catholic practices and would not change for anyone even when it meant that none of their children go to Church services with them.

All of these examples of language use during this project enriched my experience with the participants, and I believe with each other. Whenever they spoke to each other in Cree, they would laugh or support each other's statements or stories. It also validates what Métis writer and Cree language teacher, Chelsea Vowel says that "Reclaiming our traditions is more than learning our language, but our languages do give us a way in, which should absolutely be explored" (p. 109).

## Chapter Five

### Stories, Traditional Knowledges, and Seven Generations Teachings

*Because we lived that way, then we still are, it is something that they will stay for us with us forever, like you know. It's still very strong in us. Even though, you know, the government tried to take that away from us. They failed miserably. So, because we were strong rooted: we had strong roots. (Tetawin, Session One)*

In this chapter I explore the use of stories as a pedagogy for the participants, as both listeners to a story and as a storyteller. Then I explore the stories that came out from their connection to land. I connect these to the teachings of *Mino Pimatisiwin* or living the good life which I first learned from Marlene Etherington who was a Omushkego Traditional Knowledge Keeper from Attawapiskat First Nation and the Youth coordinator at the Timmins Native Friendship Centre when I was 17. These stories include learning by watching and various aspects of the fur trade/trapping lifestyle. I also noticed that the family and extended family were essential for their survival. I noted this family dynamic as intergenerational survival.

Each participant had different experiences to demonstrate these ideas and practices. Although it was unintended, participants shared some traditional knowledges as well, including, predicting the weather, living generously, and hygienic practices which embedded Indigenous scientific knowledge into their daily lives and survival. Then I examined the changes that came: the establishment of an Army Base across the river from Winisk, a flood, Residential School attendance, and generational isolation all resulted in different impacts for Omisimâw, Tetawin and Majitch and their trajectories out into the world. I also explored different themes that I found when I sorted and reflected on the Story on Land and Everyday Life data: there are two different seven generations stories that are told. The first I found demonstrated Indigenous ways of



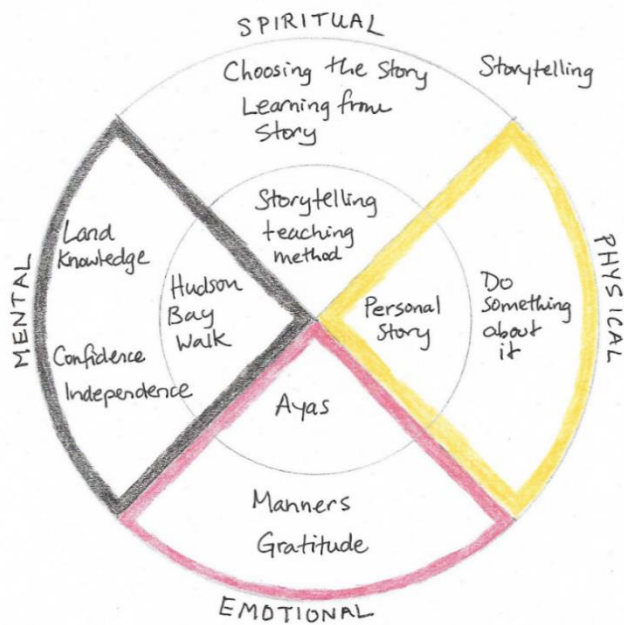
knowing in relation to dreams and visions. The second was my attempt to further understand the conversion to Catholicism in this region that resulted in me growing up in a family that followed the rituals and rites of passage in this faith.

### Storytelling

I have organized the storytelling elements in Figure 6. In the Physical quadrant I have put personal stories and stories which either demonstrated by the participants or were attempts by the participants to teach me (and by extension, you) to ‘do something

Figure 6

Storytelling



about it.’ These stories signified that action is required in some way or another on the part of the listener after hearing the story. I have placed the Ayas story in the Emotional quadrant of storytelling because what is remembered of this story was the teaching of manners and gratitude. In the Mental quadrant I have put the Hudson Bay Walk story told by Omisimâw because it contained a lot of knowledge about surviving and moving

on the land. This story also included the development of confidence and independence for Omisimâw in this story. Finally, the Spiritual quadrant includes the pedagogy of storytelling as a teaching method: the storyteller always chooses the story; and the listener/reader has a responsibility to learn something from the story. The stories and teachings are included in the following discussion.

There were a few legends and mainly personal histories that were told during this project. Bird (2005) calls legends “*a ta noo ka nak*: Stories about events that happened so long ago that the personages are beyond living memory and take on powerful, even mystical qualities” (p. 22). The telling of these legends during the project include: an Ayas legend told by Majitch to explain how her mother used the story to teach manners (Session Two); the Wasaykaychek shut-eye dance story told by Omisimâw when I asked her to share a legend (Session Seven); and the story of the Grebe read by Tetawin from a book because she wanted to share a legend but doesn’t fully remember the entire stories as they were told when she was a child (Session Three).

The participants said that legends were sometimes told by both parents, but they were also mixed in with biblical stories. Legends were also told by visitors (Session One and Five). Tetawin said, “My mom would be the one telling, you know, legends. Or some ...or sometimes it would be a true story” (Session Three). Majitch said, “My mom used to tell us stories from the Bible actually and I, I took them as a child would read fairy tales - that sort of thing. It was like a fairy tale to me” (Session One). Omisimâw says, “My mom didn't do that very much. You know, she taught us how to pray” (Storytelling Event). When they were told legends by either of their parents, Omisimâw and Tetawin often shared how they fell asleep before the end of the story (Session One and Session Five), which may have contributed to their lack of remembering story details. The oral nature of storytelling means that it can be easily lost if the next generation doesn’t engage with the Elders while they still remember (White, 2018).

Tetawin said,

I remember our dad when he was getting old, like, you know,  
a couple years before he died,

he used to tell stories and he would stop and say,  
“I don't remember anything after that.”  
Because they get like that: we get like that, too.  
Because everything.  
Nothing was written.  
Nobody was, written, the stories were never written,  
so, you know from passed on...  
You know, from generation to generation.  
Nothing was written.  
It just kept on going from person to person. (Session Two)

The use of storytelling, whether it was a legend or a personal story, by their mother always had a purpose and shared some form of knowledge. Majitch yearned to tap into these knowledge systems within legends (Session Two). She recalled a legend that her mother told to teach her manners:

Doe: [Majitch], do you want to share one of those legends that you were thinking about?

Majitch: Oh, it was...It was just the fact that it was about Ayas.

Doe: Mm hmm.

Majitch: And he went to visit his grandmother.  
And his grandmother said,  
“Oh, come in,” she said.  
“I'm expecting company and maybe about a dozen people or so.”  
And then he noticed there was a little pot  
on by the fire and the boiling away.  
It just one little piece of meat.  
And he said, “What you're going to feed twelve people with the little piece of meat?”  
And then she said, “Well, maybe you should eat before they arrive.”  
So, he, he's taking a slice out of the meat.  
And, and every time he took the slice it was the same, the same size: it would never, would never go down.

Pretty soon he was just so full and still there was a little piece of meat in there. And, and then that's, that's how I remember my mom saying, "You know, anytime someone gives you something. Just don't say, 'Is that all?' That's not polite." Oh, there was always moral of the story in legends.

Tetawin: Yeah. Don't be greedy. Yeah.

Majitch: I'm sure there was more to the story, but that's, that's the piece that I remember.

Tetawin: Yeah.

Doe: Because that's the moral that you remember - it imprinted on you.

Majitch: That's right.

Doe: How old were you when you...

Majitch: Must have been about six, five, or six years old. (Session Two)

Majitch's telling of part of the Ayas story demonstrated her learning during her mother's storytelling. Her mother's intention was to teach Majitch to be grateful, and in her late 60s, Majitch still remembered the lesson that she learned through the telling sixty years earlier when she was 6 years old.

Most of the stories that were shared during this project, they fall under the category of personal histories. Bird (2005) calls these *ti pa chi moo wi nan*. These stories "recount recent historical events and involve people known to or remembered by the storyteller" (p. 164). Tetawin shared a personal history told to her by her mother when they were complaining about the food they had to eat when they stayed in Winisk because their father was working at the Army Base:

Tetawin: My mom's story is kind of sad because her mother died when she was six years old.

And she was brought up by her grandma.

Machee Kookoom.

They were very poor.

They were very poor, and they were always hungry.

And but I think that made her strong because she was a hard worker.

She learned a lot from her grandma, Mary.

And her aunt.

One sad story that I always remember was that I guess they used to travel all over, like on the land to look for a place to where the animals are when they were hungry. And they would go from here to there.

Different lakes or rivers they trying to catch a fish.

And she was saying that this aunt, she was living there, [where they] were living that her aunt was there.

I don't know if it's two aunts or one aunt for sure.

And there was an uncle there and her grandma.

And then they were just struggling to survive.

That's all they did was ah, and she said that they were travelling one time in the bush. And they made her a little snowshoes with willows, you know, just, just circle thing, like, you know, very, you know, something very – something that was easy to do, like, you know, and then just put a little strings on and then she was made to walk.

She was only about, I don't know, six, seven years old.

She said, and she said she, her aunt was in front of her, she was walking behind everybody, following them.

And then she said she was crying because she was – she wanted to go on,

on her aunt's toboggan

and she said "No."

so they made her walk behind her,

and she said she was hungry,

and she was crying following them.

That's, yeah.

That's the kind of life she had.

She didn't have a easy life.

She was always drag here and there and you know,

Doe: But she shared that with you.

Tetawin: Oh yeah, she yeah oh yeah yeah yeah.

I think that happened over four or five on five years and we were always hungry, and we didn't like the food from the store.

And she told us when she said to us one time,

we were hungry and they said it was just,

we should go and check [the fish nets],

but it was kind of like a bad day to go check the nets.

So, we were complaining about like just eating Bannock all the time or [inaudible]

he would go to the store and buy some canned stuff.

We got sick of it after a while.

And she said, "You're lucky to have something to eat."

And that's when she used to start talking about her childhood how she,

she had to work for everything that she had to eat and started really early.

She didn't have a childhood, you know. (Session One)

Both the Ayas story and the hunger story told by their mother contain intended moral lessons for the participants to learn. Hernandez (2003) noted that Indigenous people used stories that hold teachings on how to be a good person. The fact that both participants remembered these stories and the lesson that they learned from it, is evidence that the storytelling pedagogy worked for them.

### **Hudson Bay Walk**

When I examined Omisimâw's Hudson Bay Walk, I can see there is practical information about traveling on the Hudson Bay Lowlands in late summer in the 1940s.

The Hudson Bay Walk story was told by Omisimâw in Cree [[audio with map available here](#)] and translated into English by Tetawin:

The families of Swampy Cree people used to gather to their villages every spring to bring in their pelts to pay for the bills at the Hudson Bay store, to spend

time with their other family members and for the annual treaty days to get their four dollars that was promised to them on the treaties in place of their land and resources that had been taken over by the government Canada. At the summer's end the families would go back to their trap lines in mid September wherever they chose to spend their winter base locations.

My parents [names removed] and his family had a trap line in Shagamee River off the Hudson Bay coast, and they had to travel by the bay in a freight canoe with their families and supplies i.e., flour, lard, and sugar to last them until Christmas time as well as their tent, blankets, and tools.

Dogs were also essential for travel in the wintertime: there was no room in the canoe so M\*\*\* and I were ordered as being the two eldest of the family, we would walk with dogs to Shagamee River which is about 100 miles by foot. We left the same day as our father left by boat down Weenusk River then to the Hudson Bay northward. M\*\*\* was given a shotgun and 60 shells by his father [name removed] to hunt for shore birds, ptarmigan, or geese for their daily meals and to feed the dogs while they travel.

When they have been walking for hours, they decided to have a break, they made fire and discovered they didn't bring tea with them so M\*\*\* went back to get some tea from their grandparents who were also getting ready to leave for their trip up the coast to their trapping area. Luckily, they were still in the village. M\*\*\* didn't come back until the next day because they had covered a long distance before M\*\*\* had to turn back for tea. I built a shelter, a small tipi and tied up the dogs for the night. After M\*\*\* came back, we made tea and had something to eat and started out and followed an old trail that's has been there for ages from Fort Severn residents to visit their neighbours in Weenusk. We took our time enjoying the land along the tree line and picked berries and ate them which boost our energy. It was a beautiful day and could see the hazy horizon of the landscape. All of the sudden the dogs were running towards the bush and started to bark at something, sounds of fighting, it turned out it was a skunk and one of them got sprayed in the face and smelled awful and this dog was carrying the shotgun on its back. For some reason he seemed to run around us where the wind was blowing from which was unpleasant and there was puss coming out of eyes and white foam coming out of his mouth, but the dog got better eventually. One of the dogs turned around and decided to go back but we didn't bother to chase after to bring him back.

After walking the whole day, we stopped and spend night past the first river, Blueberry River, it wasn't too big of a river, but the water was up to our waist wading across to the other side of the river. This was about mid September, and it was warm enough our clothes to dry up.

We kept on walking and came up another river, Polar Bear River, and this river is a lot bigger and deeper than the first one because of tide coming in from the bay. We waded into the water and water came up to their necks as they kept going and finally reached the other side. We decided to stop and made fire to dry our clothes and look for a place to camp. Just close by there was cluster of trees, we clear trees in the middle of the cluster and camped surrounded by these trees. When the fire was good and going, we hung our clothes to dry and tied up the dogs all around the little camp. All of a sudden, I see the fires burning brighter and I ran and found out it was my jacket, all there was left was metal buckles. After everything had settled down, I said to M\*\*\* let us say a prayer and M\*\*\* agreed as they were praying M\*\*\* started making jokes and they started laughing. M\*\*\* was like that he was a joker. During the night I heard someone running around their shelter, M\*\*\* said it was just one of the dogs that got loose.

The next morning after breakfast headed away from the tree line and headed out towards the bay where the terrain is more sandy. At the end of the day, we pitched our tipi on the side of the sand dune. M\*\*\* went hunting and killed snow geese and had dinner and fed the dogs. The next morning as we were getting ready to leave, they saw a man walking towards them with a gun on his shoulders, it turns out it was A\*\*\* our uncle who came to look for us. My grandparents and uncle A\*\* had gone by the Bay and gone ahead of them and had arrived at the mouth of the river, Small Hill, camping at the mouth of the river. They reached the camp later in the day and Grandma S\*\*\* was sitting there plucking geese and was so happy to see them. She said, I don't understand how your father can let you two walk all the way here by yourselves. She was upset with her son.

And said to M\*\*\* and me not to go anywhere from here. We stayed there for one week then one day, we saw someone coming from the north and it turned out it was [our father] and when he came into the tent, grandma scolded him by saying why are you abandoning your children to travel by themselves. My father never said one word. I was 16 years old and M\*\*\* was 14 and our grandma S\*\*\*



referred us as children. I commented that we never felt afraid or fearful while we traveled by ourselves. The next day we left the camp and towards Shagamee which was about 35 miles north from here. Our dad was leading and walking really, like his normal pace, but we had a hard time keeping up with him. We had to take our boots and socks when we cross the creeks by this time there was ice on the edges of the waters and one time when we did that, I was taking time to test the water with my bare foot how cold it was and M\*\*\* pushed me and I banged my ankle on a sharp white rock, and I was bleeding. M\*\*\* was being mischievous again and thought it was funny. In the late afternoon, we finally arrived on the east side of the Shagamee River, and the camp was on the north side, our dad shot a couple of shots and [our mother] came and got us with the canoe. This is the way it always was the parent would order their children what to do without any questions and we just did what we were told to do.

That's it for me. (Session Three)

These kinds of ordinary details demonstrate that important elements remain to be learned about the cultural landscape of Indigenous peoples, including the Omushkego peoples. Hernandez (2003) asserts that environmental knowledges often include social and spiritual practices of Indigenous peoples, which then get reflected in their stories. And in their work in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, Andrew and Buggy (2008) note that these living landscapes are essential parts of Indigenous cultural heritage. It is useful to know that there are bunches of willow trees near the streams and rivers in the Hudson Bay Lowlands that are tight enough together that you can squeeze in there and feel comfortable and fairly safe sleeping overnight, as well as understanding the influence of the tides on these rivers close to the Hudson Bay. Omisimâw's comfort on this landscape included a practice of praying at night. Her brother, at 14 years old would be joking around during prayer time, but it is interesting to note that even on their own, at 16 and 14 years old, their spiritual practices and reverence were still part of their day.

In some ways, it does not matter to me which prayers they said: it matters to me that they practiced reverence on the land before they went to sleep every night.

There is also Omisimâw's choice as a storyteller to frame the intended lesson of the Hudson Bay Walk story to demonstrate that parents would give commands to children who would then follow them (Session Three):

Omisimâw: I'm going to share a story about independence. That's what our parents gave us.

Doe: Okay, yeah, sounds great.

Omisimâw: No asking of questions. Can you do that sort of thing? It was always commands.

Doe: Okay. Maybe.

Omisimâw [giggles]: When they want you to do something, instead of asking you to do something, they command you every time to do something when they want something. Okay.

Doe: Okay.

Omisimâw: Okay. Alright.

Doe: Yes. Okay.

Omisimâw: Do I start now?

Doe: Yes.

Omisimâw: I'm going to say this in Cree. It's better to use my language, okay?

Doe: Perfect.

Omisimâw: Because I don't, I can't, ah, address the, some things that are happening there on the way [in English].

*Waysketch, mona kiskenten* [Long time ago, I don't know]...I'm starting now okay...[resumes talking in Cree] (Session Three)

In their work, Archibald (2008) and Dion (2009) aim to ensure that readers and storytelling listeners understand that storytellers are deliberate in the choice of story they choose to tell. It then becomes my responsibility as a listener (Archibald, 2008; Dion, 2009; Fixico, 2003) to find meaning. Omisimâw wanted me to hear a story about learning independence. As I reflected on this particular story, I see the result of doing what your parents told you gave the children and youth agency to become independent and confident in their ability to do things for themselves. As children, they were expected to learn tasks which will help in their family's survival. First, they collected fresh boughs, or brought water as small children, and then by the time they were teenagers, they could start fires, set snares, and hunt for their food. In the Hudson Bay Walk story, Omisimâw told her grandmother that they were not afraid when they were walking across the land; thereby proving that they had become independent and capable youth. Auger & Faries (2005) state in *the History of education in Nishnawbe Aski Nation* that "children learned from all of the activities they participated in whether it was playing, helping or doing chores. They learned by assisting adults with their daily chores and by watching how people did things" (p.7).

A non-Indigenous woman named Vita Rordam (1998) stayed in the Winisk village and witnessed the every day lives of the Omushkego Cree peoples between 1955 and 1957 – a time period when Tetawin would have been 12 to 14, and Majitch would have been a baby in the following description:

The Indian children seemed to learn mainly by imitating and helping parents and older siblings, by doing things and finding out for themselves, and inevitably, but getting into trouble once in a while. They followed the parents wherever they went and, when they were old enough, they helped chop wood, feed the dogs, fetch water, paddle canoes, gather berries, and other chores. Performing useful work but growing up in freedom, most youngsters developed into self-confident, resourceful, independent, and brave adults. (p. 175)

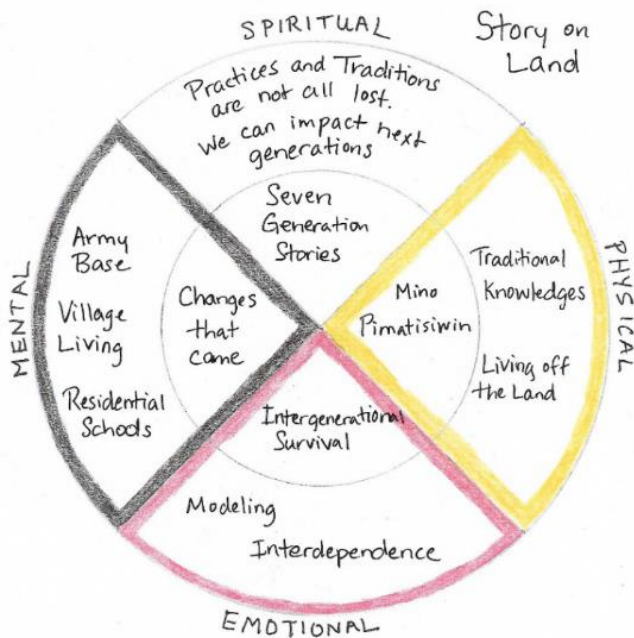
Both these legends and personal stories demonstrated the modeling practices by parents which transmitted practical life skills to children and youth to develop manners, accountability and resourcefulness (Auger & Faries, 2005).

**Stories on Land**

I have organized the Stories on Land elements in Figure 7. I have placed stories

Figure 7

*Story on Land*



that include information related to traditional knowledges and living on the land in the physical quadrant, as well as the teachings of Mino Pimatisiwin because these are manifested through activities that one can 'do'. I have put stories that include intergenerational survival, modeling and interdependence in the emotional quadrant because there is an emotional connection necessary for these activities to thrive. I have put the

changes that came, stories of the Army Base, village living, and Residential Schools in the Mental quadrant because either the participants or I had to grapple with the information and story details that are shared. And lastly, I have put the analysis that these include seven generation stories, and that cultural practices and traditions are not all lost in the Spiritual quadrant. I also put in the hopeful idea that we can impact the next generations with these stories. I include these ideas and teachings in the discussion that follows.

The stories on land include the activities that contribute to living a good life, or Mino Pimatisiwin. These activities or behaviours contribute to their group survival. These stories also include the changes that came between the 1940s and 1960s which impacted their ability to continue to live off the land. There are stories and conversations about what was lost, and what can be done do to (re) create these activities and cultural knowledges.

During my analysis process, I noticed that there are two strands of personal stories that contain seven generations within the story or storyline. I chose to include them because I think these are valuable observations for looking at how far Omushkego peoples have come and generate ideas for what we need to do for our next seven generations.

### **Where We Came From**

The following stories demonstrate the long-standing relationship that the Omushkego participants' families had on the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

#### **Connections to Land – *Mino Pimatisiwin* – Living a Good Life**

The Story on Land was a prominent topic during most of the storytelling sessions. As I was searching through and reflecting on these stories, it became clear that living on

the land demonstrated the teachings of Mino Pimatisiwin – Living a good life. *Mino Pimatisiwin* is the essence of *maahchihew*, but also living with a good heart to maintain balance with everything and everyone (personal communication, Christopher Hunter, Omushkego language and cultural teacher, March 2010, Toronto). Auger and Faries (2005) describe these concepts as ‘living the good life’ in the *History of Education in Nishnawbe Aski Nation*:

it requires much effort to achieve and means acquiring a balance in every aspect of one’s life. Anishnawbe people believe they must continually strive to maintain the ideal and to assist others to achieve the goal. The goal can only be achieved through one’s own personal efforts and with the assistance and cooperation of both human and ‘other than human’ persons that make up the Anishnawbe world.  
(p. 1)

Early life in the 1930s for Omisimâw and 1940s for Tetawin was idyllic and purposeful and reflected the ideals of Mino Pimatisiwin. The family lived by trapping furs to trade with the Hudson Bay Company. They would hunt for food and furs: caribou, rabbits, birds, and fish to eat; and beavers, wolves, various mink, and foxes for the furs. The money acquired from the sale of the furs, bought supplies and food that would last them for the season on the trapline or in the summer in the village of Winisk. Tetawin stated, “we would have supplies to last us at least three or four months for groceries and our blankets and the stuff that we need” (Session One).

The trapping lifestyle required Tetawin’s father to travel with the dogs to where he would set his traps. He would be gone for a week, and then in a couple of weeks, go

check his traps. It was her mother's role to take care of their home area: chop wood for firewood; set snares for local small animals like rabbits; and set nets for fish. It was expected that everyone contributes in everything that they did in their daily living.

Tetawin shared that when they were travelling, they were all responsible to help "look for a good place to build askeegan: our winter home. Where we spent the winter. And we helped... everybody helped out when we build a teepee we had to, they had to cut the trees and everything" (Session One). In this way, they spent the winter on the trapline isolated as a family. Tetawin recalled,

Yeah, but I still remember my father killed lots of caribou in the wintertime and that's what we would live on mostly wild food: ptarmigans and rabbits.

I remember eating mink too, and otter.

This, it don't taste too bad.

We never wasted anything.

There's no store where we are so we had to eat what was there.

My mother used to go set a net under the ice.

And when my father was gone trapping.

And she would take one of us or my brothers with her and set the net and that's how we survived while my father was gone checking his traps. (Session One)

Image 5

*Tetawin's older brother  
checking the fish nets*

And in the Springtime, they would go back to the  
Winisk village:

So that's, that's how they lived long time ago.  
Then go back out. And back in the springtime.  
They will, they will stay the whole winter there.  
And then the spring again they would bring their  
pelts and sell them and  
And that pelts they sell.  
They would live on that for the summer months.  
(Session One)

Both Tetawin and Omisimâw learned from  
watching their parents doing their tasks. When she

talked about her mother, Omisimâw described how she taught by example:

She taught everything what we know.  
That's what she was doing.  
And she really, didn't really teach us how to do those things.  
But, but by watching her.  
That's how we knew.  
We watch everything what she does.  
That's how we learn.  
She didn't say, 'do this' 'that's how you do it' or,  
She didn't say that,  
We watch her, how she did beadwork,  
she made moccasins, she made mitts.  
And we're sitting there and watching her doing it.  
We were [inaudible] very young.  
Maybe 8 years old,  
and she was looking at my beadwork when she was doing it,  
while I was watching her.  
She'd correct me once in a while, but  
She didn't say, this is how you do it.  
But I learned by watching her how to do things. (Storytelling Event)





Tetawin added that “It was easier to learn because everyone was in the same room. There is no different rooms that we have now” (Storytelling Event). Therefore, in this lifestyle, as children, you observed, tried, and then were given tasks to become proficient in the skill, like chopping wood, or setting snares for rabbits and eventually being able to walk 100 kilometres across the land feeding yourself along the way at 16 and 14 years old.

Another aspect of learning to take care of yourself, and others, happened when children were sometimes left alone for short periods of time. In Session Three, Tetawin described how they learned how to survive in those moments. Their father would be gone for a week. And when their mother would check the snares, their mother would have to leave the little ones behind in their living area around the askeegan. When Tetawin was a baby, she was in a *tikinagan* [cradle board] crying, and her siblings who would have been 11 and 9 gave her tea to stop her crying. When her mother came home, she had to laugh because baby Tetawin had tea all over her face.

At 77, Tetawin still loved tea! What this story showed is that the 11- and 9-year-olds had to figure out how to get their baby sister to stop crying, and they were successful because they would have watched their mother soothing babies with her own milk or with soft food.

Omisimâw stated that she learned as a child that working was fun and that it taught her independence. She stated, “We just lived the way that the people live in the bush, you know. We would have fun doing, remember this, okay? We had fun doing

Image 6

Doe’s daughter in a *tikinagan*



work” (Session Five). Being the oldest of the participants, she has the most in common with Ahenakew and Wolfhart’s (1992) Cree grandmothers from the late 1980s: “They stress personal competence, self-reliance and hard work” (p. 26). The skills that they learned and the responsibilities that they had gave them the confidence to be able to do things on their own. At that time, there was a push for the reservation system and cheap houses were built, but because of the ongoing fur trade, the people of Hudson and James Bay were not forced to stay on these small plots of land right away. There was a different sensibility with the government in Northern Ontario for Omisimâw’s family, likely because they contributed to the fur trade economy. Omisimâw shared how independent their family was from the government at that time:

Sometimes, we used to come for Christmas or something like that.  
Or my dad would come to sell his furs – pay his bills, whatever.  
Buy something, get supplies again, come back.  
You know. we didn't get any help from anybody. (Storytelling Event)

That being said, they were now dependent on the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) and the ongoing fur trade. Although many people don’t like it now, the fur coats being sold by the HBC in the twentieth century were still supporting Indigenous families all over Canada who had adapted their lifestyle to get what they needed to supplement their lifestyle of hunting and trapping in the modern age using metal tools, traps, guns, etc. All of which comes from a 300 + years fur trade that helped build up an economy which established the English and French colonies quite well on these lands. So much so, in fact, that the HBC is the longest running corporation in the world which was established in 1670 (Kenyon, 1986).

### ***Intergenerational Survival***

Life on the land required a lot of energy to survive. Every person that was added (a child born) created more energy and resources that were needed to survive. But the more children there are, when they are old enough to learn skills, they can contribute to their survival. This level of interdependence is important to the continuation of Omushkego cultural practices. One winter, Omisimâw recalled when her youngest brother was born. He was born in February, 200 miles up the Winisk River. She was 15 years old. She spoke of the strength and fortitude of her mother during the experience:

And D\*\* was born in the same place. and I was there when Dan was born.  
I was 15 or something,  
15, yeah, something like that.  
I remember.  
I remember my dad woke me up, and he says...  
We just got there that day

Doe: Yep.

Omisimâw: I guess my mom was in labour and I guess she was helping my dad make the shelter, you know.  
Yeah, and she didn't stop.  
And then I went to bed.  
I was tired, eh.  
My dad woke me up.  
"Go and get Jane, next door."  
They've been there before us.  
That's when Dan was born, yeah.

Doe: Yeah. That's funny. So, she she's in labor and she's still making the tipi?

Omisimâw: Oh yeah. Oh, yeah.  
She's a tough lady.  
She's not one of those people who say,  
"oh, I can't do this,"

you know.

She was very [inaudible] and didn't ignore the pain,

I suppose. you want to make a,

help my dad to finish up the tipi.

I think we had a tipi that time. (Session Five)

Not only did they travel to get there while she was at the end of her pregnancy in February in Northern Ontario, but her mother also helped her husband make the tipi shelter that they would be staying in and to deliver her own baby. It was in the middle of winter, and having shelter was necessary for survival. Therefore, it had to be done, even when you are in labour. On the [Google Earth map](#), this place is labeled as *Ito mameek*. You can see how far it is from both their Shagamee trapline *and* the Winisk Village. Omisimâw does not know why they traveled there in the winter with her mother in this imminent condition. My guess is that her father did not want to leave her alone with the baby while he had to go trapping. She had a previous stillborn baby before this pregnancy which may have caused him to worry about his wife and baby. Ito mameek was the trapping grounds of their friends/relatives and there would be other adult women there to help when needed.

Tetawin also told a story of when her father was out trapping, her mother gave birth alone and lost the baby and she almost died from birthing complications. When her father returned, her mother was sent to the hospital in Moose Factory. That following year, her father did not let his children go to Residential School for an additional three years. He needed his family close by on the trapline (Session Two). He needed all his children to contribute to their living. Eventually, Tetawin was sent back to Residential School when she was 15 years old (Session Two). You might be wondering how he

could get away with not sending his children to Residential School at this time for so long. My guess is that as devout Catholics who always attended Mass when they were in the village and baptized all their children, the priests in charge of St. Anne's Residential School and the Mission out of Fort Albany knew that this family did not need to be brought to Jesus. If her father said they would eventually go back, the administrators believed him, and their faith in him was not misplaced. I have already shared that Father Gagnon traveled the Hudson Bay Lowlands with a dog team to visit the people where they had their trapping grounds. It is plausible that they would come to an arrangement under such heartbreaking circumstances.

Tetawin shared that she spent a lot of time with her paternal grandparents during these years on the land:

they used to have a tipi in the summertime,  
but in the wintertime,  
they would have this little one room shack,  
where they live in wintertime.

That's when they're get older when they couldn't go in the bush anymore.

And. Yeah, my grandmother used to talk about things all the time.

I spent a lot -

I spend a lot of time with them. (Storytelling Event)

This story demonstrates how as the trappers get older, the older couple couldn't maintain the hunting and trapping lifestyle by themselves. All their children were grown and had their own families. By the 1960s, staying in the Winisk village was a possibility, and they adjusted to living their lives there. Before then, they would have been taken in by one of their children's families to travel with them to their winter camp. The family unit needed more than just two people to survive the Northern Ontario climate. As

Omisimâw recalled, “Sometimes, they remind us that, ‘We didn’t raise you for nothing, you know. Oh, we raise to work and to help out’” (Storytelling Event).

The phrase “We didn’t raise you for nothing”, which would have been spoken in Cree and more eloquent, speaks to the importance of communal living and time not wasted. Everyone needed to contribute to their living situation. Wood needed to be collected and cut. Caribou needed to be hunted, then butchered and cured. Fowl needed to be shot, plucked, gutted, and cooked/cured. Animal hides and furs needed to be cleaned, dried, and worked to be pliable. Rabbit skins would be cured, and then made into warm footwear, mittens, or hat lining or woven into blankets. Water, ice, and snow needed to be collected for consumption and use. Everything that you needed to create a shelter and keep it healthy and safe needed to be done. Clothing, food, and water were a daily necessity. More hands makes the work manageable. They were living in a climate that included months of -40-degree Celsius weather in the winter, uncountable mosquitoes in the summer, and countless bogs and lakes that make the landscape impassable in the summer, except by river routes and walking trails that are thousands of years old. Omisimâw said that they didn’t play. They just worked. As the oldest in her family, that would have been the case as she would have responsibilities to help with the younger children or given tasks that would allow her mother to take care of the younger children.

There is a marked difference in details for Majitch’s stories of living on the land. There is a 21-year difference between Omisimâw and Majitch, and Majitch’s stories have more of a childlike view. She spoke of playing with seashells on their stops traveling along the Bay: “I remember playing with, with shells because I thought they

were kind of cool because we didn't really have those kinds of things inland and in Winisk River" (Session One). Her stories are tiny vignettes, almost like pictures:

And there was one time I went to get some water and  
I was face to face with a moose!  
I never ran so fast!  
I left everything up there,  
there ran up right up the hill.  
It wouldn't have done anything anyway  
because it was in the middle of the lake. (Session One)

Majitch described the summer and trips to the Hudson Bay and berry picking:

And so, we would all go up to the Bay and  
go on a picnic spend a couple of weeks in the Bay.  
And just to have a good, a good time, you know,  
and around maybe July,  
we would go picking berries,  
we'd have blueberries, strawberries, raspberries.  
It was quite plentiful at that time. (Session One)

Majitch described tide fishing at the Bay:

And the men would go out there and put stakes.  
When the tide was out.  
So, they would put the nets  
and those and those stakes.  
And then wait for the [tide] come in.  
That's how we fish in the summertime.  
The tide would come in, go out,  
and then the fish will be hanging there in the nets.  
That's what I remember in my childhood.  
I might have been about five years old. (Session One)

These vignettes are able to stand alone as descriptions of moments, whereas Omisimâw and Tetawin's stories are part of larger stories that have a beginning and an

end. Majitch does have larger stories, but they take place after she left Winisk in 1969 (Session Four).

### **Traditional Knowledges**

There were some examples of traditional knowledge that came from living on the land that were shared during this project. And although the stories shared seemed obvious and natural, there are some real survival benefits that were not expressed by the participants, but upon examination, I found after reflection.

The first was being able to predict the weather. After a lifetime of living on the land, Omisimâw shared that as her father became elderly, he would still look out the window to see what the weather was going to be like the next day:

Omisimâw: He knows where the stars are.

He had a name a few of them.

And then, you know, ahm, you know he comes around in the evening, [inaudible] when he was okay.

And he goes to my bedroom,

I look over there and when the sun goes down.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: He pretty well tell you how it's going to be next day.

Doe: Hmmmm.

Omisimâw: Every day goes into...

That's going to happen tomorrow.

It's going to be windy or it's gonna be, it's gonna be a warm, it's gonna be, it's gonna be raining or you know, snowing.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: He knew all that.



Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: He look up to, I guess the rainbow around the sun or moon.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: He knows what's going to happen then.

He knew all about the weather, astronomy,  
whatever you call that.

They all that, you know, because they –  
they know what's going to happen because it's like,  
the weather station, you're looking at it,  
that's how they look at the sky.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: He'll say, oh, I'm gonna go tomorrow.

It's going to be nice and I'm gonna go.

I'm gonna go trapping

and he'd be gone for the whole week. (Session Five)

Being able to predict the immediate weather patterns was important for daily survival, but also for the safe travel time required in the trapping lifestyle. He knew the weather patterns from a lifetime on the land, and even when he could not travel anymore in his late 80s and early 90s, he would still enjoy looking out at the sunset to know what the weather was going to be like the next day.

### ***Teachings***

There were ways that some teachings manifested into their daily living. Tetawin remembered her father being very generous and demonstrating reciprocity:

Tetawin: I use that all the time.

And that's what you need to do is try to live your life,

like, be kind to people; be generous with people.  
 My dad used to be so generous.  
 I remember so we, we didn't have that much then.  
 And things were cheaper then.

Doe: Sure

Tetawin: Way back.  
 And I remember my,  
 my uncle Michel used to come and borrow money from my dad.  
 And then he would say, "I will give it back to you."  
 And my dad said, "No, it's okay."  
 That was back then.  
 Very generous. (Session Three)

### **Boughs and Mice.**

All the participants in different parts of their stories talked about changing the evergreen boughs regularly in their shelter (Session Three, Session Five, Storytelling Event). Tetawin and Majitch discuss sleeping on evergreen branches, feather blankets, and rabbit fur blankets. Tetawin said, "Yeah, we just sleep on the ground like on the branches. On top of the branches" (Session Three). Omisimâw also said that

We just lived the way that the people live in the bush, you know.  
 We would have fun doing, remember this, okay?  
 We had fun doing work.  
 Like, it was a routine to do, get some water, get some snow, or something.  
 Or change the flooring of our shelter...  
 we changed it once a week, because it smelled fresh, you know?  
 You know, even though we were in the bush,  
 and ah, you'd think that people wouldn't give a damn about anything,  
 you know, my mother, she made –  
 she put a lot of water in the basin and tell us to wash our face every morning.  
 (Session Five)

Omisimâw expanded on this funny story of how her mother used humour to get the children to do this hygienic task again during the Storytelling Event:

Omisimâw: Yeah, once a week, we changed the flooring.  
You mean in the askeegan? Once a week.

Doe: And then what did your mom tell you about...?

Omisimâw: She would tell me to go and get the branches to change the flooring and whatever you call it. Yeah.

There you go. No such thing as asking. "Can you do this stuff?"

They use a command word every time when they want something.

You know? [inaudible] the whole gang.

Whichever leave, they would wash their face first and you used the same water, though.

Tetawin: Yeah, they would pass it around.

Omisimâw: In the room in that tipi and tell us, if we were slow doing something because we're still sleeping, a little bit.

Tetawin: [laughs]

Omisimâw: She says, wash your face, you know when you are sleeping on the ground, that mouse poop on your face or something.

Tetawin: [laughs]

Omisimâw: And then we wash our face.

We believe that, eh.

What, you believe everything your parents say, you know?

Tetawin: Yeah, that's another thing. You just pass that basin around and everybody's washing your face in the same water.

Tetawin and Guest: [laugh]

Tetawin: That's what happened.

Omisimâw: We had, we had a good soap in those days, you know. I remember the soap was very perfumy and smelled good. That soap that we used to wash our faces.

Tetawin: Everything is so different. (Storytelling Event)

This story illustrated how their hygienic practices of washing their face and changing boughs were taught to them with a good reason (mouse could poop on your face) told to them, but the significance of the information was not passed down to them. Their parents used humour to teach their children and coax them into doing what they should do. And these practices are important to health and hygiene. According to Mouse Control (2022), mouse urine or feces can cause many illnesses, including salmonellosis and more seriously, hantavirus. Therefore, washing of the face every morning, and changing of the branches every week was essential for their well-being and survival. The disease prevention was not included in the instructions, but the importance of *why* is implied by mentioning the mouse poop. Therefore, I must assume that there are many traditional teachings or practices that were essential for their health and survival that had become implicit in the culture. Perhaps knowing the disease caused by mouse poop was lost in the telling, but the daily routine implies that the importance was understood.

It is imperative that we as Indigenous peoples learn and value these seemingly simple practices (Hernandez, 2003; Rowe et al, 2019). As Tewa scholar, Gregory Cajete (2000) says of Indigenous people sharing the ideas of Indigenous knowledge and science with each other and with a broader audience is that a “greater understanding on the part of Westerners of the profound wisdom contained in

Indigenous science” (p. 9). In other words, it is important to do what you are told by your parents because there are thousands of years of survival experience backing it up.

### ***The Changes that Came***

There were major changes and adaptations that this generation had to live through. The conversion to Christianity happened generations ago in 1879 and then St. Anne’s Residential School was established in 1910 just before their parents were born (Auger & Faries, 2005). And even though all of the participants went to Residential School, their time in them varied: Omisimâw, who was born in 1933, only went for a few sporadic years starting when she was 10 years old (Session Five); Tetawin, who was born in 1943, went more than a few years, but also had huge gaps where she did not go at all (Storytelling Event); and by the time Majitch was born in 1954, she went every year from the age of 6 to 14 years old, after which she left for High School in North Bay (Storytelling Event).

The other big influential change on their family lifestyles would have been the building and use of the Army Base across the river from Winisk. In the years that the army base was being built in 1956 (Rordam, 1998), Tetawin’s father did not go trapping because he was working as a carpenter. Tetawin stated, “We, we had to go put the nets down the river because we didn't have anything to eat while my dad was working at the Air Force around that time. We didn't have too much, too much - fresh Food to eat because he didn't have time to hunt” (Session One).

The interruption in regular yearly trapping as the years passed also meant that Majitch’s childhood stories included more of the Winisk Village. Majitch describes various aspects of community life in the 1960s:

Majitch: I remember the church, one or two of the churches were burnt down.  
Some somebody put a match to it.  
I think the woman was.  
It was a woman that did it.  
And she was arrested.  
That, that much. I remember. Yeah. Yeah.  
Then we for the longest time we went to church in the community Hall.  
And it's the same hall: we used to,  
we used to have movies - all old movies.  
And it would be all smoky in there.  
I remember that part.

Tetawin: Black and white movies.

Majitch: Black and white movies.  
Oh, well, and more, more spaghetti western ones.  
You know, once in a while, we have a square dance.

Doe: Live music?

Majitch: I don't remember who - must have been live music.  
Tetawin: Yeah, there were people that made that - used to play. Yeah.

Majitch: I think at that time, we had those 78s.

Tetawin: Yeah.

Majitch: Records.

Tetawin: Yeah.

Majitch: And everything was kind of cranked up. (Session Three)

Another change to the lifestyle was the non-Indigenous men visiting the community from the Army Base. Sometimes their father would have some of the army men over to party:

Majitch: He would bring the,  
the Army guys over and have a little party on the weekends.  
And then they'd have some music and,  
you know, fiddle music and everything.  
And my dad somehow  
He started doing his little homebrew.  
So, he would have a little homebrew and they would try it out.  
I guess he was using those -  
He was using raisins.

Tetawin: [laughs]

Majitch: So anyway. Yeah, they would come around and have a party and then  
they disappear: go back.  
And then I remember just never going back to the  
to trapping again.

Guest One: Hmmm. (Storytelling Event)

The Guest's thoughtful 'Hmmm' response acknowledged the significance of this change in their family's activities. At this point in their lives, her parents were also getting older, and Majitch was the only small child left who was not in Residential School. Although he lived all his life on the land, a wage income in his late 40s seemed to have initiated a major change to settle down in the village. The Army Base closed in 1964, and by then, there was only one deaf son, who was 27 years old, living with them. Majitch started going to Residential School ten months of the year and it is unknown from their stories how often their parents went to Shagamee for winter trapping or the Spring goose hunt.

These stories recall the idyllic experiences of living off the land and the changes to living in the village of Winisk. Living in Winisk changed how the families would also make their decisions. One of the unforeseen repercussions of living permanently in the

Winisk Village was that life on the reservation was not as safe as the family trapping grounds. The families knew when to leave the lower ground to avoid the Spring floods when the rivers break up the ice. But with the government provided permanent housing in the Winisk Village, that is where the families were living and staying. Majitch remembers the details of a flood in the 1966. "One Spring. We had a flood. And I swear, we spent two weeks in a canoe. See the buildings going by, you know" (Storytelling Event). By the time I was child in the 1970s, Majitch's parents were living in Fort Severn closer to their mother's sister. The move could have been a result of the flooding of Winisk in 1966 and the fact that Fort Severn is closer to the Shagamee River than Winisk.

### **Different Impacts for Majitch.**

This loss of the trapping lifestyle, a wider age gap because of still births, and the interruption of the children staying together because of Residential Schools, isolated Majitch so that it was as if she was an only child for the first six years of her life. Once she went to Residential School, she had few connections to keep her in the north. Eventually, Majitch left the Winisk Village in 1969 when she was 14 years old, and she never returned. And the original Winisk Village flooded again in 1986, and the reservation was moved to the current location of Peawanuck, Ontario. Therefore, there is no longer a place for her to return to if she wanted to revisit her childhood 'village'.

Majitch said that even though she lives in the city, she feels like:

we are very adaptable because we were nomadic by nature.  
So, we would go from place to place.  
And to this day, we have that ability to adapt to our situation,  
much like we're doing today.



The times when we were up in the trap grounds.

We are often, we were made to stay in one spot because we would have blizzards and cold, cold temperatures kept us in so...

Today we are experiencing a pandemic, and we are adjusting very well, I think.

...

our parents gave us a foundation to keep our, our culture.

To live in the city still feel like you want to go out there and build a fire and just sit around it and go picking berries.

Picking berries in the summer and just go into land and listen to the birds singing their songs and you want to feel like you want to hop in a canoe and go! (Session One)

The level of details and time spent on the land are reflected in each of their stories and language use with one another. Omisimâw who lived the longest on the land, continually used the language in her life. Tetawin lived most of her childhood and different years during her adolescence on the land and uses the language with her older siblings and with other Omushkego people her age. Majitch went to Residential Schools regularly since the age of six, then left Winisk when she was fourteen, never to return. At the age of fourteen, both Tetawin and Omisimâw were still on the land learning from their parents and grandparents. The result of this difference is that Omisimâw speaks English with Majitch, even though Majitch can speak the language of Cree. When reflecting on Omisimâw's story of the Hudson Bay Walk, she was 16 years old when she walked across the land with her brother, and Majitch was not even born yet in 1949. These differences demonstrate that some of the older Elders who are now in their late 80s or older, carry deeper knowledge of the land and language because they had been living longer on it, and as Restoule et al (2013) and Solomon (2022) advocate, it is important to collect these stories now before the Elders are gone.

### ***Seven Generations Stories***

While hearing and reading through the stories, I noticed that there were two stories that spanned seven generations in their knowledge and content. The first contained predictions to come, and the second contained generational information about their conversion to Catholicism. There was a lot to learn from both of them.

### **Predictions.**

Tetawin retold a story of men in loincloths predicting airplanes during the

#### Storytelling Event:

I guess her mother, her grandmother said that  
 Just like when she was a kid.  
 They used to have this big tipi,  
 where all the old men were sitting around talking,  
 you know, smoking or whatever they were doing.  
 And one of them said, you know,  
 He would say, like she remembers.  
 She said she remembered hearing the old man saying –  
 like kids running in and out of the teepee -  
 that “there was going to be something flying in the sky. That's going to be loud.”  
 It was way back, way back there they were.  
 I don't know how far those old, old guys were then.  
 It might have been 200 years. I don't know.  
 But they predicted about the airplanes.  
 They were talking about the airplanes.  
 “There's going to be people in the plane. And then there's going to be things  
 flying and they are like, you know, going to be loud, loud noises.”  
 And  
 That was before the, I guess the before the missionaries came  
 And  
 And she said, you know, the  
 She just happened to be running in and out of there and there.  
 That's the way they were talking in there, talking about things, you know, what's  
 going to happen and it's going to be like,  
 “people are going to have a hard time, like, our people. They're going to have a  
 hard time because you know, some something or some people are coming.”

The they couldn't really like explain but they knew, they're coming. Somehow, yeah.

They predicted that.

I'm not sure.

I'm not sure if the old guy said some somebody else say that I'm not sure, but that's what the guy was saying that they were predicting – somebody was predicting that there's going to be people coming into our country, like, you know,

My grandma used to say a lot of things like that. Yeah.

I just remember a few things.

But I can't remember everything. (Storytelling Event)

Tetawin's grandmother, Sara, would have likely been born in the early to mid 1870s. Therefore, Sara's grandmother would have been a child around the 1810s or 1820s. The Omuşkego peoples would have already engaged with the Hudson Bay Company with the earliest trading posts being established in 1679 in Fort Albany, Moose Factory and Rupert House. These early trading posts took a long time to establish and maintain, and in the centuries that followed, generations of Omuşkego peoples learned to shift from subsistence only hunting/trapping to a combination of subsistence and fur trade hunting/trapping (Kenyon, 1986). So, although there was influence for some time, the confusion around which grandmother was the child, is a good question. Was it Sara's grandmother's grandmother, which would put it closer to 1750. Or was it Sara's grandmother, which is around 1810. Either way, there is still significance in the prediction of the airplane and the difficult changes that were to come. Even if it was Sara's grandmother, that is a seven generations story because Tetawin has grandchildren who would be counted as the seventh generation. If it was Sara's grandmother's grandmother, then Tetawin would be the seventh generation in that line. The Elders talking in that tipi were sharing a vision or dream and were trying to warn the

people about what was going to happen. The ability to gain knowledge from dreams and visions existed in Indigenous ways of knowing (Bird, 2007; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Ermine, 1995), and are demonstrated through this story that was passed down from one generation to the next, which held value for the storytellers that passed it along.

### **O mushkego Spirituality and Conversion to Catholicism.**

These were the personal stories about what O mushkego peoples faced while living on the land before and during the time of Missionaries. Bird (2007) shares how individuals gained spiritual and practical knowledge through reflection and dreaming. This practice was called *mitewin* (p. 74-75). During our session, Tetawin shared how they used to train medicine people. They started when they were really young and left them alone at 5 or 6 years old to meditate and learn to use their gifts:

Tetawin: Just like, you know, my aunt was telling me that my grandfather said that to be a real

...What do you call it?

Once you know there's a, there's a gifted kids.

You can tell when they have a special gift, right?

So they get picked and they put him right in the bush on their own – five or six years old.

Just like, leave them there.

So that's how they started having visions, like you know messages.

You know, being out there by yourself.

That's how you train all the medicine men.

That's how, or with people with special gifts.

And they would check on him every day, though.

They wouldn't leave him out there.

They probably bring them food.

But you know, they would leave them out there.

Yeah.

Some of them.

They used to put it on a tree like a little...

Just like a tree house.

Majitch: Mmm hmmm.

Tetawin: You know? A little treehouse.

*Tayshipehtakan*, [a treehouse] square 8-foot raft of logs where food stored so your food, animals can't reach, you know those things?

Majitch: Oh, yeah.

Tetawin: *Tayshipehtakan*, they will put them up there.

That's where they would stay. Yeah.

Can you imagine that, eh?

And they would start like, you know,  
to start having those experiences, like, you know.

Building on those...

Was helped you to build on your...

to control your fears and things like that, you know,  
I'm not going to be scared like, you know, I think so.

I'm sure to trained them.

You know how to...

You know, to use...to use their powers.

Mental - mentally, like, you know...?

Doe: Yeah.

Tetawin: Yeah. Control their fears and to prepare themselves to receive...  
to grow the gifts or whatever.

To build the gifts. (Session Three)

Tetawin's aunt told her this information, but it was not something that Tetawin witnessed, nor was part of their lives growing up. It was information that was shared with her about how they used to live.

Omisimâw also has personal stories of metaphysical events that can be referred to as spiritual powers and their use (Bird, 2005, 2007; Deloria, 1999). She learned from her grandfather that there was good sides to those practices:

Omisimâw: Yeah, there's a good side of it.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: There's a good side of it, but they don't use powers to hurt someone.

Doe: Mm hmm.

Omisimâw: That was my grandfather was saying that because they, they worship creator, you know, and their traditional way of praying, you know what I mean?  
(Session Five)

### **Mysteries in the Bush.**

Omisimâw also shared a personal story of when they were camping 200 miles upriver when the men were out separately setting their traps in 1937 or 1938:

Omisimâw: Oh yeah! That's long time ago, way up, way up in a, like 200 miles from here.

In Spring, just like now, they were trapping.

They left us. There was two families. Okay?

Doe: yeah.

Omisimâw: My parent's family and her cousin's family.

They left the ladies to stay behind because they're going to further up the river.

Doe: Yeah

Omisimâw: And then, that night –  
That night, we heard something like ah,  
you know how your heart is pounding?

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: Bum! Bum! Yeah. it was like that.  
It would make a noise somewhere in the bush.  
So, you know, that night our moms are so scared that they,  
we took off somehow and, on a boat, on a canoe,  
went down the stream, whatever.

Doe: Mm hmm.

Omisimâw: And we camped somewhere.  
I don't know where. But I remember my mom.  
That thing followed us, down there.  
And you still hear this, just like a pounding heart or something.  
you know how the 'pum, pum...'  
It was loud behind the bushes.  
Yeah. And then [I] remember my mom has Jesus' picture and hang it up on a on  
a tree all around us, you know?

Doe: Yeah, yeah.

Omisimâw: Anything a holy thing that she had:  
she has to hang it up outside.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: So, we had one old, old man with us, you know,  
but my, my mom's cousin's stepfather.  
I don't know what he was doing there.  
I hardly remember. And this guy,  
I guess, he was ah, doing his thing, you know, falling asleep.

I thought, I think you're using his sleep to fight with this thing that could be heard in the bush, there?

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: I know my mom's cousin is [inaudible] was kicking this old man told him, not to sleep, because he was, she was scared too, you know.

Doe: yeah.

Omisimâw: I don't know. I think, ah, Ernest was a baby at that time, I'm not sure. Anyway, he was small, anyway. There were three of us, I know.

Doe: yeah.

Omisimâw: So anyway. We left next day.

And then on that same night, I guess, my dad, and there's another guy and there's three of them.

Doe: yeah.

Omisimâw: I don't remember the third one, but that my mom's cousin...Pat Metatawabin. They said that somebody threw a stick at them while they were on um, beside their fire, you know?

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: They were making a fire out in the bush.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: So anyway, that's the end of it. I don't remember the rest of it, you know? (Session Five)

Bird (2005) writes that often in these types of stories, the metaphysical experiences cannot be explained in an

ordinary way: those individuals that

Image 7

*Photo of Shagamee River, 1991*



learned to use *mi-tew*, learned to control their minds to reflect, but also manipulate reality. Bird (2005) goes on to say, “In other words, you could perform a miracle that is not possible in ordinary man” (p. 99). The Hudson Bay Lowlands are fairly flat with some trees around rivers and streams, but mostly flat land and muskeg as you can see in Image 7. The people who grew up living and navigating on the land could not explain these sounds and actions except through metaphysical ways. And even when they all grew up practicing the Catholic faith, they made the necessary adjustments by using the Catholic images and tools to keep the danger away from them and to protect themselves. Omisimâw says, “my mom has Jesus’ picture and hang it up on a on a tree all around us, you know?” (Session Five).



Tetawin also tells a story of what she calls ‘bad medicine’ that was used against her father. When these events were happening, her grandfather ran to Fort Severn for help. It was still normal to have people who could run across the land from one community or family trapping area to the next in the 1940s.

And [my sister] said, my dad used to have these seizures, remember seeing him like something coming out of his mouth, you know?

So, my grandpa,

I guess they were like camping around the same area – like, it wasn’t very far from each other.

Anyway, my grandpa went to Fort Severn.

I’m not sure if it’s because where they were camping was closer to Fort Severn than Winisk.

He went somewhere anyway.

Of course, he was running.

He was running like these like messengers, long time ago.  
They had runners, eh?  
That bring messages or whatever.  
And he was good at that.  
And... I'm not exactly sure if it was my aunt told me that...  
My Aunt [name withdrawn] because my dad never wanted to talk about that.  
He never wanted to talk about that. (Session One)

The end of the story is that the grandfather brought holy water and a crucifix.  
Tetawin concludes that “whatever you believe works, right?” (Session One) because the seizures stopped. It should be noted that this spirit attack story was not talked about in the presence of her father who had these seizures. Tetawin says, “I'm not exactly sure if it was my aunt told me that. My Aunt Teresa [must have told me] because my dad never wanted to talk about that. He never wanted to talk about that” (Session One).

The silence among these generations may have started during the time when Indigenous spiritual practices were being replaced with conversion to Christianity. In these stories, the generation that was baptized starting in 1879, converted wholeheartedly, and took on those beliefs, including attitudes of disfavour towards Indigenous spirituality and practices. This silence was also evident in Edmund Metatawabin's (2015) memoir when his great-grandfather disappeared for doing a sweat lodge in the James Bay region, and no one ever talked about his disappearance in open conversations (p. 243). My guess is that Metatawabin's story would have happened in the 1840s or 1850s. You can see this lingering negative attitude towards Indigenous spirituality when Tetawin took her father to the Sun Dance in Matheson in 2002 and his conversation with the male Sun Dance conductor amused the older man:

Doe: What was he saying?

Tetawin: Oh, what did he say?

“All those people that are practicing like witchcraft some kind of witchcraft or something.” [laughs]

*Kamentokechika.*

Majitch: Yeah.

Tetawin: That’s what he said, it’s kind of funny, but he was laughing.

...

Tetawin: So yeah, he’s one of the man,  
medicine man - he’s medicine,  
I think. [my father] was making fun of him,  
because he was wearing something different,  
like a shirt.

And my dad said, “Oh, I thought you were a priest.”

[Tetawin laughs]

He was sitting on the other side.

He had a black shirt with ribbons on it, eh.

Majitch: Oh, Okay.

Tetawin: And um, he was sitting in the other side.

And he came over and oh, my dad said, “*Oh, kiskendimin na?*” [Do you know me?]

And he said, no.

And then my dad said,

I thought you were a priest.

[Tetawin laughs again]

Majitch: He is, kind of.

Tetawin: Yeah. He’s kind of a priest.

And they laughed, of course. (Session Nine)

And so the personality dynamics and attitude regarding *mitewin* spirituality were just as much at play into the decisions made by her father's grandmother, Maggee, to baptize her children. And the silence around those decisions can only leave us guessing based on the fragments of the stories that are left behind. What is clear is that Maggee and Robert's children, Abraham, Anna and Maggy were baptized in 1879, and another son, John was baptized at age 25 in 1898 (familysearch.org). Abraham followed the Catholic faith, baptized his children, and raised them according to Catholic traditions (familysearch.org), celebrations and prayers, including baptisms and marriages conducted by priests when available, as seen in Appendices A and C. Conversion to Christianity happened before the Residential School attendance for these families. Therefore, the impact of the religious dogma may have been less negative than for other Residential School survivors who were introduced to Christianity alongside the brutal assimilationist practices in these institutions. For the participants born in the 1940s and 1950s in this region who prayed according to Christian prayers in their tipis and askeegan winter dwellings on a nightly basis by their parents, the connection to these prayers included family closeness, often included humour, and a connection to the land.

Another personality dynamic was that Robert, Abraham's father did not convert to Catholicism in 1879, and is known to have used this type of *mitewin* spiritual attack against people as well. Omisimâw shared a story about Robert as one who uses Spirit attacks:

Omisimâw: Who?

Doe: Robert

Omisimâw: He was really into that hmmm, spirit attacker, you know.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: He was like that. But you know what happened to him?  
He used to be powerful in that thing.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: Doing that thing. Anyway, one day, one day was visiting a woman  
that just had a baby.

Doe: yeah.

Omisimâw: He was, I guess this woman had gravy from boiling –  
boiling caribou meat or something, but it, she [s]he gave him a drink that gravy.  
And [s]he put the finger in there first, to see if it's warm enough.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: So being, still bleeding, and all that stuff.  
And when that, my [he] drank that gravy, and he died with that.

Doe: Oh my.

Omisimâw: Yeah. [inaudible] ladies were powerful in that, that way when you  
have your period and that automatically you're kind of poison something.  
You're...I don't know how to put it that way, you know?

Doe: Yeah, so she didn't she just put her hand and there, there was nothing on  
her hand, like...

Omisimâw: No, no, no, she didn't have any poison,  
but she had, she was still bleeding.  
Her period, you know?

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: Yeah, somehow, something did to him.

Doe: Hmmm.

Omisimâw: But even though he was powerful doing evil spirits attacking people and that. He couldn't fight back on that thing.

Doe: Yeah

Omisimâw: Because the ladies are powerful, eh?

Doe: Huh. Do you think that's why [your father was] so like, Catholic and didn't want to talk about any of that stuff?

...

Omisimâw: Oh, he never, he never said anything about it, you know.

Doe: Mm hmm. Like he never talked about it.

Omisimâw: I don't know. I don't know if he doesn't want to talk about it or what.

(Session Five)

In Omisimâw's story Robert eventually met his end by a female relative whose power of giving birth was too powerful for him. Many questions remained. What happened between Maggee and Robert while they were raising their family? Maggee must have been formidable to ensure that her children were raised Catholic when her husband maintained mitewin spiritual practices. Bird (2005) shares a story of the clashes that happened during this conversion time period in the 1800s in his book *Telling our Stories: Omushkego Legends and Histories from Hudson Bay*. A group of women were praying every night, and interfering with a man's mitewin practices and he was unsuccessful in hunting. He was very angry, and the women had to flee for their

lives. Bird explains, “So the men didn’t want to join the Christianity because they would lose their power of skills, of hunting, and all that is associated with their beliefs and practices” (p. 214)

In Omisimâw’s, Tetawin’s, and Bird’s (2005) stories of these times, I see that in Omushkego mitewin practices, the men had control and power because it is an individual power gained from praying and reflecting while they are out on the land: and for women, Christianity offered them access and agency to spiritually protect themselves with Christian symbols and prayers.

The pieces of story and evidence surrounding Maggee and Robert demonstrate some nuances in these spiritually charged times. What was interesting was that Robert’s name was not included in his son, Abraham’s marriage records in 1898. Not only was it not included, but the records say that Abraham’s father is unknown (*inconnu*), which infers that either Robert, Maggee or Abraham did not want his name in these Catholic records at all. But Robert’s name was included in his daughter, Anna’s marriage in 1905. The priest would have known who Robert was because his name was on Abraham’s baptismal records (Appendix A), but at this point in their lives, the conflict between Omushkego spiritual practices and Catholic practices were evident in their family marriage records. Sometime between 1898 and 1905, Robert seems to have softened his stance to be recorded in Anna’s marriage records in 1905, but there is still no official record of him professing his love for the Catholic faith. Whatever these spiritual clashes looked like in their daily lives are unknown, but it is clear that Abraham’s son followed his father’s example and did not want anything to do with

Indigenous spiritual practices and so did not share any experiences or knowledge around these issues with his children or grandchildren.

I continued to reflect on Maggee and her conversion to Catholicism. Although I am sure there were daily rituals and reverence in their lives, there are no stories among the participants about women who were trained or who practiced the mitewin way. When Bird (2007) describes mitew practices, it always took place alone out on the land. In the participants' stories, the women were not alone out on the land, per se. They were in close vicinity to their shelter. They went out to set snares and fish nets, but they stayed close to home – unless there was a metaphysical threat. Then they were compelled to move camp to safer grounds (Session One, Session Five, Storytelling Event). The ritualistic nature of the Catholic faith offered women some agency for daily ritual. Praying every evening which *they* led, and the morals and values in the Gospels were close enough to Mino Pimatisiwin that Indigenous women could relate to it. The other element to it was that women could commune with one another and their children in prayer. Adapting their spiritual practices to Catholicism filled the same need that that Omushkego men had when it came to metaphysical connections and understandings. The important part for the women was that these prayers were not done alone.

It had become clear that the spiritual practices that were lost because of conversion to Christianity happened seven generations ago for the participants and their grandchildren. At 87, Omisimâw herself had great-great-grandchildren. It reminded me of retired Senator Murray Sinclair saying that it would take generations for us to heal from our colonial traumas (Moran, 2021). During this discussion of cultural practices that were lost, Tetawin reflected that it “would take people too long time to get everything



back that they lost” (Session Three). I suggested that we should still try to learn what was lost to incorporate into our lives. And Tetawin said,

Tetawin: Oh yeah, sure, yeah.

As long as you follow, you know, follow the...

Follow faithfully, just like everything else, like, you know, to be a good person.

That's how it's all about.

Doe: Mm hmm.

Tetawin: And follow it faithfully and I know that some young people nowadays they, you know,

they stopped drinking and all that stuff,

which is good.

Drugging and all that stuff.

They follow the seven, seven grandfathers'...

Doe: Mm hmm.

Tetawin: Those are good.

You know, you know that medicine wheel is a good teacher. (Session Three)

When I reflected on these seven generations stories, it became clear that the seven generations principle (personal communication, Wanda Whitebird, Mi'kmaq Elder and traditional knowledge keeper, September 2010, Toronto) means that when we think about our individual and collective actions, and how our choices will impact the next seven generations, the timeline is not inconceivable. By being able to name the seven generations, our connections to those that came before us, make it easy to imagine the generational impacts on those that will follow.

These particular stories from the past, track two different strands of seven generations and have different teachings. The first was a warning of change and how it was going to be difficult for Omushkego peoples. The second demonstrated the spiritual

changes that these same generations went through that followed. The loss of Omushkego spiritual practices within the participants' families created a cascading loss of their identities, that left two of them feeling like something was missing (Session Nine). Now is the time when there are still those who know these spiritual practices for the next generations to pick up the bundles and learn - if that is what they want to do. Over the last 30 years, I have witnessed first-hand a revival of Sundance ceremonies, sweat lodge, shaking tent and smudging practices among the Omushkego Cree communities in the Hudson Bay Lowlands and Timmins area. There have also been Anishinaabeg, Omushkegowuk and Haudenosaunee knowledge keepers who are sharing spiritual and cultural teachings in the Greater Toronto Area. As Goforth (2007) reveals, in order to heal from our colonial traumas, Indigenous peoples need to recover our traditional values, beliefs, philosophies, etc., and adapt them to our needs today. Most Indigenous peoples cannot go back to completely living off the land the way our ancestors did, but we can learn from their knowledge of doing so, to improve our lives and our connections to land and each other both for our individual and collective wellness.

Taken all together, I worked hard to (re)create meaning through storytelling pedagogy. I positioned myself as a responsible listener as recommended by Archibald (2008) and kept in mind that I have an obligation to these stories and the women who shared them with me (Dion, 2009; Wilson, 1999). I paid attention when the storyteller had a specific intention to teach me about parental expectations leading to independence. And then I leaned in closer when the stories were reminiscences with hidden teachings, like the science required to keep the family safe from disease.

Although I am the one doing the work to finish this dissertation, you, dear reader, are still required to find your own meaning in these stories as well. My position as listener/reader had to be focused on significant teachings to make meaning in this moment. But there are still more teachings to be found with each reading and each generation who will read and (re)awaken these stories for themselves. This is the essence of oral storytelling that can also be transformed in the written form: these stories can still transcend time and space as Fixico says (2003) when we (re)tell and hear/read them.

## Chapter Six

### Omushkego Identity in Stories

This chapter explores the issues of identity that came up in the participants' stories. The participants explored influences that came from outside of Omushkego Cree culture that changed the way they dressed or thought about themselves. These and other experiences like Residential Schools led to various levels of Omushkego cultural loss, and then the irony of learning about Omushkego cultural practices when they left their homelands. The last parts of the chapter explored all of our experiences in (re)awakening Omushkego identity practices and rites of passage.

Indigenous identities are complicated. Grande (2015) reminds us to think about who is doing the naming and identifying of Indigenous peoples. Is it us? Is it the dominant powers in charge of legislating our lives? On these lands now called Canada and the United States of America, various Indigenous peoples for hundreds of years were called 'Indian'. It was the reference to the 'other' who lived on these lands when the European settlers and explorers arrived (Mann, 2005, p.390). Any Indigenous person, regardless of their own culture or Nation were often called 'Indians' by settler peoples. It was a clear distinction between both sides of this otherness. We were the 'Indians', and they were the 'We mis ti go si wak' [white men who came on wooden boats] (Bird, 2005). For the sake of brevity, I won't go into the complexities of the colonial naming game, but I do have to address a few things for clarity.

The relationship between Indigenous populations and the colonial settlers changed after Confederation in 1867. Once the colonial settlers became their own 'country', albeit still connected to the British Crown, they needed to find a way to have full access to the land and resources where the Indigenous peoples were living and

thriving on the land (Vowel, 2016). On one hand, the newly formed federal government began the process of signing Treaties between this new nation and various Indigenous nations; and on the other hand, the government created the Indian Act of 1876, which was the first legislation to define and control 'Indian' populations (Toulouse, 2018). The complexities of identity that exist because of the Indian Act are the result of the patriarchal and white supremacist culture that exists within Canadian culture (Vowel, 2016). For example, the original definition of who qualified to be an Indian was how the person was associated with a federally recognized and documented Indian *man*: the child of, or the wife of, etc. Therefore, the generations that follow had and continue to have issues because of these limitations (Vowel, 2016).

This project focused on Omushkego Cree Elders; therefore, in today's understandings of the legislated identity, although they are all Status Indians according to the federal Government lists, they also identify as First Nations women. Historically and culturally, they belong to the Omushkego Cree peoples and Nation of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. Although this project does not directly focus on the political issues of Indigenous identities in Canada, I found that their stories revealed their struggles with their own sense of identity as Indigenous women within the context of ongoing colonialism and change.

The issues of identity that came up in this project stemmed from various aspects of cultural interruption. The impacts from the Indian Act included the reservation system, Residential Schools, and the restrictive laws regarding Indigenous cultural and spiritual practice. If Bird (2005) says that fifty percent of Omushkego people's make up is spiritual, the loss of spiritual knowledge and practices becomes apparent with how

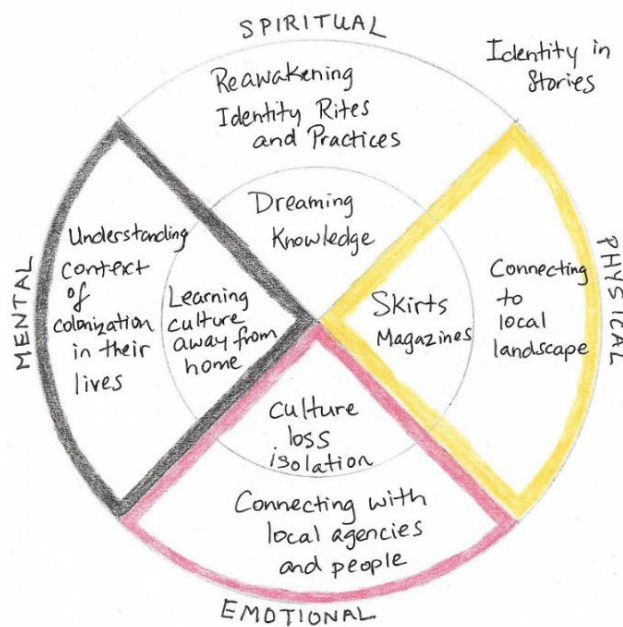
some of these participants felt about themselves as Omushkego women who may or may not have adopted the Catholic faith to fill that other fifty percent.

Another factor that was out of their control was the Cold War. Without any consultation, Canada just started building an Army Base across the river from the Winisk Village to create one of the listening stations that were placed all along the Northern regions of Canada and Alaska (Wilson et al, 1995) which brought white men and their culture to live and work close by for many years. No one in the Winisk community was given a choice or the ability to say no to the building of the Army Base. Another far-reaching, and seemingly minor, but important for identity markers was the discontinued selling of fabric from the Eaton's catalogue through the Hudson Bay Store as well as the introduction of 20th century media through magazines found at the Army Base dump.

All of these laws and cultural interruptions created change in the participants' lives, and because of their age range of twenty-one years between the oldest and the youngest, the differences in their lives are striking. This chapter explores the stories where the participants describe issues surrounding their sense of identity and how that changed who they wanted to be, what they felt was missing, how they changed, and how they returned to various cultural practices to assert their Indigeneity.

As you can see in Figure 8 in the Sacred Circle diagram, I have put the change in clothes and body in the Physical quadrant, represented by skirts and magazines. I have also put how the participants connect to local landscapes and how that relates to their sense of identity. I document the emotional impacts of culture loss and isolation, as well as the importance of connecting with local agencies and people in their lives. What and

Figure 8

*Identity in Stories*

where they learned about culture and colonization is in the Mental quadrant.

And finally their/our (re)awakening and understandings of rites of passage, identity marking, and dreaming

knowledge and action are included in the Spiritual connections that the participants and I worked through on this journey.

Although I have made distinctions in the diagram to show where I would put these experiences, as you will see in the

analysis, these lines are fluid and intermingle in their storytelling of their lives. I respected their storytelling choices and processes, and the analyses followed in a similar organic way. The diagram is meant to be a guide to demonstrate the four elements of self (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual), and how the participants moved through these elements at different times in their lives, but in no way are these experiences strictly linear in direction around the circle. I include all of these analyses in the discussion that follows.

### Skirts

Tetawin found a picture of herself that her cousin took, and it is dated 1958. She used the photo as a prompt, and it makes her think about skirts. In this photo, she is wearing a skirt, and she said, "We used to make our own dresses. And used to order some material from Eaton's: the catalog, and Simpson Sears, they have some material"

(Session Two). Tetawin then recalled the first time that she saw a woman wearing pants when she was 15 years old:

Okay, so in 1958 that summer I remember one of the girls to – went the hospital and Moose Factory.

I think it was Mary, Mary McKay's daughter, Evelyn.

She was just young then.

But as you like.

And Maggie, too, they were, they were they were coming down the road on the bicycle and I see, oh they look different.

And I said, oh, they were wearing pants.

They came back from Moose Factory or something to the hospital and – and they were wearing pants.

And then I thought, "oh my God, like, what are you wearing," you know?

Oh, it's kind of strange to see somebody, you know, wearing *pants*.

I remember, I remember Evelyn's pants were pink and Maggie's were light blue.

They had just come from a –

It was the first time I saw a lady - a woman - wearing pants.

You know? (emphasis added because of her tone, Session Two)

Tetawin also talked about how wearing skirts and dresses were formative in her identity as a female in her lifetime. Tetawin talked about how it took a while to make that change from wearing dresses to wearing pants. The only reason she stopped wearing skirts was that the Simpson Sear's catalogue stopped selling fabric and started selling pants. The capitalistic nature is obvious and had a contributing factor to influencing gendered clothing for Omushkego peoples in Northern Ontario. It was not an easy transition for the Omushkego women and girls:

Tetawin: Oh, we went back and forth, back and forth, you know, but some reason, the Simpsons Sears stop taking orders.

And I guess that's sort of like helped us, you know,

to change our clothes because we couldn't get any more fabric for some reason.

Eatons wouldn't - stopped, you know, taking orders.



Doe: Because they want you to buy the pants.

Tetawin: I guess so. So, it was 1958 around there.

I remember that. Yeah. So, this is my story and...

But then I like wearing dress.

I like to wear a dress. (Session Two)

Majitch also talked about this transition from wearing skirts to wearing pants.

During the Storytelling Event she said,

Majitch: I used to wear pants and, and a dress tucked into my pants.

Tetawin: Oh, yeah.

[They both laugh]

Tetawin: Yeah, it was like that for a while because you were,

we were, you know, we were uncomfortable,

and they wear dress on top of pants.

Just and then we finally got rid of it. (Session Two)

Tetawin is quite funny retelling this story during the Storytelling Event. She adds,

Tetawin: It took a while to get used to wearing pants.

Guest Two: [giggles]

Tetawin: Now I want to go back and wear skirt now. [laughs]

You know, when I, before I retired.

I made a list of things I wanted to do.

Like when I retire.

One of the things was to wear a skirt or dress, you know,

Guest One: Hmmm

Tetawin: But it's just, is hanging in my closet.

[Everyone laughs]

I wear it once in a while when it's hot outside, like in the summertime.  
 I wear them sometimes  
 I gotta get into the habit, you know,  
 I think it's good to be, you know, to wear dress.  
 Wear a dress like our Elders used to have, you know. (Storytelling Event)

Tetawin connected wearing dresses and skirts with who her Elders were, and she wanted to connect with their physical representation of their identity. If they wore skirts, then she should would wear skirts to be like them. Tetawin's thoughts towards the

Image 8

*Doe in ribbon skirt*



simple act of wearing a skirt demonstrated how Omushkego women could contribute to a practice of critical Indigeneity.

Tetawin talked about how female identities are linked to wearing dresses. She said, “Yeah, I think it looks nice. When people - women wear dresses. It's one of them, their identities, I think, you know, to wear like a dress. It's their stuff” (Session Two). I used to resist this thinking because I equated wearing dresses with European or settler histories and identities. But at this moment, I think that wearing skirts are part of Omushkego identities, and certainly the revitalization of the ribbon skirt in Indigenous North American cultures proves that it is important to many Indigenous women's identity. So much so, that there is now a National Ribbon Skirt Day on January 4<sup>th</sup> in Canada (The Canadian Press, 2023). On that first National Ribbon Skirt Day, I wore a ribbon skirt while I was teaching online, and I shared this information with my students.

## Magazines

Another impact was the introduction of magazines. Tetawin recalled that she and her sister would go to the Army Base dump and find the magazines left by the officers for the first time in the mid-twentieth century:

And then, you know, because we were sort of like living in that era. You know, when you start to grow up teenager and looking at those magazines, sort of like changed the way that we were thinking like, you know, “oh, I want to be like these movie stars” like, you know, the society that they live. So much better and that's what we saw there, so, you know, but we were, you know, it was so funny. I was laughing one time. And you see those things. I don't know. [My sister] used to have long hair under her arms so she so, she shaved all it - we were watching the magazine. He said you seen those people shaving there. So, we started doing that, too. [laughs] (Session Four)

It is easy to see how as teenagers they could be influenced by what they were seeing in a glossy magazine. She stated, “You know you started to see how you live, you know, and, I don't know, like it was kind of like wishing you could live the way they were” (Session Four).

These magazine influences in the 1950s in the far north had a big enough impact for them to change their body habits. I can't even measure the different impacts of media on the youth in the north in the twenty-first century. Solomon (2022) speaks to the desperate need for action because television, schools and social media are changing the youth every day, and the youth are not speaking the language. It is a mammoth of a challenge, but there is hope in language and cultural programs through

agencies like Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) and the Ojibwe Nation Rebuilding Initiative (ONRI) happening now. NAN has been providing language classes online since the Covid-19 pandemic (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2021) and ONRI has created language kits that they have been sending to communities over the last year (Ojibwe Nation Rebuilding Initiative, 2023).

Maskikoo-Nehinaw scholar Onowa Mclvor and American scholar Teresa L. McCarty (2016) found in a survey of Indigenous language immersion programs in Canada and the United States that students in these programs do as well, but more often, better, in English classes than their peers who went to an English-only classes. Not only that, but many of these students also outperformed on math and science classes as well. These studies demonstrate that when students are immersed in their languages, they learn better. I believe that these immersion schools and activities would fulfill what our ancestors wanted when they signed Treaty 9: they wanted their children to be able to be on the same playing field as the new Canadians (Auger & Faries, 2005). In other words, they did not want their children and grandchildren to be at a disadvantage when the world was changing around them. Mclvor and McCarty's (2016) survey of immersion schools show that Indigenous students learning Indigenous languages in schools and in community events allows them to thrive.

### **Culture Loss and Learning About Culture Away From Home**

Like many Indigenous peoples, the cultural losses experienced by the participants, and me, were not always conscious nor understood (Assembly of First Nations, 1994). Although the participants had all grown up on the land and speak their language, some cultural connections from the land were missing and replaced with

Christian stories and dogma. It was not until the participants moved away, and sometimes decades later that they started to find resources or people who would fill in some of the missing pieces.

Tetawin talks about learning about her culture when she moved to Timmins and worked in the library at the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre in 1983:

My first job was at the Cultural Centre.

I worked in a library.

They have a library where all the Native information and books and related to um, I was a secretary there in the library.

Yeah, I learned a lot in there and, and there was the first time I really, I really started to learn about my culture.

I had to move to a city to learn my culture.

They had all kinds of books in the library. (Session Four)

The existence of these types of agencies are integral to the preservation of cultural practices that conversion to Christianity, colonization, and the Residential Schools tried to erase. I was confused that she said she learned her culture in the library because she grew up on the land. Tetawin explained the difference between living on the land and living a culture:

When, when you live in the land, you know, you're living with your family, you get to use your language that's, that's the most important part of being at home with talking – you're using your language.

And you learn everything in your language:

what you're doing, what's your,

what's, what's this called, whatever, and you're learning the things,

how to do it, like how to trap,

to set the net and it's all in Cree in your head.

And the difference is when I –

when I said I had to learn like I had to learn the history,

the history, and the ceremonies.

We didn't have ceremonies, you know,  
because religion took over our ceremonies when I was young.

Doe: Okay

Tetawin: That's the difference for me.

I had to learn the, you know,  
the sweet, sweet grass and all that stuff.

I didn't know anything about that before,  
before I left Moosonee, I didn't,

I didn't.

I didn't know all these things. (Session Four)

This passage speaks to the great loss of what Bird (2005) calls fifty percent of our spiritual selves resulting in the silence that followed because of the struggles between Catholicism and Omushkego Spiritual practices. Tetawin reflected on how participating in her culture has been a long time coming:

It felt good for me because like I said,  
like when you're connected to your culture,  
I guess, you know, ah, like you said, you know,  
because you lived from up there on the reserve,  
and because you speak your language,  
and you connect more you're –  
you're connected really deep and then your language with nature when you talk  
to people are the same language.

I said, but I was figuring out one time, how,  
how far back was it that the missionaries came.

And I come up with this is at least 100 years.

Where the missionaries came and that's a long time ago,  
we, we stopped doing the ceremonies.

Okay. And so that's why I'm saying,  
like we didn't.

We lost part of it,  
I guess, big part of our be being ah...our culture –  
big part of it because of the missionaries coming.  
And so when I moved to Timmins here,  
it was,  
it was starting to  
they were starting to have those workshops and everything.  
And that's what I mean,  
I started to learn, you know, the good things about –  
feeling good about being a Native –  
positive things.  
I always thought, you know,  
because people that they see,  
and I never understood why our people were always drinking.  
Like being violent –  
violent, violence in families.  
I didn't understand that.  
I never knew what it was.  
I thought it was just the way we were,  
we were that way,  
but I don't think so.  
It's because of things that happened  
then we didn't really know why we were the way we were or something like that.  
So, when I...  
So, when I said that they had to come to city to learn my culture,  
it was part of my culture that was important for us long time ago.  
The way we lived.  
You know, the way we lived.  
This, you know, part of it was destroyed and you know,  
yeah, that's what I mean. (Session Four)

Tetawin guessed that it was 100 years ago, but it was 141 years from the year 1879 and our project conversations. Maggee professed her love for the Catholic faith and baptized her children in 1879 (Appendix A). And so, religion started replacing the

ceremonies in their region 64 years before Tetawin was born in 1954. She also mentioned the intergenerational impacts on families and communities that she did not understand happening around her. She made it clear that knowing these histories helped her to understand the link between these behaviours (drinking and violence) and the colonial traumas that happened because of the implementation of the Indian Act laws. In his work, Anishinaabe psychologist Peter Menzies (2014) says that knowing that these negative and violent behaviours have a source, helps intergenerational survivors move forward from it and sometimes through it.

These are consequences of how the Canadian hegemony infiltrated Tetawin's identity and who she wanted to be. The magazines that she and her sister acquired from the garbage piles at the Army base, and her experiences at the Residential Schools, influenced how she wanted to be. And in her lifetime, it created what she called a low-level sadness in her (Session Four). She also stated that her experiences at the Residential Schools are always with her, and they are part of her. Despite this constant pain, she has found healing in (re)awakening her knowledge of her culture and shared her struggles honestly with our small group, and also the public event of the Ininimo Speak Cree virtual conference in 2022. Tetawin stated, "Our people are interested in you know, to understand why we are the way we are. That's how they begin to understand acceptance, like, yeah. That's my story" (Session Four).

It is important for Indigenous IRS survivors to understand the context of their lived experiences. Iseke-Barnes (2004) insists that affirming Indigenous identities are necessary because these identities were attacked and destabilized in the schools, and in



society. Alfred and Corntassel (2005) also remind us that Indigenous peoples have been shaped by the political contexts of the Indian Act and ongoing colonialism which put restrictions on cultural practices, language and their relationship to land. Majitch reiterates this experience:

Yeah, I never, never understood why we didn't participate in cultural stuff. But then I found out that the Indian Act was the one that abolished powwows. And also, they couldn't even have three people standing talking because they thought we were planning a revolution or something. That's when I found out that it was that abolished. (Session Four)

Majitch made the link to the oppressive legislation and law enforcement that implemented these laws which defined and confined Omushkego peoples in the Indian Act. Majitch also experienced a more pronounced erasure being the only child left at home and grew up essentially without her siblings, as well as early and consistent attendance at Residential Schools throughout her childhood. Majitch talked about how all the children were gone when she was a child in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The children in the community of Winisk were gone to Residential School. She also did not have anyone to play with when they were on the trapline. The only time she would see other children would be in Church, and that is when they would play. Majitch recalled,

[My friend]. And I'd see her once in a while,  
but then I guess it's because everybody was in their own trap lines.  
So, there was people scattered all over the place.  
And Church was the only time that I would socialize with,  
with whoever I had was left in the community.  
And I remember a couple of kids and Viola was there one of them.  
And I would play with them in Church.  
I never really paid attention to what was going on.  
This, the fact that I just wanted to play. (Session One)

And when Majitch went to Residential Schools, her parents were already settled in the Winisk Village for a time. Going to Residential Schools from age six to fourteen had a tremendous impact on her:

Majitch: As for me. By the time I came along and then you go to Residential School.

It's as if they've erased all that from your memory.

And then you're being assimilated into the white society.

And so, you continue on being in the white society mentality.

And then I didn't even know there was –

I didn't even know there was an Indian Act until I got to Indian affairs [to work].

I had heard about it a little here and there.

And realized that Native people were being controlled through the Indian Act and other regulations.

Tetawin: Yeah,

Majitch: It's like it's like a modern-day slavery encampment so, that's how I look at the reserve system.

Anyways, yes.

And so, by the time I got to high school, I still felt like I didn't belong anywhere.

I still didn't fit into the white society.

I just went along with the flow.

And I knew there was something missing.

And then when I met my friend Virginia.

She was from Manitoulin Island, that's when I found out they had powwows, because she had a regalia and I learned a little bit from her, and also the Ojibwe language and then the further south I went, the more I learned about Native people in general.

And always was thinking, how, how do I participate in a pow wow?

I could never get an answer to that, until I got to Council Fire.

And I never knew there was a ribbon skirt and what the meaning of the skirt was.

I didn't know anything about, about the lodge.

In that there was two or three degrees of participation:

where women participate on the first round,

and then men in the second round and all and all that stuff.

So, yes.

I was, I would probably, could say that I was fully assimilated into the white society, but I still was not belonging anywhere, really, was in limbo. (Session Four)

This sense of limbo was the result of disconnection from the familial intergenerational life on the land, and the discontinued Omuşkego spiritual practices, along with her Residential School experiences. Majitch talked about how cultural practices and ceremonies were not part of her life until she got involved with the Council Fire agency in Toronto a few years ago in her 60s and her life changed:

And that's where I started to gain the teachings from there.

And so, the only thing that I have not participated in over there is the drumming: drumming and singing – have not participated in that group.

I'm not sure why. Um.

Just cannot get into it.

...

And so, in 2009 I started going on Tuesdays.

Mostly Tuesdays at the circle for Residential School [survivors' group] and we dealt with issues in circle, and it evolved.

Even though we were running out of money.

We still met there.

And then somehow, we got more money.

And that's when we decided to continue with the regalia and then they had their first powwow.

And so was where we had our coming out ceremony:

that should have happened like [when we were] six years old,

and here we were in our 60s when that happened,

and so as an individual,

I had a lot of growings [inaudible] there and of course,

[Tetawin] got involved in a little bit we flew her from Timmins a couple of times.  
(Session Four)

Majitch's story reflects another Residential School survivor who was part of the *Witness Blanket* project. Stan Wamiss says that

he lost much of his childhood in his time at the School... "We never paid attention to our culture," Stan said. "When I left residential school, my dad died and took everything with him, his knowledge. What I'm learning now in our culture, I should have known when I was ten or twelve years old, you know?" (Newman & Hudson, 2019, p. 80)

These stories demonstrate the profound disconnection with Omushkego culture in a country that created policies to assimilate the 'Indian' through Residential Schools. It didn't matter that she was living 'like a white person', speaking and writing in their language of English, and working and living in Toronto. She still experienced a disconnection with Canadian society which still saw her as a brown skinned *Indian*.

It is only when she was retired, she was able to connect with other Indigenous peoples through Council Fire's programming for Residential School Survivors and demonstrated what Goforth (2007) finds in her survey that Indigenous peoples connecting to traditional values, beliefs, and practices are essential for healing.

### ***Living in Southern Ontario***

When Majitch left Winisk at 14 years of age, she traveled to Toronto and the first thing she saw was a beautiful tree. She said, "I woke up and I looked, and I saw these weeping willows all over. And I said, 'Wow, what a beautiful place'" (Storytelling Event). Majitch continued to connect with nature where she is in southern Ontario:

I look forward, I looked forward to going to that Creek and  
I always thought, oh, I wish.

I wish I could see more birds, you know,

Yeah, I was really excited when I saw those ducks.

Yeah. The Blue Heron, that was really neat.

...

Majitch: I always have this desire to go and, and just take the GO train get off a  
Rouge hill.

Tetawin: Oh yeah,

Majitch: They have little marshes, and the sand is nice.

The beach is nice around there and certain parts.

So that's what I was thinking.

Every summer I was thinking I should just go down there and have a picnic,  
you know,

Tetawin: Yeah, you know

Majitch: Even here, I'd have to go all the way down to the west end to High Park,  
so that's...

Quite a ways.

I always do two parks. (Session Nine)

Tetawin also said that she felt inspired to be outside when she sees a nice spot:

Tetawin: I wish I had a tipi there. You know?

Majitch: Yeah.

Tetawin: Or a tent or something.

Doe: Yeah.

Tetawin: We can lay on the ground - like sleep on the ground.

Yeah. I got a couple of geese: snow geese from Agnes.

Doe: Nice

Majitch: Nice.

Tetawin: So, what I'm gonna do is I'm going to get somebody to come with me to Miken Otaski and smoke it.

Majitch: That would be nice.

Tetawin: Because Kim says that I can go there anytime, like, just to come and get the key.

If I have anything going on, you know, even just to family.

Doe: Yeah.

Tetawin: So, it's a safe place to go, like, you know, sometimes you don't feel safe because the bears or something.

Doe: Yeah.

Tetawin: At least, that, that, that building is there.

Doe: That's right.

Tetawin: Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, it's nice. (Session Nine)

The connection to land that was made when they were young continues for them today. These connections can create networks within our cellular memory and dreams (Brant-Castellano, 2000; Ermine, 1995). Tetawin described in awe how she dreams of a trail that she walked often as a child, demonstrating how these connections with land are embedded in her consciousness and memories:

Yeah, you know that that, that little trail from our house.

I always dream about that trail.  
 It's, it's, it's across she,  
 she lived across towards the river  
 and there's this little, you know,  
 on the main road down up the river,  
 up the street up  
 the river there  
 Yeah.

And then it was just going across like this and then there's a little bush there.  
 And this is just the, you know,  
 and I always dreamed about that trail. [says in wonder]  
 All the time.  
 And then my uncle's  
 little House was right there.  
 And I always dream about that part there.  
 I don't know why.  
 Even to this day.  
 I always dream about it, you know. (Storytelling Event)

### **(Re)Awakening Identity Practices**

This project includes a reclaiming of Indigenous Storytelling and I suspected that at some point in their stories they would talk about identity. What surprised me was the marking of identity in different ways that were observed during this project, and then the marking and affirmations of identity that continued through to the writing and completion of this dissertation.

### ***Tattoos***

Another physical practice for Omushkego women was tattooing. I remember as a child seeing tattoo marks on my grandmother's forearm. I did not know what they said because they were in syllabics, but I knew that they were permanent. Omisimâw also has tattoos on her forearm and wrist. I asked her about them. She said,

Omisimâw: They used to do that.

That's an old doing a long time ago, Native people, you know

Doe: yeah, yeah. So how, how do they do it?

Omisimâw: Oh, they put, put on a needle.

They used a needle and the, you know the charcoal from the stove?

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: And a piece of charcoal, black one?

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: They wet their, um, thread and they rub it, rub it on that charcoal. They give a little bit stitches and they pull it right through inside of skin.

...

Omisimâw: I got my initial somewhere.

I got another tattoo there. Yeah, a little bit. Not much.

Doe: Does it hurt?

Omisimâw: It hurts when you're doing it, yeah.

You have to pull a needle through your skin.

...

Omisimâw: But we didn't have that long time ago, so we used to, it's cleaner anyways that charcoal. (Session Seven)

First, there was important knowledge about the hygienic use of charcoal.

Omisimâw was taught that charcoal is clean, adding to the list of traditional knowledges learned during this project. Second, why would they put their own initials on their arm? I believe that it was an assertion of their identity. Their name was who they are as an individual. Naming yourself physically was an important concept given that many



students who attended Residential Schools were given a number as their identity (Truth and Reconciliation, 2015). Perhaps tattooing their initials onto their forearm was a subconscious assertion of their identity. Third, I do not believe that Omisimâw's mother started this tattoo practice in general, but perhaps the naming of herself became more important in the twentieth century. Or perhaps the tattooing of the body always included their name in one way or another. Incidentally, in her early 50s, Majitch also went to get a tattoo on her shoulder. It is a flower, like the ones in Omushkego Cree beadwork, and her family nickname in syllabics. This tattoo is definitely an assertion of her Omushkego Cree identity, and particularly one that is linked with her identity given to her by her family. Tattooing her nickname only used by her family indicates how important that familial connection is to her.

In this last year of working on this dissertation, I decided that I needed to also tattoo my names on my arm. I chose to use syllabics and chose to find a tattoo artist at the annual Tyendinaga Indigenous Tattoo Gathering (Francis, 2021). I found an artist named Odinaamad, and he did my tattoos. His name is significant because his name means Turning Wind, and my name translates to the Woman who brings the wind. When I told him that, he agreed that he was the right person to do this tattoo. Our names connected us through our relational thinking and practice.

On my left arm is my given name of Eskwao kipaytat nodininao in syllabics: Δ<sup>^</sup>9°  
 6VC' 6Πσ-6°, and on my right arm is my name, and the name of my wife and children in syllabics, along with a vine to connect them all together. I also asked for a buttercup to represent me because there are a lot of buttercups in Moosonee, and a tulip to represent my wife because her parents emigrated from Holland. Odinaamad used

vegan-made ink and used a poking tattoo style for the syllabics. He used the tattoo gun with more needles for the vine and flowers because it would take too long to do that one poke at a time. Although it was not the string and charcoal method, the names imprinted on my arms make me feel connected to my maternal grandmother and the women that came before her, as well as my immediate family and the next generation through my children. At a visceral level, the naming feels important on my skin because it is visible, and it is another act of critical Indigeneity by telling a story on my skin and reawakening my identity through story in syllabics. I am asserting my identity by initiating story on my arms and as Iseke (2013) shares when we do this type of storytelling recovery, we, as Indigenous peoples, are in the process of remaking ourselves.

### ***Rites of Passage***

Both Participants felt honoured to be part of a berry feast ceremony for Tetawin's grand-daughter. The 12-year-old *Oskineekiskweo* [young girl], fasted berries for a year after her first menstruation. At the end of the year, there was a ceremony conducted by Elder, Wanda Whitebird, and local community members and friends came by to bear witness. Tetawin said that "I just thought, I just felt really good that the people that were there are taking part. Especially the young people. [her] friends, you know. They, they're starting to learn and it's a good thing, you know?" (Session Four) Tetawin added, "They should know more what's going on. And that way they build a respect for the culture" (Session Four). And she is right. It is not just Indigenous peoples that need to (re)awaken and (re)claim these histories, cultural practices, and knowledges. Canadians need to accept them with respect to move forward together as well.

After the project was completed, I decided that I needed to do my own berry fast to (re)claim this rite of passage for myself. Instead of fasting at the beginning of my menstruation, I did it at the end of my cycles. I decided to follow the 13 moons (Samatte, 2021) to complete my year of fasting. Once I was done, I also had a berry feast and Majitch came to support me and celebrate. Much to our surprise, she brought her rattle, and she sang, 'The Strong Woman's Song' for me. I think there were a few of us that had tears in our eyes as she sang for us for the first time in her life in Omushkego traditional ways. She continued to show growth because during our Zoom sessions in this project, she said that she could not get into drumming and singing. And now more than a year after the project, she is part of Council Fire's new handrum and singing group of Residential School survivors.

## Chapter Seven

This project incorporated time for reflecting on both our stories and our storytelling processes. This Chapter will go through these reflections.

### Project Reflections

During the second half or near

the end of our regular sessions, I

asked the participants to reflect on

our storytelling experiences with one

another. I also had a Follow Up

session after the Storytelling Event. I

put their various reflections in Figure

9 to demonstrate which quadrant I

thought they would fit in. In the

Physical quadrant I put their sense of

peace in their connection with land, as well as their understanding and willingness to

take on Elder and traditional knowledge keeper roles. The Emotional quadrant shows

that making connections was an important outcome in their reflections, and in their lives.

I also included the teachings of reciprocity and 'all our relations' to document their

community relationships and interactions. In the Mental quadrant I put 'tell and hear'

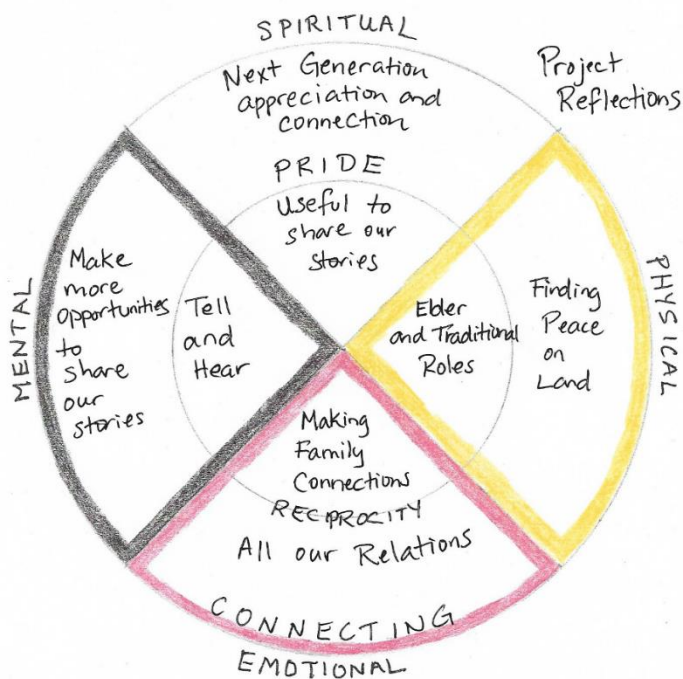
because the participants felt useful sharing their experiences and both participants and

guests appreciated hearing these stories. It continues to be important to tell and hear

these stories and to make opportunities to include more voices in these storytelling and

Figure 9

*Project Reflections*



sharing events. And lastly, in the Spiritual quadrant it was important to show that participants and guests felt pride and appreciation for who they are and how their families and ancestors lived off the land. I also included that the participants felt useful to share their stories and making connections with me, each other, and the guests were important in this project. I explore all of these aspects in the following discussions.

### **Making Connections Through Conversations and Stories**

I have shared in Chapter Six how Majitch was isolated from her siblings because of Residential School experiences. She was also the youngest child in her family; therefore, she did not get a chance to meet a lot of her older relatives before she left Winisk at age 14. While I was reading through this project, I was grateful to learn about the *Witness Blanket* art exhibit and book by Newman and Hudson (2019) which was cathartic because the contributors' stories and artifacts collected for the *Witness Blanket* often mirrored both my stories as an intergenerational survivor and my participants' stories, thereby confirming that the impacts of Residential Schools are shared by Residential School survivors and their children and grandchildren. Just like Majitch who could not talk to her brother in Residential School, so too did *Witness Blanket* contributor Angeline at the Old Sun Residential School. And even though she was there with her older sisters and brothers, they were not allowed to talk to one another:

When she was at residential school, she was there with her three older sisters and two older brothers, but she couldn't be with them. "We couldn't even talk to the boys," Angeline said. "I'd sneak a smile at my brother if I met them in the hallway. We weren't a family" (Newman & Hudson, 2019, p. 87).

Which is reflected again when Majitch says, “I don’t really know [my brother] well” (Session Nine).

Conversely, one of the benefits of this project is that Majitch said that she learned more about her family and relations during the sessions and Storytelling Event:

Majitch: Yeah, well. As for myself, because  
I only knew my grandmother and  
I didn't know my other ancestors like my,  
I never,  
I never knew my grandfather

Tetawin: Oh, okay.

Majitch: Just a one grandmother.  
And so, it connected the dots for me a little bit.  
See who I'm related to.  
Didn't know I was related to the Edwards.  
And then two years ago,  
I found out I was related to the Carpenters and the Bluecoats.

Tetawin: Yeah.

Majitch: And then somehow, we're related to the Acheeneepaneskums, too

Tetawin: Yeah. I remember my mom talked to me about the  
Acheeneepaneskums.

...

Tetawin: Even me, I'm still finding out like who I'm related to our parents and  
grandparents.

Majitch: Well, you could finally  
Well, you finally find out who your relatives are and  
And then because I haven't been  
Haven't been closely connected to the family per se because of geography.  
Yeah, you just feel like you're finally

Finally, connecting

And

I've never really, there was a disconnect between even our own,  
My own siblings, because of the age difference and because they lived in other  
places. I'm not close to [my older brother] as I should be and  
You know, I don't really know him that well. (Session Nine)

Majitch's sense of family is still important even though she lived in Toronto so far away from most of her relatives. During this project she learned about more people that she did not know to whom she was related. She said, "It just feels like your family extending every time you find out who you're related to. You feel like your family is extending" (Session Nine). If one of the goals of Residential Schools was to interrupt family connections, it succeeded in some ways for this participant who said that she did not know her oldest brother very well at all. And so, participating in this project strengthened and expanded her sense of family and belonging.

Tetawin then told of another relative that she only learned about recently:

I remember finding out like, Sister Catherine.

This was related to us and, and she was our supervisor [at Residential School], she never said anything.

I didn't know that we are related to her to her through my dad.

John George. Yeah, because my dad's [grand]mother was a John George [it is a surname in the region].

Like, and you know, maybe five, four generations. So

It's weird, you know, but I remember seeing her visiting my auntie in Timmins, like, she used to come and visit her, but I never knew that we were related to her.

(Session Nine)

Sister Catherine's great-grandparent would have been a sibling of Maggee who married Robert. Learning about unknown connections was a similar experience of my own to have learned that I was related to Alfred Mitchell during this project. His wife

used to babysit me, and our families would spend time together when I was growing up in Moosonee. They lived one block away from us, and no one thought to mention to us as children that our families were related. I never thought to question the friendships that my mother had with different people in Moosonee. It never occurred to me that they were from the same area or related to us. It was just not talked about in English.

Perhaps if I knew the language, I would have noticed Alfred calling my aunt by a familial term like *nimiss*, which means older sister (Session Four).

### **Living Reciprocity that Reinforces Connections**

The participants and I learned a lot of things during this project. When asked to reflect on their experiences both in storytelling and in their lives, it became apparent that the cultural teaching that was present in the stories, but more obvious in their reflections was the teaching of reciprocity. There is a short story of Tetawin’s father’s generosity, but it was through Majitch’s ongoing participation in Council Fire’s programming that the teaching of reciprocity was very much alive. Majitch said,

And so, it's a place that I really appreciate being involved with and making Group that I'm with [inaudible]

So, So, it's a good community.

I really appreciate what they do for me.

So, the more to do for me, the more I want to do for them.

(Session Four)

It was through Council Fire’s programming that Majitch said she was “reintroduced to beading. So that’s what I’m doing now. And it's something that's coming back, and my mom was a perfectionist, so

I find myself being a perfectionist” (Session Nine). The cultural practices of beading and

Image 9

*Beaded poppy*





sewing were rejected when Majitch was young and wanted to leave. During this project she was crafting and beading regularly to live her Omushkego identity that she saw in her mother's beading practices. So, even though she is over 1000 kilometres from where she watched her mother doing beadwork, she has taken up the practice and is quite good at beading. Majitch exemplifies what Anishinaabe scholar, Lana Ray (2016) found in her research that "through our ongoing visits and reflection was that beading is a way to strengthen relationships and community knowledge" (p. 364).

Both participants have been beading and crafting during the pandemic to keep busy. Although it was not part of our project outline of activities, during our Zoom meetings, Majitch was always beading or crafting. She said:

Majitch: I've been doing a lot of beading. I finished four of these. [Lifts up her crafts so that we can see them]

Doe: Nice. Beautiful.

Tetawin: Ohh. [in admiration]

Majitch: They're little sacks.

Tetawin: What do you, what do you put in there? Flowers?

Majitch: Or you can put anything: you put your jewelry in there if you want.

Tetawin: Oh yeah.

Majitch: Your little medicine bag if you...

Tetawin: Oh, yeah.

Majitch: I don't know. I'm doing these for Council Fire there. They've been ordered by somebody, so, I have five to do. I have one more to do, and then I'm finished.

Tetawin: Oh, that's good.

Majitch: I'm doing my part. (Session Nine)

By contributing her craftwork to their community fundraising and events, Majitch is nurturing her community relationships. She feels connected to them and provides what she can to contribute to their programming. And during the pandemic, Council Fire provided hot meals to Elders and community members, and Majitch received these meals and supports as well. Both Tetawin and Majitch felt that there was something gained by learning and practicing their culture in local programs and through this project:

Majitch: Well, you gain - you gain different  
There's a richness in your  
Yeah, your...

Tetawin: Indigenousness

Majitch: yeah, your Indigenousness.

[both laugh]

Majitch: There was something missing before, you know,  
I didn't know how to  
How to do the sweat – I didn't - had no idea.  
Even to do the smudging.  
I had no idea.  
And pipe ceremonies and the different –  
Different things that happened over there,  
makes me feel connected to,

to the earth and just being an Indigenous person as a whole.

Doe: Has this project done that in a little bit, too?

Majitch: Oh, yes. Yeah, you're connecting with your immediate family.  
You know,  
And so, you get to know people better.

Tetawin: For sure. (Session Nine)

Tetawin added that after the virtual storytelling event, “Now I feel like I’m connected with them” (Session Nine). Majitch added, “It’s kind of strange at the same time, because you’ve known them for a long time, you know, and then...And then, they still don’t know you that much” (Session Nine). For Majitch, it was the first time that almost everyone participating in the project or attended the storytelling event knew her own personal stories and how and when she left Winisk. It showed how silent they had become to their own experiences. She further stated, “Every time we got together in the past, it was for a reason and there’s something and then we never connected that way” (Session Nine). This lack of personal storytelling of her past, demonstrated that the families did not practice telling their own stories and hearing about each other’s lives. In her study, McGuire (2010) found that one of the benchmarks of resiliency is “[t]he ability to say who you are [and it] is critical in generating meaningful and needed indigenous-based histories that can transform how we, as Aboriginal peoples, think about ourselves and our location within this place called Canada” (p. 119). Tetawin further expressed the importance of the next generations to also understand these experiences she had in Canada:

Tetawin: Um, Like I said, like, you know what, that makes me happy to, to share my stuff.

Because I have a lot of stories that I need to share that I think people should know especially – especially my grandkids. So that they'll know about my life. You know? They'll know about my life, and they can tell their, their children and grandchildren. (Session One)

Tetawin also spoke to understanding the value of what she shared during our storytelling:

I contributed something like, you know, part of my Mushkegowuk You know, stories, my life, actually, as one of the, you know, people that had experiences as You know, living on a land and, you know, ...

I feel useful. That's the way elderly people feel when they share their lives, like me, like later on in life, if somebody asked me something, you know, I feel good about sharing it. Because it enrich their... it's enriching for them, I hope, anyway. (Session Nine)

Tetawin found it personally satisfying and affirming to her identity and accepted her role as an Elder with knowledge that is valuable to share. Rowe et al (2019) share that the role of Elder needs to be fulfilled and Restoule et al (2013) confirm that the Elders are just waiting for someone to ask them to share what they know. It is important that Elders are given opportunities to share their stories with young people today (Restoule et al, 2013). The Elders and the youth need to understand each other because as Rowe et al (2019) assert “the health and well-being of older Indigenous people is directly connected to the health and well-being of younger generations, and

there must be opportunity for these connections to be strengthened” (p. 11) like in our Storytelling Event. And Majitch noted, this was just the beginning:

Majitch: Um, I think it's a good start.

About the stories.

My mom used to tell us stories from the Bible actually and I...

I took them as a child would read fairy tales that sort of thing.

It was like a fairy tale to me.

She would tell stories about the people you know the Hebrews and,

and everybody over there in the Middle East,

and she told me that there was all kinds of different types of people in the world and different skin and why they were the way they were and all that stuff.

So that's the type of story she told me.

And my, my dad was the primary legend teller.

I remember him telling us lots of legends.

Yeah.

And It's important to share our culture and in the way we lived.

Um, yeah.

The way of the Mushkego people.

I think it's important to share. (Session One)

At 77 years old, Tetawin was at a place and time where she felt proud and wanted to share her culture:

And I feel good.

And I feel good.

Now that I know.

I mean, I am who I am.

I'm proud. Very proud.

And I like to share like,

there's people that are interested in our culture here.

And I'd like to share it. (Session Four)

Omisimâw also said that she was happy to help and share her stories in this project (Session Seven). After listening to all the participants stories, one of the guests who attended the Storytelling Event asked to share his thoughts and reflections:

Guest One: My family who used to be on the land, all the time.  
All year around live off the land all year round.  
It went from that,  
To living in houses and towns and cities in 50, 60 years and two or three  
generations of people in our family underwent such a  
Great change in that period of time.  
So, I'm getting older,  
I'm finding it more important to listen to you and know about how it used to be,  
because those are the things that I want my kids to know.

Tetawin: Yeah.

Guest One: And if we have grandchildren.  
I want them to know that as well.

Tetawin: Yeah.

Guest One: How things used to be.  
Like even my late mother and my auntie, you know, being born in a teepee  
spending like a life on the land and how that used to be.  
Because I didn't get to experience that by the time I came around, we were on,  
we were in town, and I was sent to, you know, regular Canadian education  
system.  
I didn't go to Residential School, but I went to through this other system and  
encountered an entirely different experience of being -  
Of being in school encountering a lot of racism and encountering a lot of  
anti-Indigenous thinking.  
And so, you know, my experiences –  
so much different that it becomes more and more important to listen to  
What it was like to live in Moosonee, Moose Factory, Fort Albany, Attawapiskat,  
Winisk and Severn as well and  
I can't help but, you know, thinking about  
The simplicity of life back then.  
How, how simple things were back then,  
you know, you go from one place to another.  
And you hunt along the way, and you camp along the way.  
You take your time, like you

keep saying there's no rush.

All of those things I think are so important to think about right now because right now everything so fast and the pace of life is so fast.

...

And I only connected with it here and there different times when I was young when my parents would bring me out on the land or my grandparents would bring me it on the land, but it -

At the same time, it makes me feel very proud of who I am, because I know that my family, my grandmother, and you – you all had these experiences.

And we didn't rely on nobody.

We just relied on our own family and our knowledge and our – know how of living on, on the land.

And then that makes me feel

Very proud of who I am. (Storytelling Event)

This sense of a self-reliant Indigenous identity was important to remember and assert in our daily lives (Perley, 2018). I've seen pictures on social media of this guest moose hunting with his son. It is important to do what we can at this time to connect with our ancestors – seven generations behind us, say – and assert these practices and (re)awaken these knowledges (Perley, 2018; Smith, 2004) and as Henhawk (2013) says our stories can counter dominant discourse and challenge Indigenous marginal spaces within dominant stories. And as Archibald (2008) found, the energy created by the storytelling can feed the mind, body, heart and spirit of all that are involved. For Tetawin, these memories in the telling bought the past close to her heart:

Tetawin: I always think about the past.

Not always,

But you know, I live in the past.

What I mean is that more like

I keep thinking, oh, I wish.

On the land, somewhere.

And that's why I keep going to Peawanuck.

That's the closest I can get to where I grew up, like, you know, this really, I really like going up there.

And

Every time I look outside.

And I'm thinking, oh, I wish I was in Peawanuck.

I'd do this, do something different.

I have, you know,

I go down the river and sit.

I'd go down the river and sit down and listen to the river, you know.

It's just so different, like, you know, like, just like

[Guest One] was saying last night, you know,

It's you just you're up there and you're thinking,

oh, what else do I need, I'm happy here.

You know,

What do you want, you know?

I'm here. I'm enjoying it, like, you know,

Sometimes you can...

You wish it could last forever.

Doe: You ever think about moving up there?

Tetawin: I did at one point, but then [my son] got sick.

That's what happened.

I already had a house and everything.

Doe: Yeah.

Tetawin: But you know when you really think about it.

You know, it's hard to live up there because I would have to get my own wood.

Now I know elderly people are given oil heating.

Get somebody to cut it for me and the food is expensive, you know, even though.

Like you can get some food from –

anybody can come in and give you food,

that's how it is up there.

But I don't know.

I'm happy where I am.



I'm trying to be happy where I am right now.

Doe: Mm hmm. Mm hmm.

Tetawin: Half-way up north and halfway down south. (Session Nine)

Tetawin revealed the teaching of intergenerational survival because she knew that as an elderly woman, she could take care of her needs in Peawanuck by herself. She was centrally located in Timmins. She was close enough to the north where those who visit from the northern communities can drop by. She has grown children, her own cousins, several nephews, and many grand nieces with their families who live in Timmins. She also has grown children and grandchildren in Southern Ontario and Quebec. Although she would love to live in Peawanuck, and almost did, she was trying to be happy living in a place that is in between all of the people that she loves.

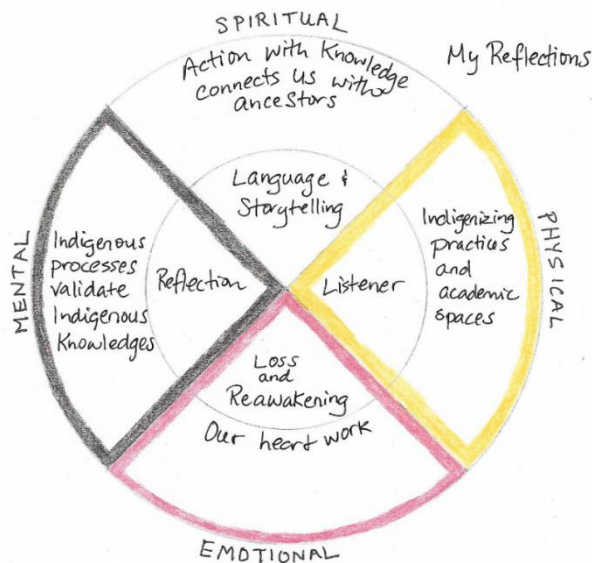
### **My Reflections**

This project confirmed to me that it is possible to Indigenize our lives and academic spaces through storytelling and that our O mushkego stories are essential to our well-being. This project was born out of necessity. I needed to hear and document these stories. I tried my best to be an active listener and respect the ethical considerations while working with my O mushkego participants. I had suspected, but without their words before this project, I did not know the extent of the participants feelings of loss and their search for meaning and connection. The silences that existed in our lives did not provide a time or a space to voice these griefs and loss. And by listening to the participants talk about their own loss of culture in their lives demonstrated that they needed to tell their stories as much as I needed to hear them and share them in this dissertation. I hope that this project contributes to the flipping the

coin from loss to (re)awakening traditional knowledges, rites of passage, and (re)introducing ceremonial and cultural practices in our lives.

Figure 10

*My Reflections*



I have tried to put my learning into the Sacred Circle in Figure 10. In the Physical quadrant I have put the struggles to Indigenize our everyday practices and in academic spaces, as well as my role as a listener. My understanding of this role is not passive. All readers and listeners all have a responsibility to actively listen and be present to hear what is being shared. In the Emotional quadrant I have put loss and

reawakening, which is our heart work as Indigenous peoples and scholars: we do not do this work alone, and we do not do it just for ourselves. In the Mental quadrant I start with reflection, which is directly across the axes of being a listener. I have learned that our Indigenous processes validate and reinforce Indigenous knowledges. In the Spiritual quadrant I have learned that our actions from listening, reflecting, and coming to knowledge connects us with our ancestors. Lastly, that this project has affirmed my love and respect for the language and storytelling that I so long to speak and tell.

The choices made of stories told by the participants, and the act of telling those stories imparted participant experiences which contain knowledge about culture, landscape, moral behaviour, and personal histories, all of which was emphasized as important to Indigenous ways of knowing by Norton-Smith (2010). Our storytelling

practices emulated and demonstrated what Archibald (2008) and Dion (2009) have said that storytelling is a shared social event to impart practical and life lessons. My hearing and sharing of these stories contributed to my own sense of critical Indigeneity within academia and in my daily life. I actively shared these teachings by wearing ribbon skirts, offering beading as an option in my classes, sharing rites of passage with my family and neighbours, and marking my Omushkego identity on my skin like my female ancestors.

## Chapter Eight

Tetawin: ... *Kahketoh. Kahketowuk.*

[... Shut up. Shut up all of you.]

Even at mealtimes, too, we were told to be quiet.

Majitch: Always. (Session Two)

I feel useful. That's the way elderly people feel when they share their lives, like me, like later on in life, if somebody asked me something, you know, I feel good about sharing it. Because it enrich their... it's enriching for them, I hope, anyway.

*(Tetawin, Session Nine)*

Today the young people are questioning everything. These old stories teach about Omushkego custom and what the life was like. One can learn from them by hearing, by imagining, listening. Maybe the stories can help the young people to learn our own history and find a place to stand. (Bird, 2007, p. 54-55)

### **Bearing Witness to Silence and (Re) Awakening Voices**

Do you know how many ancestors it took to get you here? I think about these people sometimes. I think about my Omushkego ancestors who survived arguments, the weather, waves of diseases and the end of an Ice Age. I think about my Irish ancestors who survived countless battles between little kingdoms, and then their colonization by the British, the Plague, and the waves of poverty and starvation that led them over the ocean to these lands three generations ago. When I consider the French ancestors, I often think of them as adventurous and free on these lands because they

most likely were not free in their French homelands. They were surely common folk who were farmers and perhaps some teenage girls who were sent to the New World to become wives in New France bearing many children and working from dusk until dawn. Lastly, I think of the Scottish ancestors who were driven by their clan connections and rules until the British finally subdued their governance systems. Then the individual Scotsman who came over with the Hudson Bay Company and worked hard to make his living for a time. It is not known how long he stayed, nor when he left, and if he survived to have children over in the highlands. Did he retire a rich man and create a good living for the generations that followed? I don't know. But all of these ancestors and their lives exist within me. I am a complicated space, and I feel it.

I feel it mostly in relation to the oppression of my mother's peoples. I am an Indigenous person in Canada. I feel my relatives pain of subjugation and assimilation assaults over the last 150+ years. The Residential Schools, colonization and apocalyptic change of lifestyle impacted who they became. They moved into towns, speaking less Cree language, and living in cities with very limited Cree language use. I know that the privilege that I have in my pale white skin allows me to give voice to these experiences in ways that people will hear me differently than my cousins with brown skin. It's an uncomfortable truth for me, but I know that being silent is not a choice. Silence never changes anything.

I can still hear my mom's cousin, George, singing on that stage at the James Bay Education Centre. He stood up there and made sure that at least one O mushkego song was going to be heard that night along with the Christian songs and stories. Just like when I was a child, I listened with rapture to every story that was shared by the

participants in this project. As I have shared, the storyteller chooses which stories to tell, and the listener has a responsibility to learn something in the moment (Archibald, 2008; Dion, 2009; Fixico, 2003). I followed the data to see what they talked about the most, and then I sifted through those stories to see if there were any patterns or teachings that came forward to me. I must admit that I have always been interested in the story of Robert Hunter. I did not know much about Maggee until we talked together during this project. I think Maggee and Robert were both formidable and together created children with strong land life skills, who passed on this kind of relationality to their own children despite their different spiritual practices. I am aware and know that my choices were driven by my need to know why the participants kept their stories to themselves. I now understand that when you are trying to fill a void, almost anything put in there is a joy and a treat. I have sat in reflection with these stories, and I have found more than I thought I would.

Stories can start to fill these voids, and together we have found that telling and hearing these stories felt good. Not only that, but as Indigenous people, being able to say where we come from is critical to understanding who we are (McGuire, 2010) and learning about family relations was an important step in feeling connected to our Omushkego identities. We must continue to stand firm and enact our critical Indigeneity every day through sharing and living our cultures as Perley (2013) says to keep the culture(s) alive. Understanding our histories – stories, family and land connections - within the political, social, and economic contexts of our world as Alfred and Corntassel (2005) say is needed to make positive changes to improve our lives for each other and our future generations in Canada. As an emerging Indigenous researcher I am very

aware of the need to situate this research and our experiences within the broader colonial cultural contexts (Bishop, 2021; Whitinui, 2014).

This project confirmed that the last 150+ years in Canada have been the Eurocentric templates for Canadian governance and lifestyle (Godlewska et al, 2010). The stories included examples of what Battiste (1998) calls cognitive imperialism: although the participants' earliest experiences on the land contain their language and land knowledges, their exposure to assimilationist education and the disappearance of sustainable fur trapping lifestyles took each generation of participants further away from

Figure 11

*Boulder of Assimilation going up the hill*



living off the land. The Indian Act and Residential Schools started like a journey where the Canadian government's institutions (government, judicial, and religious) were pushing a large boulder up a hill. They had to use a lot of resources and energy to do this enormous task of assimilating

hundreds of thousands of people: they reached the top using officers and agents to implement laws that confined and controlled the Indigenous peoples on the reservations and put children in Residential Schools. After several decades, they just had to maintain pushing the boulder along to the edge of the other side so that it would roll down the steeper side of the hill into the newly deforested Canadian valley.

Audre Lorde (1978) says, "In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that

can provide energy for change” (as quoted in Maggio, 1996, p. 492-493). I have seen how these dynamics worked through the Indian Act and Residential School system. The Indian Act isolated the people to small tracts of land and imposed a new system of governance outlined in the Indian Act ‘band’ system. And then they took the children who were going to be the next generation of leaders out of the community and made them speak another language to learn Canadian living. By taking out informed and culturally knowledgeable leaders out of the next generations, the Canadian government was able to sidestep powerful Indigenous leaders who were opposed to changing their lifestyles.

As I have discussed, there were leaders who agreed to education for their children during the Treaty negotiation processes who did not know what the Residential School experiences would be for their children. And when parents stopped bringing their children because they were dying in the schools, Duncan Campbell Scott insisted that attendance became mandatory in the Indian Act for all Indian children in 1920 (Canada, 1996; Toulouse, 2018).

In the following years, this boulder of assimilation gathered speed as it descended, and as I have heard and seen in the stories that were shared, the changes with the loss of language that both Tetawin

Figure 12

*Boulder of Assimilation rapidly descending the hill*





and Solomon (2022) shared indicate that the speed of acceleration continues to be astonishing.

The stories told in this project demonstrated how cognitive imperialism as described by Marie Battiste (2013) is obvious and still present. For most, if not all Indigenous peoples, the participants have lived in a country where Battiste (1998) says, “only a privileged group have defined themselves as inclusive, normative, and ideal” (p. 20). How these experiences manifested for the participants was that in varying degrees, there was something culturally missing. Tetawin didn’t learn about her culture until she worked at the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre in Timmins: her understanding of her experiences of colonization (Residential Schools and the Reservation system) as well as the absence of cultural practices, like the burning of sweetgrass, could not be articulated by her parents while she was growing up. They just accepted the way that things were, and how their lives changed with the wage economy from the Army Base across the river. Without having the time to hunt because of work, they did what they could to feed their family at the time, but the children were often hungry and did not like the canned food.

All three participants spent decades, if not all of their adult life in towns and cities, believing that living and working in these places was inevitable for them. None of them saw reflections of themselves in these places and consequently felt that pieces of who they are were missing. They eventually learned that change was inevitable, but their own actions in response over the years have brought them back to their roots in their Omushkego identities. I would say that Omisimâw changed the least in her lifetime. She was raised to work hard: she maintained that attitude throughout her lifetime no matter

where she was and she tried to raise her children to go out there and get it, too. Omisimâw wanted the language to be picked up by the next generations, and Omisimâw returned to the north and spent the last three decades of her life in Peawanuck, Ontario, teaching the language and material cultural skills while she was physically able.

Tetawin shared her story of being influenced by magazines which showed a different kind of living. Those magazines and the cultural genocide at Residential Schools brought her to living like a white person for her adult life. She shared that she did not know why her people were the way they were, but once she learned about their colonization experiences through workshops, some of her burdens lifted, and she found healing in acceptance and love in her culture. Tetawin's work in language translation and support services in the Timmins area over the years exposed her to conferences and educational events, which she then took her turn and organized to inform her coworkers at the Hospital about Canadian histories and Residential Schools. This professional development work likely contributed to slow changes and improvements that are happening in Timmins. Tetawin had gotten to a point where she was proud and wants to share her cultural knowledge with other people. She joked about standing on the corner in her skirt and singing songs in public.

Majitch did not have enough social support from people her age, or even just a sense of community in her childhood years. She then experienced the assimilationist strategies throughout more of her childhood compared to the other participants having attended Residential Schools from six years of age to fourteen. Her limited connection to her parents and older siblings pushed her to move away from home as soon as she

was able. She did not even wait until the end of the summer when she would have been sent away to High School in North Bay. She asked her uncle to arrange for her to attend a summer Early Childhood Education program being put on at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. That being said, Majitch appreciated having lived on the land for those first six years, but once she went to Residential Schools that we know denigrated Indigenous cultures (Joseph, 2018; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015), it was not enough to keep her in the north. She was looking for a different life. And she never went back to the far North. It is important to note that she did spend holidays with her older sister in Moosonee and Timmins over the years and is not estranged nor completely isolated from her family.

Through the program at Council Fire, Majitch finally had the opportunity to make her own regalia and along with her group members, she was 'danced out' into the powwow community. This cultural experience must have been a powerful and satisfying moment for her. Knowing she was going to do be danced out, I made her a beaded fan with swan, goose, and eagle feathers. I don't know that Omushkego peoples participated in social gatherings of what we know now as powwows. I do know there is a walk out ceremony for a baby when they are a year old (personal communication, Christopher Hunter, Toronto, Ontario, 2010). We must consider that Majitch's connection with her Ojibwe friends made her think that these things would have happened for her Omushkego culture as well. But at this time, we don't know. What we do know, is that today, in 2024, powwows have become ubiquitous multi-national social gatherings which offer Indigenous peoples an opportunity to be accepted into an Indigenous community event and experience belonging.

Within a year after the project had completed, Majitch now drums and sings with Council Fire's Residential School survivor women's group (Majitch, personal communication, Toronto, 2022). Majitch's participation in the Residential School survivor's group demonstrates that being connected to an organized community initiative works. She has contributed to making material culture for fundraising, writing a newsletter of their events, and regularly cooks meals for the Elder's group programming.

Our responses to cognitive imperialism and assimilation need to take place as often as our heart beats to keep the boulder moving before it gets too settled in the Canadian valley. Although Battiste (2013) says that the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges and languages need to happen in the places where we learn, it is just as important and necessary to (re)create our Indigenous identities wherever we all live every day (Gray Smith, 2017; Perley, 2014; Toulouse, 2018).

As a consequence of the monumental efforts that went into assimilating Indigenous populations: creating legislation, hiring mounted police to enforce it, and building and (under) funding Residential Schools to be administered by Church clergy

Figure 13

*Boulder of Assimilation stopped by shelter and foundation of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing*



and laypeople, and the continual mining, forestry, fishing, farming and other industries that support the Canadian economies; Indigenous and Canadian peoples now need to put the same amount of efforts into

rallying on the ground to help support the building of a strong cultural shelter and foundation to stop the assimilationist boulder and/or counter its overwhelming influences from our spaces.

What does this cultural support look like on the ground? When I examined the fallout of the closing of the Residential Schools, it is apparent that this cognitive imperialism that Battiste (1998) and Simpson (2013) still exists: everyone on these lands called Canada have all been and continue to be exposed to English Canadian cultural dominance within our school systems. In order to fight these oppressions, Audre Lorde (1979) also eloquently pointed out that the “Master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (as quoted in Maggio, 1996, p. 644). In response to trying to resist assimilation from within the Canadian academic system, Simpson (2013) says,

I am not so concerned with how we dismantle the master’s house, that is, which set of theories we use to critique colonialism; but I am very concerned with how we (re)build our own house, or our own houses. I have spent enough time taking down the master’s house, and now I want most of my energy to go into visioning and building our new house. (p. 32)

These are the directions that Indigenous peoples can follow by asserting our languages, rebuilding healthy families and communities, enacting our cultural practices and relationship with maahchihew on the land.

I acknowledge that there are many non-Indigenous allies who have been and continue to stand by our sides as this work goes on. Women in Canada would not have gotten the vote if it was not for their male allies who were able to vote and make these legal changes (Strong-Boag, 2016). In order to create equality and equity in our society

to include Indigenous populations, there needs to be a mass consensus among Canadians to believe that changes to Canadian and Indigenous cultural and economic ways of life need to happen, and then Canadians need to advocate and support legislative, economic, and social initiatives to make it happen.

In the meantime this project has affirmed that it is incredibly urgent that I assert my participants and my own experiences within these collective Canadian histories, but more importantly to give voice to their struggles within these systems that have been created. As Henhawk (2013) has shown, these counter narratives need to be shared to interrupt the benign colonial narratives that have been taught in schools and the social spheres for too long. And Simpson (2013) makes it crystal clear that “we’ve all been bathed in a vat of cognitive imperialism, perpetuating the idea that Indigenous Peoples were not, and are not, thinking peoples – an insidious mechanism to promote neo-assimilation and obfuscate the historic atrocities of neocolonialism” (p. 33). These participants’ stories demonstrate that although they faced assimilation in many ways in their early and adult lives, their understanding of their culture and life on the land includes rich knowledge that is based on thousands of years of Indigenous experience and thought. By recording their stories, these knowledges are not lost.

My search for these cultural stories and activities started with George’s song on that JBEC stage many years ago. I was not alone in missing these songs and activities. This project demonstrated that the participants were missing these cultural activities and understandings as well. The displacement of these knowledges and practices was widespread because until 1951 the dances and ceremonies were against the law in Canada (Joseph, 2018). The (re)creation of storytelling practices benefits us all.

I follow in the steps of others through my research ideas and methods which will always be relational as an Indigenous scholar (Moore, 2014; Wilson, 2001). I feel and understand that the stories and ideas would filter through me and my experiences (Archibald, 2008; Bishop, 2021; Dion, 2009; Ermine, 1996; Wilson, 2008). I began to understand in my 20s that the stories that were not told, and the cultural activities that were banned and then hidden, were because of Indian Act policies. But I was not ready to articulate it within myself. Perhaps it was because of the emotional labour that I knew would be behind it. But if I am honest, it had to also be that I learned this practice of silence and assimilating into Canadian society which allowed me to assert the basics of my Omushkego Cree identity and be proud and happy with my Cree friends and relations but did not go much deeper. Ultimately, it was not sustainable within an invisible and horrific history in Canada which started coming into the light.

Once Indigenous cultural, ceremonial, and social activities started to take place in the open and came back to our region in the late 1980s, and later other voices, like the leader of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Phil Fontaine, started to speak out in the 1990s about traumatic Residential School experiences and abuse (Loyie et al, 2016) the benign legacy was beginning to crack. Even then, Indigenous individuals like Tetawin were not ready to fully face it when they attended workshops or even helped to facilitate cross-cultural learning. She did not share with her family that these workshops were even happening. The emotional labour must have been too intense. The missing link of this communication between the generations made this project necessary to bring these stories and experiences back into the broader conversations about our country (Battiste, 2013; Sinclair, 2009; Smith, 1999) so that the emotional load can be

shared, and Canadians and educators can be truthful about Canada's history towards Indigenous peoples on these lands. These experiences are not Indigenous history. It is Canadian history: the Indian Act is part of Canadian legislation, and all that came with it, was and continues to be implemented by Canadians. Both Indigenous peoples and Canadians need to understand this truth. Both Tetawin and Majitch learned about these truths after they left the Winisk area and started their work lives as adults. Indigenous peoples need to know and articulate where their pain and suffering originate from, and then to move forward and heal from it. Tetawin said that people want to know why we (as Indigenous peoples) are the way we are.

It is also important to notice when Judy Iseke-Barnes (2004) says that asserting and living our Indigenous identity is an act of resistance to our ongoing colonialism, and that by doing so, Indigenous peoples can become who we were meant to be (Iseke, 2013). I would also add that our generation are the products and dreams of the previous seven generations. Therefore, it is important to make these generational connections. George Kataquapit was representing his ancestors on that stage and by recording the stories of his Elders. Louis Bird (2005, 2007) has and continues this work. He has eighty hours of recorded audio from Elders that he needs support to transcribe and take to the next level. He wants to have youth transcribe them in order to have the youth absorb the language as they are processing the stories (personal communication, Louis Bird, Omushkego Elder and storyteller, August 2023, Peawanuck).

The loss of language in my generation and the interruption of cultural and spiritual activities like hand drumming and dancing contributed to the need for this project at a local level. In the *Witness Blanket* project, Mary Coon shared that when she



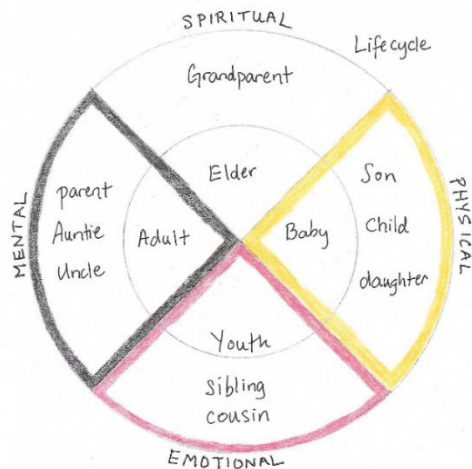
was forced to go to Horden Hall Residential School in Moose Factory, she learned that she was not allowed to speak Cree there. If she “spoke Cree, her mouth would be washed out with soap” (Newman and Hudson, 2019, p. 34). She also shared that, “When you can’t talk is when you want to say something. I learned not to talk, [not to] feel.” (p. 34) This expression is very similar to Majitch saying that going to Residential Schools “was like they’ve erased all that from your memory. And then you’re being assimilated into the white society” (Session Four).

Thus, the participants demonstrated how important it was to give voice to these stories as it was for us to hear them. It enriched their feeling of their own Indigenousness. This cultural and identity affirmation confirms Wilson’s (2008) assertion that Indigenous peoples need to reclaim their Indigenous identities and cultural practices that were negatively impacted or lost through colonial oppressive laws and actions. And as the participants and I have shared, we *can* make these assertions every day: by speaking our languages; by engaging with community and cultural agencies supporting our cultural resurgence; by refining the crafts of our material cultures through sewing, beading, etc.; by wearing ribbon skirts; finding someone who can give us a traditional tattoo; through telling our truths and stories; and by inserting our voices and ways of knowing into the academic realm to be seen and grappled with. This is not an exhaustive list but highlights what we accomplished during our project time together and the time that followed through to this dissertation’s last breath.

Omisimâw and Tetawin felt useful sharing their stories, and Majitch felt seen. The denial of Omushkego stories and the mining of them has brought them to the surface of our cultural being. My mother did not tell me about the Cree Trickster, Wasaykaycheck,

when I was 13 years old. She was not ready in 1984, but she started telling the stories that she could remember to my children when they were little ten years ago. The participants in this project each told a legend, but all showed a reluctance to say they knew everything about the story. Omisimâw said that was all that she remembers and that she tried. Tetawin read a legend from a book. Majitch told a piece of a legend that she remembered because it was a lesson on gratitude and manners from her mother. Although they would not call themselves storytellers because of this sense of insecurity, they are storytellers of their own lives.

Figure 14

*Stages of Life*

Doing this research has contributed and acknowledged the participants and my own understanding of our Omushkego Cree identity: we are wearing skirts, getting tattoos, and participating in storytelling and ceremonial rites of passage. In these ways, we are not only asserting our roles as Omushkego Cree women, but also the stages of life: baby/child, youth, adult, and Elder. Omisimâw was able to live these stages of life for the most

part uninterrupted. But for Tetawin and even more so for Majitch, their childhood experiences on the land and with family were interrupted by colonization and Residential Schools. This interruption negated rites of passage and connection with family and Omushkego culture, which would have enhanced their Omushkego worldview.

The denial of these stories and practices, and the subsequent mining of them in this project are bringing them back to the surface. My approach as an Indigenous autoethnographer within my own activities makes the research relevant to me. I am bringing the participants up on that JBEC stage so that I can learn from them and cherish their lives and stories. I have challenged this silence by asking the Elders about their lives. I am part of the next generation taking up this work knowing that when Archibald (2008) shared in *Storywork* that when Indigenous peoples use storytelling as the medium, we are taking the opportunity to learn from each other and understand our individual and collective [Omushkego] identities.

The absence of stories was a latent presence in my life growing up and into adulthood. The assumption that I made of silence's origin in the halls of Residential schools for these generations of participants was incorrect. These stories revealed that silences began with the struggles between Omushkego Spirituality and the conversion to the Catholic faith in 1879, and this new information intrigued me. I started to think about Maggee and her relationship with her husband, Robert. Once she made the decision to convert to Catholicism, her adopted beliefs must have been in conflict with Robert's Omushkego spiritual practices. He must have agreed to let her baptize their children, but what was the fallout for their daily practices of faith? Did it become necessary to vilify the person who did not convert to Christianity? *Was* he a person who used so called 'bad medicine' towards other people? Or was he a man who did not want to give up his Omushkego spirituality for the Catholic faith? And did he go along with the baptisms of his children to keep peace with his wife, Maggee? They were a hard-working couple that brought goods from the Fort Albany fur trading post to places inland

like Big Trout Lake. The paddling, portaging, and carrying would be easier to accomplish if they were getting along.

Perhaps this silence was part of non-interference practices common among Indigenous peoples. Omisimâw's father did not talk back nor contradict his mother when she was chastising him for sending his teenagers out on a trek over the Hudson Bay Lowlands with 60 shells and a gun to feed and protect themselves. And so, maybe the silence was a way to avoid conflict between family members. In a climate where you needed every member to contribute to survive, it would not be easy if there was a lot of conflict. And to avoid hard or difficult discussions with his children, perhaps avoiding the talk about Omushkego spirituality was the best choice at the time. And if Maggee wanted her children to follow the new Catholic faith, maybe she had to say things to demonstrate why Catholicism was the better choice.

No one can know what life was like back then. This generation bears witness to the impacts on our lives from what was lost (Assembly of First Nations (1994). It is easy to blame the Residential Schools for everything, but colonization is complicated, and often comes hand and hand with missionary work (Canada, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The disruption in Indigenous cultures from conversion to Christianity meant that it was harder to find Elders and knowledge keepers to help us find our way back (Stirling, 1997). But telling these stories and making these links gave us a story to find our way back (Iseke, 2013).

Omushkego and other Indigenous peoples in Canada can begin to thrive in their daily lives as a form of recovery from the various impacts of colonialism and Residential School experiences: many agencies, counselors, people, etc., are finding culturally

relevant ways to do that (Goforth, 2007). I am suggesting that we follow the Seven Generations principles. It is useful to hear and read those stories seven generations ago, which include stories before Residential Schools, so that we can carry those lessons and meanings for the next seven generations. There is a before and after, and we are connected to these stories in time. Freda Ahenakew knew in 1988 that documenting the Cree grandmothers was important because of the knowledge and lived experience they had. She recorded seven Cree grandmothers in the Cree language, creating an authentically rich collection of their storied lives (Ahenakew & Wolfart, 1992). Although I don't have the same fluency with language as Ahenakew and Wolfart, I tried to follow their example of documenting Omushkego grandmothers' lives. What was found in my project's stories were loss, change, and movement, but also humour, strength, and family connections that were all nurtured by intergenerational survival to live on this land.

For me, using storytelling to hear their voices was important. That is why I chose to do a storytelling methodology. I wanted to hear *their* stories. I wanted to be transported back in time (Fixico, 2003) to feel and understand their lives. Tetawin said that she goes right back to those moments and places in her mind when she speaks in Cree. And it was important for the participants to have a place to tell their own stories (Moayeri & Smith, 2010). Creating that space, albeit virtually, allowed the participants to do what felt comfortable to them. And beading while listening and sharing works (Ray, 2010). It would have been nice to do these things in person, but we did the best that we could during a pandemic. Majitch said that finding a way to do this project over Zoom and the phone worked because Omushkego peoples are very adaptable, and I think

she is right. The participants and I have come a long way in this project. And telling and hearing these counter stories do matter (Henhawk, 2013) for all of us.

### **What Have I learned From These Elders?**

It is important that our generation and those who follow understand the changes that occurred for our families and communities so that we understand the context of our ongoing colonization as Indigenous peoples to these lands. The Omushkego Elders of today went from living on the land in the 1930s and 1940s, harvesting and hunting sustainably to living under restrictions in stationary communities in the late 1950s and 1960s, to experiencing apocalyptic traumas in Residential Schools. On the one hand, they experienced childhoods with traditional knowledges and skills, and on the other hand, they experienced the impacts of unspoken losses created by increasing individual and community conversions to Christianity before they were born in the Hudson Bay Lowlands. These conversions two generations before they were born resulted in losses of cultural experiences of spiritual connection to the land and cycles of life. Their generations and those that followed in varying degrees stopped speaking/teaching Cree to the next generation leading to intergenerational language and cultural losses.

The influences of the Indian Act, Residential Schools, and the building and maintenance of an Army Base all slowly changed the lifestyles of the northern Ontario Omushkego peoples who lived along the Winisk River. The Residential School administrator's goal at interrupting cultural and language practices was generational work (Joseph, 2018). It has been shown through these three participants that consistent attendance and a loss of family cohesiveness resulted in the youngest of the participants leaving the north. Their need for the cultural knowledge was always there,

but a lack of awareness and understanding of why cultural rites of passage and ceremonies were absent left the participants silently searching and feeling a little bit lost.

In a twenty-year span, the stories of the participants went from living on the land at least ten months of the year on their trapline, to living in the town of Winisk for ten months of the year. It is significant to note that the guests during the Storytelling Event wanted to hear about the participants' Residential School experiences, but also how the participants lives changed from living on the land to living in towns and cities. The idea that living on the land is part of the past for the guests was clear because none of the guests who showed up grew up on the reserve. The demographics of the guests created another limitation in this project. The experiences of First Nations peoples living on reserves are not included and are likely different because they still hunt, fish and harvest seasonally on the land, although living in the community permanently. When I lived in Peawanuck with my grandfather in the 1998 school year (October to June), we were given caribou, fish and goose regularly from community members when they were successful in their hunt. Therefore, documenting the stories of the community members that stayed in Winisk and then Peawanuck is worthy of further research to fill out our circle of experiences. Although these participants' stories are full of rich experiences, I am missing the other half of the equation from those who have stayed.

The families in Peawanuck live in the community all year round now, with occasional hunting trips to the Bay in the Spring for the goose hunt, or a week or two hunting/fishing trip out on the land and out by the Bay, or inland to lakes, like Hawley Lake. In order to turn these numbers around, Moayeri and Smith (2010) suggest that "if

the same amount of commitment and resources were used to reverse the damage [Residential Schools] caused, Canada and Indigenous peoples would have a truer start at rebuilding” (p. 415). These types of efforts would include supporting sustainable economies that would not negatively impact the environment that Indigenous hunters/harvesters need to maintain *maahchihew*. Retired Senator Murray Sinclair advocates for such efforts to help both Indigenous and Canadians recover from these collective histories and come to a time and place where all people can thrive in this country called Canada (Moran, 2021). There is no reason to believe that as bilingual Omushkego peoples, we can't contribute to local and regional economies today and in the future. In all likelihood, it would be better for all our futures because of climate change to have land knowledge at the forefront of our lives.

Another significant factor during this project was language use. The boulder of assimilationist efforts started through Residential Schools is now at a stage where the government does not have to try so hard. The momentum of the hill now has the youth inundated with English curriculum and stories; the internet and social media also anchors them firmly in Canadian hegemony which they may now think is normal. I remember an Anishinaabe gentleman talking with me at a powwow at Lakehead University in 1994. He asked me if I spoke my language, and I said, “No, my mom did not teach me the language.” He answered, “You're old enough now, there's no excuse.” It stopped me in my tracks. He was right. But it was always easier to just say, “Pass the salt.” There was no immersion days where all I could hear was Cree all around me. That is what we need to surround our senses to (re)awaken the knowledge in our blood. Solomon (2022) also mentioned that we need immersion programs, and we need to



speak Cree to our children and youth. Omushkego peoples need to keep using our language, because if we don't make those efforts now, he fears it will be lost in 50 years. McIvor and McCarty (2016) tell us that these immersion programs work quite well, even for those languages that were documented by ethnologists in the 1800s and became dead languages. Language resurgence is possible.

Just like everyone else in the last decade, these changes have only rapidly increased with cell phones. And I don't know if it is a good thing or not that my relatives in the far north can now access the internet from anywhere on the land because of Starlink technology. This level of communication with the outside world should be documented and understood to see what Indigenous peoples can create to counteract these international influences on children, youth, and adults today. As I have already shared, there are agencies and First Nations programs that are trying to encourage language and cultural revitalization, and perhaps technologies can be used to help. It is also good to know that there are Indigenous people who are using technology and the internet to protect their cultures and advocate for themselves building online and offline communities to "gradually remak[e] themselves in the world" (Belton, 2010, p. 207).

The immense emotional burden to (re)learning our languages is that for Elders like Tetawin, their expression of themselves would be different depending on which language they were using. She laughed more in Cree. This change is an important distinction. If Omushkego peoples are happier thinking and talking in the Cree language, then we should make all efforts to save the language from non-use. Omushkego peoples are still in a good place when we have language speakers and/or languages

that were preserved in dictionaries that we can work at learning our languages and reclaiming our heart and mind space within our ancestors' words.

Although I was not looking for media influences on their lives in this project, it became clear that magazines, radio, and then television introduced changes in their lives. The media influences have increased with successive generations. In the 1950s, the participants looked at magazines and listened to the radio that they could not understand but enjoyed the music. Sometimes there would be Russian radio, likely boosted because of the Army Base listening stations or they would hear a Chicago radio station. These pictures and music brought a new way of thinking and living which influenced the participants and the choices that they made in their lives.

It was also evident that connections to land still matter – even when the participants were living far from their homelands. White (2018) and McLeod (2007) both found that places are like mnemonic devices which hold histories and can bring the past into the present. Tetawin cannot visit the various households in the Winisk village because it was abandoned after the flood in 1986, but her subconscious brings these places back to her in her dreams. She says she always dreamed of the trail behind their house in Winisk which took them to her uncle's house. That trail represented her many little journeys she took which imprinted land and family together. And even though she can't go there, her spirit kept visiting there in her dreams to keep her memories and connection alive in her heart and mind. My goal is to publish these stories beyond this dissertation so that the generations that follow can learn to make similar connections to our ancestral landscapes.

As Omushkego peoples, it is important to make regular contact with our homelands to make an imprint on our hearts and minds. I want to dream about the places that I go blueberry picking with my mom in the Timmins area. I can already see the buttercups clearly in my mind as a child putting this tiny flower under my brother's chin to see the yellow reflected on his skin. The time we spend on the land is a relationship we need to nurture, so that we can get to the point where we can predict the weather and see the signs of weather on the land to keep us safe when dangerous situations like flooding or storms occur, or when it is a good day for a picnic or blueberry picking.

This project also revealed that the Elders were willing and waiting for someone to ask about their lives and stories. It is important to continue to engage with older people who are now at the Elder stage of living. Their lived experiences are important, and they have a lot to teach us. These interactions can be done in ordinary ways like conversations at the kitchen table over tea, or create events where there are children, youth and adults sharing the space. Elders want to be included and our communities need to model activities and behaviour for youth to appreciate what the Elders have to offer.

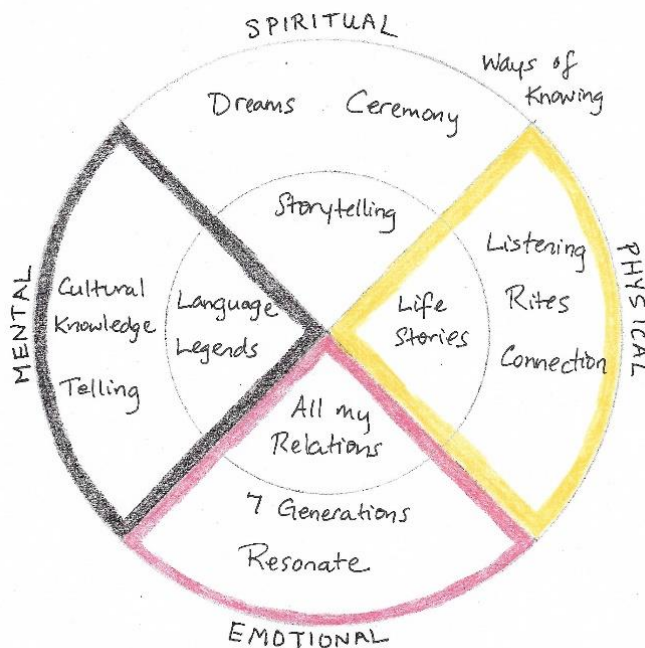
### **What Omushkego Cultural Knowledges and Practices Did I Learn?**

I have put the ways of knowing that we have engaged in during this project in the Sacred Circle in Figure 15. In the physical quadrant I have put listening, rites, connection and life stories. In the emotional quadrant I have put all my relations, seven generations and how these teachings resonate with me and these epistemologies. In the mental quadrant I have put our language, legends, cultural knowledge and our

telling to come to know these things. And lastly, in the spiritual quadrant I have put how dreams, ceremony and storytelling are going to help us (re)awaken our cultural

Figure 15

*Ways of Knowing*



knowledges.

Storytelling as a pedagogical practice was culturally significant and useful. Using stories can continue to be one of the ways to bring us back into our Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. Storytelling can (re)awaken our teaching ways. Telling our stories to each other is only the beginning. Iseke (2013) notes that “Indigenous storytelling pedagogies encourage broader understandings of

identity, community, culture, and relations” (p. 573). An interesting perspective that Wilson (2016) found is that different family and community members hold different parts of the story because of who they are and where they were when an event took place. Therefore, they created a bigger collective history when they were in the same room talking about it (p. 489). In this project, there were two versions of the same story of a father experiencing a spiritual attack, and Tetawin and Omisimâw had different details.

Each participant’s details did not conflict with one another but added to the story. Omisimâw added the first-hand remembrance of seeing her father on the ground having a seizure and her mother putting up pictures of Jesus around them on trees for

protection, and Tetawin offered second-hand information shared with her by her aunt of the basics of the story that his father had to run to Fort Severn to ask the priest for help, and then coming back with a crucifix and holy water. In both of these versions, it was acknowledged that once it was over, Omisimâw's father never wanted to talk about it again. These two versions together built a bigger story and through the telling of it, created a greater understanding of these histories and of silence.

All of the participants understood the value of storytelling. Both Majitch and Tetawin remembered the lessons that they learned from their mother's storytelling practices. And Omisimâw was thoughtful to the full story that she wanted to share in the Hudson Bay Walk. She was clear that she wanted to share a story that demonstrated the no-nonsense interaction between parents and their children. Her intention was to teach that when parents gave a command, the children would do what they were told. She believed that many parents today have lost the ability parent in this way, and her young grandchildren say 'no' to her when she asked them to do something. That was unheard of in her childhood.

Omisimâw's story, the Hudson Bay Walk, contains more than this teaching of parenting. It contains information about traveling on the land, what can be expected from 16- and 14-year-olds who have the knowledge and skills to hunt and harvest on the land, and the challenges between the generations. It is clear in the story that the grandmother was not happy that their father made them bring the dogs from Winisk to Shagamee. But when their father shows up to get them from their grandparents and he is chewed out by his mother, he has the respect to not respond or talk back to her. He just listens and they leave the next day without an argument. Anyone who reads or

hears this story can learn from this interaction. Field (2013) noted that storytelling is an important part of child socialization. It is through stories that children can learn social rules, relationships and the differences between how to interact with family in comparison with strangers. The Hudson Bay Walk story now has the potential to teach the next generation about respectful family dynamics from an Omushkego perspective.

Every person who reads or listens to this story will take away a meaning that is important or relevant to them, and that is the nature of storytelling. The potential cascade of learning is one of the reasons why I chose storytelling as a research method. Lewis (2006) states that “Storytelling as research practice enables the researcher to engage with the stories and histories of families, communities, and cultures and to bring the transformative process of understanding oneself in relation” (p. 573). I understood the responsibility that went with this type of research as well. After sifting through the highest incidence of stories and themes that were told, I immersed myself within the stories to find meaning. What resonated with me demonstrated my relationship with these stories and the participants. Eventually, I want to extend this relationship by publishing and creating resources that can be brought into the classroom to share these Omushkego Cree stories. I agree with Battiste (2013) who strongly advocates for Indigenous knowledges and languages like Cree to be brought into our classrooms.

There is so much to learn from these stories shared about living on the land. These stories also teach us about the strength of character and the knowledge that was needed to survive in the harsh climate of the Hudson Bay Lowlands. The transition to living in communities disrupted these knowledges and is already documented in 2013

(Restoule et al, 2013). But it is good to know that there are still many Omushkego people who supplement their lifestyle by hunting, fishing, and harvesting from the land, and it is important to continue to tap into these ways of participating with the earth's cycles has provided to keep all creatures, land, water, and air in balance.

It is essential for our cultural and spiritual connections to the land to preserve these traditional practices that have implicit knowledges about survival on the land. The changing of the boughs, the conditions of the land and rivers to avoid floods, contain what the Western world calls scientific knowledge. And Indigenous peoples have these knowledges that are based on millennia of generational observation and experience. As Omushkego peoples, we need to continue to value these practices because they hold knowledge for our survival on these lands and the well-being of this planet.

The extension of this generation's knowledge of the land is the idea of group survival. For good reasons, many people are focused on our intergenerational trauma (Menzies, 2014) because Indigenous peoples need to heal from their institutionalized apocolypse. But it is also important to bring back the teaching of intergenerational survival. Our relatives and ancestors worked together for mutual survival in harsh climates. Parents modeled skills and behaviours, which would then be tried out by the children. And when the child was old enough, they were given tasks to complete, like carrying water or setting snares. When the parents were too old to chop wood, or hunt, they would rely on their children's families to provide for them. In return, they would help by teaching the children through storytelling and modeling of their skills. Majitch fondly recalled her grandmother teaching her to make and repair fishnets. Omushkego generational interdependence means that every person, no matter what their age, has

something to offer for the group survival. These types of bonds can create immeasurable value in Omushkego culture.

Another big piece of our story is the need to acknowledge the role of the Fur Trade in our hundreds of years together as settler and Indigenous peoples. Our hunting and trapping lifestyles were convenient when it benefited the settler's New World economies. The fact that trappers in the 1960s were and some are still participating in the fur trade needs attention and respect within our collective stories. There is value in knowing how to live on the land in these stories: to maintain land cycle knowledges by living on the land all year round; to keep our stories and languages alive and thriving; for child development to create strong and independent individuals; and to reduce the human imprint on the environment in comparison to resource extraction economies.

### **Finding Our Voices and Other Outcomes**

I am of the same mind as Grande (2015) when she says, one of the many ways that the academy refracts colonial logics is through the overvaluing of 'young' and individual voices and the undervaluing of Elder and collective voices. And in a system that overvalues 'new' knowledge, fast productivity, and solitary thinking, paradigms of connection, mutuality, and collectivity are inevitably undermined. (p.3)

Knowing how institutions often devalue older people, part of my reclamation and (re)awakening of voice among my Omushkego self and community includes the valuing of Elders and collective knowledges. Our talking with one another has created and will contribute to collective knowledges that will be shared through our iterative and community processes and the products from this project. Both Tetawin and Majitch



acknowledged that it was important that Omushkego peoples understand the history of our colonization. Being able to express what they have learned by telling their stories has helped these participants to move forward in their healing and affirmation of how they connect with their identities as Omushkego women. It was also vital for me to offer the social and political impacts of colonization on their lives to situate these women within the contexts of Canadian colonization. The participants chose these stories to tell and to be known for all of us to hear/read to bear witness.

What to say about the different outcomes for each of the participants in relation to land and identity? They are all strong women, but perhaps their sense of confidence in who they are was different. Omisimâw remained strong in her identity as a language teacher in the north. She participated in local events as an Elder in the community. Tetawin has come to understand the cultural elements that had been lost because of her great grandmother converting to Christianity in 1879. Conversion to Catholicism meant the acceptance of shaming towards Omushkego spiritual and cultural practices and silence towards these activities. The lack of ceremonies and overlapping of legends and Christian parables blurred the lines of her understanding of her culture. But she held fast to the language and how it connected her to the land and her relatives, even in her dreams. Majitch had learned ceremony and cultural activities in Toronto through Council Fire programming, as well as traveling back to Timmins and Peawanuck for Creefest and other family gatherings when it was possible. Majitch remained closely connected to her sister and many nieces and nephews that either live in Timmins or who travel to Toronto and visit her there.

This project gave these Elders the opportunity to share their stories. They expressed that they appreciated the time together to share their stories, and they also were happy to have learned from each other. They also felt more connected to the guests that came to the Storytelling Event. As such, these experiences reinforced the idea that Elders and youth need to participate in events together because both age groups are needed for cultural survival (Restoule et al, 2013). It became clear that the silences also impacted their lives as well. The Elders were isolated in who they were because as Majitch said she never told anyone about her personal journey from her youth because no one ever asked.

This project affirmed that if stories make us who we are (Bayer & Hettinger, 2019; Episkinew, 2009), telling their stories of their lives gives us an opportunity to become who we were meant to be as Indigenous individuals (Iseke, 2013). During the project, Omisimâw was always happy to help and share her stories, Tetawin felt useful as an Elder to talk about the knowledges that she knew from growing up on the land, and Majitch shared her life stories for the first time and relived her resiliency, while making the links between the Indian Act and the controls that were imposed on their lives. Tetawin joked around about standing on the corner with her skirt and kerchief willing to share her culture with anyone who stopped to listen. Majitch was also part of a group that was (re)creating the knowledge base for them to become Elders with cultural knowledges to share with the next generations: they are crafting, learning teachings, making regalia, and drumming and singing together.

It was also evident through their stories and mine that taking part in cultural rejuvenation is important to our identities and intergenerational connections. Omisimâw

continued to make bags, skirts and moccasins for her many grandchildren and great grandchildren. Tetawin continued to participate in cultural events in Timmins and is often asked to open the event with a prayer. Majitch has made her regalia and has started participating in powwows in the Greater Toronto area, as well as contributing beading projects for Council Fire campaigns (Red Dress Day and Orange Shirt Day). I have participated in a berry fast, gotten tattoos, and made ribbon skirts. Fasting from berries has increased my passion for blueberry picking - and eating! There has been a revival of North American Indigenous tattooing practices (Francis, 2021), and by taking part, I am participating on a physical level that reaches back to my maternal grandmother. My tattoos will also signal to others that I am participating in critical Indigeneity by having permanent Indigenous markings on my visible skin. I am sure I will have many opportunities to share these stories of my ancestor's tattoos and how they are connected to my choice to have tattoos on my arms. I also have several ribbons skirts now, and I made one for my daughter, mother and both of my sisters.

The wearing of skirts was an important gender and cultural identity marker for the participants. One of the unspoken and capitalistic nature of our colonization was the push for women to wear pants. And I understand that it was not just Indigenous women that went through these changes, but for the participants, it was a forced changed imposed by the Eaton's and Simpson Sears' stores, who transitioned from selling material to make skirts, to selling pants that women had to buy. This story also represents the social and economic impacts coming from Canadian material society. It was a not directive from the Indian Act legislation, but the by-product of the capitalist society that we all live in.

These storytelling sessions also provided opportunities for participants to learn about their ancestors and living relatives. Learning about these relations created a greater sense of connection to family and Omushkego community. Participants talked about who their relations are and where they are from. The youngest participant found out a lot more about her family tree than she had known before, and it was unlikely that she would have asked those questions before this project took place.

Ultimately, participants felt valued and purposeful. Tetawin says, “It’s important to share our culture and in the way we lived. Um, yeah. The way of the Mushkego people. I think it’s important to share” (Session One).

### **How Can We Assert Indigenous Cultures in Our Lives?**

The history of conversions to Christianity in the Hudson Bay Lowlands is part of our stories that Omushkego communities need to acknowledge as part of most of our ancestors’ lives. These changes happened, and subsequent generations might not continue to follow Christian beliefs and practices, but there are some that do. Finding a way to live side by side with our different beliefs *is* Mino Pimatisiwin: living a good life.

It has become clear to me that as Omushkego peoples we also need to acknowledge these cultural losses in order to face our own (re)awakening and the work needed to bring these teachings/life practices back into our daily living. With each loss, the participants have found over the years a way to counteract the grief of what was missing. Each individual started to pick up their cultural bundle in their own way – including me. Although participants Omisimâw and Tetawin remained faithful to Catholic practices, they have also maintained and practiced material culture that they shared with their families. Majitch and I are learning from Elders and knowledge keepers

cultural and spiritual practices by learning to sing and drum, performing rites of passage, and taking part in ceremony (smudging and sweat lodge, for example).

As Indigenous peoples who have and continue to experience colonization we are not starting at a total deficit. There are still people who live in northern and isolated regions on these lands who maintain some of these cultural land practices of hunting, fishing, hide tanning, etc. It is crucial to continue to participate with them, record their stories, to retain their humour, practical information, and important traditional practices that are beneficial for our health and wellness, like changing of the boughs regularly when living this lifestyle out on the land.

It is also essential to include *all* generations within these cultural (re)awakenings. Elders, adults, youth, and children need to all be included in cultural and social events. Many agencies are engaging in intergenerational programming now and this is why you see Council Fire's Elder's program contributing to the youth powwow in Toronto every year. It is important to spend dedicated time in the same room or space doing cultural activities that will help nurture our histories, stories, and cultures. These events could include storytelling, beading/crafting, speaking the language, hunting, harvesting, and learning to cure caribou, moose, and rabbit skins: all of which connect us with our ancestors' connection to the land and culture. Omushkego peoples are adaptable, and we can survive and thrive through all these changes.

These are just a few examples, but as individuals and as communities, we need to make efforts to participate in these events on our traditional territories. The urgency is to make these things interesting for the children and youth. If Omushkego youth are not interested, then our knowledge and language keepers have to make sure to document

Omushkego lives and knowledges so that when they are ready, there will continue to be people and resources available to them.

During her thoughts on language, Tetawin lamented that “I always regretted is that I didn’t teach [her children] Cree. That’s my big thing” (Session One). This project revealed that loss of language includes loss of older words and phrases that are connected to living on the land and spiritual practices; disconnection between grandparents and grandchildren who do not speak the same language; disconnection between parents and children who speak in English, but not in Cree; the loss of humour of the legends told in the descriptive and humorous Cree language; and the implicitly relational aspects of the Cree language that non-Cree speakers have to make efforts to understand and express in the English language. The unseen impact for Tetawin is that she thinks and feels differently in Cree. What will happen when she does not have anyone to speak Cree with? Without the language, part of her identity will be quiet once again. This dynamic shows that the loss of language transmission is felt in both directions. I always thought it was just my loss of understanding the language.

The use and inclusion of the Cree language in this project and dissertation are important for the preservation and revitalization of our language. My next step must be a driven response to learn and practice speaking Cree every day, especially since our Elders are getting older and I need to encourage language use in my daily life with them while they are here. I appreciate the new words that I have learned during this project, and it has become even more pressing that I learn this language because as Basil Johnston (2020) said, language holds our culture and who we are as [Omushkego]

peoples. And I would like to laugh more, and all indications show that O mushkego peoples laugh more when they are speaking Cree. *Tapwe!* [It is true!]

This silence of the language meant that the participants were speaking Cree to siblings, but not to children or grandchildren. Residential School trauma silenced their beliefs and childhood. Canadian silence and erasure of these histories by the media acting as if the Residential Schools never happened for over 100 years had a particular affect on the participants. I think it was just as problematic but has often been overlooked. The IRS survivors had to act as if what they experienced was normal without understanding that it was an aggressive assimilationist strategy by the Canadian Government (Canada, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). The silencing through the absence of it in Canadian lives (Godlewska et al, 2010) created a constant pain or as Tetawin says, a low-level sadness in her life, and I am sure there are varying degrees of that pain for all survivors. For many, this silence was manifested in the interruption of language transmission.

And for those O mushkego peoples who are living outside of their ancestral traditional lands, it is just as important to get to know the territory that they are currently living in. Majitch's first impression of the city was the beauty of a Weeping Willow tree. Majitch always makes a point to find the natural areas in the Greater Toronto Area, and now that she is connected to knowledge keepers, she has learned ceremonies and social practices, like powwows and singing with the other women of different First Nations together with their hand drums.

The importance of agencies like Friendship Centres, the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre and Council Fire cannot be understated. It has been shown that

especially for Majitch, the Residential School Survivor's group at Council Fire has created programs to reconnect and provide rites of passage and cultural practices that are providing wholistic healing (mind, body, emotional and spiritual) for survivors who are living in urban areas. This also benefits the survivors' families because the rites of passage and cultural practices are starting to happen in their lives, too, just as Majitch was able to support my Berry Feast by singing for me.

The leaders from Nishnawbe Aski Nation in 1975 knew that they needed to preserve Ojibway and Cree cultural knowledge and histories when they created the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre. That agency in particular is a repository of linguistic and cultural knowledges, and I feel I have a responsibility to our ancestors and future generations to engage with these knowledges as much as possible. When Omisimâw was working at the OCCC in the 1980s she was transcribing stories and talking by Elders that were already audio recorded. These agencies were already preparing and preserving the knowledge of the Elders back then.

Tetawin's lifetime of work in these types of agencies in Timmins demonstrated that she also contributed to her own and the community's growth over the years. At first, her role in the community was to support Indigenous families as they transitioned to living in Timmins. And as the years moved on, Tetawin had to face the truths of ongoing colonization and teach these experiences to her coworkers at the Timmins and Area District Hospital. It was during this project that it was the first time that she talked about the emotional labour of doing this type of cross-cultural work. She found it difficult to hear and support the pain that the white nurses and staff were experiencing during these workshops. Unfortunately, these types of education initiatives regularly fall to



Indigenous peoples to teach about the impacts of Canadian history on Indigenous peoples. I also carry the emotional burden of teaching Canadian histories of the Indian Act and IRS to students in the Bachelor of Education program at Lakehead University. I have come to see this work as part of ongoing activities related to Truth and Reconciliation.

### **Truth and Reconciliation**

There were many Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) funded projects across Canada. I did not realize at the time that the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's (RWB) performance of *Going Home Star* was also part of the TRC commemorative activities. I was influenced by the RWB's performance which commemorated a story of Residential School survivorship to change the direction of my dissertation project. I see now how my lived experiences and project have connections to the TRC's work.

I would include my different opportunities for teaching as part of my TRC trek. Over the last eight years, I have been a sessional lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University. I often teach the Gakinoomaagewin in Education course. In this course, I have learned to encourage teacher candidates to open their eyes and hearts to these Canadian histories and provide examples of how stories and the inclusion of arts-based activities into the classroom can inform and guide their teaching. I also understand that my teaching/engaging compulsion to invite my neighbours to my driveway and garage in 2021 to learn about Residential School histories contributed to expanding the Truth part of the TRC activities in my neighbourhood. Talking to my neighbours transformed the way that I see and engage in my suburban landscape for

the better. I received compassion on that day from my neighbours, and I now have a lot more compassion for them.

The use of storytelling and art allowed people to give voice to these histories and to share their experiences. I cannot ignore that my participants and I are part of the waves of Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) activities in our daily lives. Our stories are the truths to be told, and they can be both joyful and terrible to hear.

I also see my connection with Carey Newman's *Witness Blanket* which was also funded by the Truth and Reconciliation Commemoration Fund. I am also bearing witness, albeit on a smaller scale, like the *Witness Blanket* (Newman & Hudson, 2019). Carey Newman learned from doing the *Witness Blanket* that

truth has to come before reconciliation, and that reconciliation is not limited to social repairs, like providing clean water and equal access to health care and education. Those are basic human rights. Lasting reconciliation needs to be about disrupting the colonial systems that created these problems in the first place. It is about respect for this land, and recognizing all humans who live in Canada as equal. (Newman & Hudson, 2019, p. 150)

All of these TRC activities, both big and small, official and personal, show how Indigenous peoples are trying to recover our voices and take up audible and visual spaces. It isn't just "Oh, that George thinks that he can do these things". It is important that we assert the belief that we *can* do anything. And these songs and stories can come to us through shared storytelling events and even through dreams. It is important that we keep moving, speaking, and dreaming our truths.

Often, people forget the ‘truth’ part of Truth and Reconciliation. They just want to move straight to the Reconciliation activities which can help people heal, move forward, or tick off some check marks in their personal or work life. My project revealed the truth of my participants and my own experiences within Canadian histories related to the impacts of conversion to Christianity, the Indian Act, and Residential Schools. I have revealed the various losses and changes that occurred because of the implementation of these activities and legislations written and/or carried out by Missionaries, Canadian politicians, RCMP officers, civil servants, teachers, and others. I have done this by sharing their voices through their stories and experiences.

I have been trying to fill a lifetime of silence in one project. What I did not realise was that it was more than one generation of silence that existed. I started this project not knowing what I was going to hear, but I knew that documenting their past and lived experiences and their current experiences are beneficial for our collective futures. The seven generations principle *is* a conceivable timeline. Our ancestors, like Maggee and Robert from the early 1800s learned to live on the land in a way (*maahchihew*) that was in balance with the environment and all living things. Maintaining this balance was an essential part of Omushkego survival. If there was overhunting (disrespect) those animals would not be available to us generations later. The seven generations stories told during this project were unintended as seven generations teachings. But upon my own reflection and yearning to understand the impacts of these stories for the participants, their children, and grandchildren, I was able to see the seven generations within them as teachings. What was lost within these seven generations can be (re)learned from knowledge keepers who maintained these knowledges in secrecy and

through dreams and ceremonies. These outcomes are aligned with what the TRC hope that our futures will hold and carry.

### **Further Recommendations**

Future research needs to extend this research to include more of my generation, and the current youth's experience in our world today. How are their lives different than our own, and to those of their Elders? How are their lives changing, and how are they experiencing youth land-based or internet-based programs and media? Omushkego peoples need to know these stories and knowledges now to help make plans for the next seven generations. This project already demonstrated how the assimilation of each ten-year gap between the Elders accelerated. And so, more research is needed to document and understand where this generation of youth are going as soon as possible.

If these processes during this project enriched our lives by deciding to wear skirts, getting tattoos, practicing rites of passage, and supporting each other's stories and activities, we, as Omushkego peoples, need to ensure that we are supporting and evaluating local programs and initiatives whose aims are aligned with Omushkego identities, well-being, connections to land, and language. This level of engagement is what it means to respectfully participate in relational work with our communities. Our approaches matter and including myself within this research project provided another invested perspective; whereby, I have worked hard to reflect on how these stories substantiate and contribute to Omushkego histories and knowledges. I will be forever grateful and humbled by my participants' trust and sharing in this project.

It is crucial to build our Omushkego legacy by continuing to record personal stories of Omushkego peoples. Our Omushkego communities need to approach those Elders that are still alive who carry the Omushkego story canon in their hearts and minds. The next generations also need cultural rejuvenation. It has been recommended by many Elders, including Jonathan Solomon (2022) that we need to create Omushkego Cree immersion classrooms and spaces. Our communities also need to create time and places like Restoule et al (2013) did to take youth out on the land with Elders who will speak to them in the language and provide practical skills through modeling, the youth trying, and then giving them the responsibility to undertake land and survival skills. These programs need to take place in every season. Learning all of these land life skills are important. Learning our stories, both legends and personal histories are important. But learning all of these things through the Cree language is essential to creating a thriving cultural legacy for the next seven generations and onward.

I hate to say it, but we have to put the same amount of energy that Father Gagnon did into his missionary work. He learned to speak the Cree language, take care of his dogs and travel with them up and down the rivers systems all over Hudson Bay Lowlands to visit with people and pray with them. Is it impossible to learn these skills now? All one needs is motivation, resources and support like he had, and the energy to be driven to succeed.

Indigenous ways of knowing can be revived in Indigenous peoples and how we relate to one another. This project showed that together we can (re)create our stories, storytelling and cultural practices, and (re)claim our rites of passage on this land. These stories *do* connect us to our ancestors and each other. Our lives as Indigenous peoples

are still holistic even when we live in different places because our connection to land and story are living and breathing in our conversations and actions.

In the end, what matters most to me is that these voices are no longer silent, and that they are valued and heard.

*Meegwetch! Egotay!*

*Wachiye, wachiye!*

## Epilogue

During the writing of this dissertation, Omisimâw passed away at the age of 90 years. She leaves us with generations of children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and a few great-great-grandchildren. Her family legacy will live on. Her participation in this project takes on the emotional gratitude of recording her thoughts and stories. I also feel the gaping hole of her as a resource for language continuation and practice.

I know that Tetawin's main support and language use was with her two older sisters, who are now both passed on. It makes it very obvious that I need to double down and learn the language for the Elders in my community. If Tetawin's identity is more alive when she is speaking and thinking in Cree, then it would be unconscionable to not give her the opportunity to speak Cree every day.

We need to get up on that stage.





- Assembly of First Nations. (1994). *Breaking the silence: An interpretative study of Residential School impact and healing as illustrated by the stories of First Nations individuals*. First Nations Secretariat.
- Auger, D.J., & Faries, E. J. (2005). *The history of education in Nishnawbe Aski Nation*. Nishnawbe Aski Nation.
- Ballenger, B. (1997). Methods of memory: On Native American storytelling. *College English*, 59(7), 789–800.
- Barlow, J. K. (2009). *Residential Schools, prisons, and HIV/AIDS among Aboriginal people in Canada: Exploring the connections*. Aboriginal Healing Foundation.
- Baskin, C. (2005). Storytelling circles: Reflections of Aboriginal protocols in research. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 22(2), 171–187.
- Battiste, M. (1998). Enabling the autumn seed: Toward a decolonized approach to Aboriginal knowledge, language, and education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 22(1), 16–27.
- Battiste, M. (2009). Maintaining Aboriginal Identity, Language, and Culture in Modern Society. In, M. Battiste (Eds), *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* (pp 193-208). UBC Press.
- Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Purich Publishing Limited.
- Bayer, S., & Hettinger, A. (2019). Storytelling: A natural tool to weave the threads of science and community together. *The Bulletin of the Ecological Society of America*, 100(2), 1–6.
- Belton, K. A. (2010). From cyberspace to offline communities: Indigenous peoples and

- global connectivity. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 35(3), 193–215.
- Benham, M. K. P. (2002). Bringing out the stories: Lessons about engagement. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 41(2, Celebrating 30 years of American Indian higher education 1972-2002 Special Issue), 2–8.
- Benoit, A.C. & O'Brien-Teengs, D. (2016). Indigenizing research practices: Two Indigenous researchers share their experiences of incorporating Indigenous culture into research. *Canadian Journal of Aboriginal Community-Based HIV/AIDS Research*. 8(Winter), 3-21.
- Bird, L. (2005). *Telling our stories: Omuskego legends & histories from Hudson Bay* (J. S. H. Brown, P. W. DePasquale, & M. F. Fuml, Eds.). broadview press.
- Bird, L. (2007). *The spirit lives in the mind: Omushkego stories, lives and dreams*. (S. E. Gray, Ed.). McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Bishop, M. (2021). 'Don't tell me what to do' encountering colonialism in the academy and pushing back with Indigenous autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 34(5), 367–378.
- Bradley, N., R. (2007). Remembering offence: Robert Bringhurst and the ethical challenge of cultural appropriation. *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 76(3), 890–912.
- Brant-Castellano, M. (2000). Updating Aboriginal traditions of knowledge. In S. G. Dei, B. Hall, & D. Rosenberg (Eds.), *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world*. (pp. 21–36). University of Toronto Press.
- Bringhurst, R. (1999). *A story as sharp as a knife: The classical Haida mythtellers and their world*. D & M Publishers.

- Bucharski, D., Reutter, L., & Ogilvie, L. D. (2006). 'You need to know where we are coming from': Canadian Aboriginal women's perspectives on culturally appropriate HIV counseling and testing. *Health Care for Women International*, 27, 723–747.
- Calliou, B. (2004). Methodology for recording oral histories in the Aboriginal community. *Native Studies Review*, 15(1), 73–105.
- Canada. (1996). *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Canada Communication Group - Publishing.
- Chadwick, A. (1998). Blood as narrative/narrative as blood: Declaring a fourth world. *Narrative*, 6(3), 236–255.
- Chavoshi, N., Christian, W., Moniruzzaman, A., Richardson, C., Schechter, M., & Spittal, P. (2013). The cedar project: understanding barriers to consistent condom use over time in a cohort of young Indigenous people who use drugs. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 25, 249–259.
- Chawla, D., & Atay, A. (2018). Introduction: decolonizing autoethnography. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 18(1), 3-8.
- Christensen, J. (2012). 'They want a different life': Rural northern settlement dynamics and pathways to homelessness in Yellowknife and Inuvik, Northwest Territories. *The Canadian Geographer*, 56(4), 419–438.
- Conseco, M. (2020, August 28). Topic of Residential Schools absent in some Canadian Schools. [Poll research]. *Research Co.*  
<https://researchco.ca/2020/08/28/residential-schools-canada/#:~:text=Two%20thirds%20of%20Canadians%20who%20attended%20K>

[12%20in, classroom%2C%20a%20new%20Research%20Co.%20poll%20has%20found.](#)

- Corntassel, J., Chaw-win-is, & T'lakwadzi. (2009). Indigenous storytelling, truth-telling, and community approaches to reconciliation. *ESC*, 35(1), 137–159.
- Cruikshank, J. (1998). *The social life of stories: Narrative and knowledge in the Yukon Territory*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Deloria, V. (1999). *Spirit and Reason*. Fulcrum Publishing.
- Dion, S. (2009). *Braiding histories: Learning from Aboriginal peoples' experiences & perspectives*. UBC Press.
- Elder, J-A. (2006). Keepers of the stories: The role of the translator in preserving histories. In G. L. Bastin & P. F. Bandia (Eds.), *Charting the Future of Translation History* (pp. 225–241). University of Ottawa Press.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2022). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, 36(4), 273-290.
- Ellis, D. C. (2000). *Spoken Cree Level 1:ê-ililîmonâniwahk*. The University of Alberta Press.
- Episkinew, J-A. (2009). *Taking back our spirits: Indigenous literature, public policy and healing*. University of Manitoba Press.
- Ermine, W. (1995). Aboriginal epistemology. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 101–112). Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Field, M. (2013). American Indian oral literature, cultural identity revitalisation: Some

- considerations for researchers. In M. Turin, C. Wheeler, & E. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Oral Literature in the Digital Age: Archiving Orality and Connecting with Communities* (pp. 91–101). Open Book Publishers.
- Fixico, D. (2003). *The American Indian mind in a linear world: American Indian studies & traditional knowledge*. Routledge.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.
- Godlewska, A., Moore, J., & Bednasek, C. D. (2010). Cultivating ignorance of Aboriginal realities. *The Canadian Geographer*, 54(4), 417–440.
- Goforth, S. (2007). Aboriginal healing methods for Residential School abuse and Intergenerational effects: A review of the literature. *Native Social Work Journal*, 6, 11-32.
- Grande, S. (2015). *Red pedagogy: Native American social and political thought*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Gray Smith, M. (2017). *Speaking our truth: A journey of reconciliation*. Orca Book Publishers.
- Greenwood, M. (2013). Being Indigenous. *Human Development*, 56(2), 98–105.
- Haig-Brown, C. (1988). *Resistance and renewal. Surviving the Indian Residential School*. Arsenal Pulp Press.
- Hayano, D. (1979). Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, problems, and prospects. *Human Organization*, 38(1), 99–104.
- Henhawk, D. A. (2013). My critical awakening: A process of struggles and decolonizing hope. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 6(4), 510–525.

- Hernandez, N. (2003). Indigenous identity and story: The telling of our part in the sacred homeland. In C. R. Prentiss (Ed.), *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity* (p. 25). NYU Press.
- Hill, R. T. G. (1997). Methodological approaches to Native American narrative and the role of performance. *American Indian Quarterly*, 21(1), 111–147.
- Hulan, R., & Eigenbrod, R. (2008). *Aboriginal oral traditions: Theory practice ethics*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Iseke, J. (2013). Indigenous storytelling as research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 6(4), 559–577.
- Iseke, J., & BMJK, B. (2011). Chapter sixteen: Learning life lessons from Indigenous storytelling with Tom McCallum. *Counterpoints*, 379, 245–261.
- Iseke, J., & Moore, S. (2011). Community-based Indigenous digital storytelling with Elders and youth. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 35(4), 19-38.
- Iseke-Barnes, J. (2004). Politics and power of languages: Indigenous resistance to colonizing experiences of language dominance. *Journal of Thought*, 39(1), 45-81.
- Iseke-Barnes, J. (2009). Grandmothers of the Metis Nation: A living history with Dorothy Chartrand. *Native Studies Review*, 18(2), 69–104.
- Johnson, J. L., & Beamer, K. (2013). Chapter eight: An Indigenous narrative of resilience: Malama ko aloha. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 48, 1369–1376.
- Johnson, P. R. (2016). Indigenous knowledge within academia: Exploring the tensions that exist between Indigenous, decolonizing, and nêhiyawak methodologies. *Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology*, 24(1, Article 4), 44–61.

- Johnston, B. (2020). One generation from extinction. In A. Garnet Ruffo & K. Vermette (Eds.), *An Anthology of Indigenous Literatures in English. Voices from Canada* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed., pp. 96–101). Oxford University Press Canada.
- Joseph, B. (2018). *21 Things you may not know about the Indian Act: Helping Canadians make reconciliation with Indigenous peoples a reality*. Indigenous Relations Press.
- Kataquapit, G. E. (2003). *Some history myths & legends of the Swampy Cree*. Lehto Rainbow Printers Ltd.
- Kenyon, W.A. (1986). *The history of James Bay 1610-1686. A study in Historical Archaeology*. Royal Ontario Museum.
- Kirkness, V. (1997). Sharing through language: Pipe dream or reality? *The First Perspective*, 17-18. In Iseke-Barnes, J. Politics and Power of Languages: Indigenous Resistance to Colonizing Experiences of Language Dominance. *Journal of Thought, Spring 2004*, 39(1), 45-81.
- Kovach, M. (2010). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
- Kovach, M., Carriere, J., Barrett, M. J., Montgomery, H., & Gillies, C. (2013). Stories of diverse identity locations in Indigenous research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 6(4), 487–509.
- Krupnik, I. (2005). “When our words are put to paper.” Heritage documentation and reversing knowledge shift in the Bering Strait region. *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 29(1–2), 67–90.
- Lake-Thom, B. (1997). *Spirits of the earth: A guide to Native American nature symbols*,

*stories and ceremonies*. A Plume Book.

Lavallée, L. F. (2009). Practical application of an Indigenous research framework and two qualitative Indigenous research methods: Sharing circles and Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), 21–40.

Lee, M., & Parkhill, M. (2022, January 25). Where searches for remains are happening at former residential school sites. *CTV News*.

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/where-searches-for-remains-are-happening-at-former-residential-school-sites-1.5754222>

Leen, M. (1995). An art of saying: Joy Harjo's poetry and the survival of storytelling. *American Indian Quarterly*, 19(1), 1–16.

Long, J., S. (2010). *Treaty No. 9: Making the agreement to share the land in far Northern Ontario in 1905*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Loppie, C. (2007). Learning from the grandmothers. Incorporating Indigenous principles into qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(2), 276-284.

Loyie, L., Spear, W., K., & Brissenden, C. (2016). *Residential Schools: With the words and images of survivors: A national history*. Indigenous Education Press and Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre.

Maggio, R. (1996). *The new beacon book of quotations by women*. Beacon Press.

Mann, C. C. (2011). *1491 New revelations of the Americas before Columbus*. Vintage Books.

Mann, H. (2002). Elder reflections. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 41(2), 58–60.

Martin, G. (2014). Dreaming my way home: An intergenerational narrative inquiry about



- Secwepemc identities. [Doctoral dissertation, The University of British Columbia]. UBC.
- Masta, S. (2018). What the grandfathers taught me: Lessons for an Indian country researcher. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(4), 841–852.
- Mayo, P. (2015). Antonio Gramsci's impact on critical pedagogy. *Critical Sociology*, 4(7–8), 1121–1336.
- McIvor, O. & McCarty, T.L. (2016). Indigenous bilingual and revitalization-immersion education in Canada and the USA. In O. Garcia, A.M.Y. Lin, and S. May (Eds). *Bilingual and Multilingual Education*, Encyclopedia of Language and Education. (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., pp. 439-452). Springer Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02258-1>
- McGuire, P. D. (2010). Exploring resilience and Indigenous ways of knowing. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 8(2), 117–131.
- McLeod, N. (2007). *Cree narrative memory: From treaties to contemporary times*. UBC Press.
- Mehrabadi, A., Craib, K. J. P., Patterson, K., Adam, W., Moniruzzaman, A., Ward-Burkitt, B., Schechter, M. T., & Spittal, P. M. (2008). The cedar project: A comparison of HIV-related vulnerabilities amongst young Aboriginal women surviving drug use and sex work in two Canadian cities. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 19, 159–168.
- Menzies, P. (2014). Intergenerational trauma. In P. Menzies & L.F. Lavallée (Eds)

- Journey to healing: Aboriginal people with addiction and mental health issues: What health, social service and justice workers need to know.* CAMH.
- Metatawabin, E., & Shimo, A. (2015). *Up Ghost River: A Chief's journey through the turbulent waters of Native history.* Vintage Canada.
- Moayeri, M., & Smith, J. (2010). The unfinished stories of two First Nations mothers. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(5), 408–417.
- Moore, J. (2020). Women tell their stories: Learning to listen to First Nation voices. *Oral History*, 46(1), 102–110.
- Moose Cree First Nation. (2023). *Wetum Road*. <https://www.moosecree.com/wetum/>
- Moran P. (2021, January 27). Senator Murray Sinclair urges Canadians to reckon with systemic racism. *CBC: The Current*. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-jan-27-2021-1.5888592/sen-murray-sinclair-urges-canadians-to-reckon-with-systemic-racism-1.5888597>
- Moses, D. D., Goldie, T., & Garnet Ruffo, A. (2013). *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Mouse Control. (2022). Can mice in the house make you sick? *Mouse Control*. <https://www.mousecontrol.ca/blog/can-mice-in-the-house-make-you-sick/>
- Myette, E., & Riva, M. (2021). Surveying the complex social-ecological pathways between resource extraction and Indigenous peoples' health in Canada: A scoping review with a realist perspective. *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 8(2).
- Nabigon, H., Hagey, R., Webster, S., & MacKay, R. (1999). The learning circle as a

research method: the trickster and windigo in research. *Native Social Work Journal*, 2(1), 113-137).

Newman, C. and Hudson, K. (2019). *Picking up the pieces. Residential School memories and the making of the Witness Blanket*. Orca Book Publishers.

Nishnawbe Aski Nation. (2021). *Nishnawbe Aski Nation*.

<https://www.nan.ca/event/takwaakin-introductory-anishiniimowin-cree-language-learning-session-2021-6/>

Noddings, N. (2012). *The philosophy of education* (3rd Ed.). Westview Press.

Norton-Smith, T. (2010). *The dance of person & place: One interpretation of American Indian philosophy*. State University of New York Press.

Omushkego Nation Rebuilding Initiative. (2023). *Sending out Language kits* [Facebook group]. Omushkego Nation Rebuilding Initiative. [<iframe](#)

[src="https://www.facebook.com/plugins/post.php?href=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fomushkegonationrebuilding%2Fposts%2Fpfbid02ptdEYYSU5SXYDZ1CY4rFALbJmETjL5nVMMGsWD7exfi1821Yzgqj17DQYJwbomyI&show\\_text=true&width=500" width="500" height="633"](https://www.facebook.com/plugins/post.php?href=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fomushkegonationrebuilding%2Fposts%2Fpfbid02ptdEYYSU5SXYDZ1CY4rFALbJmETjL5nVMMGsWD7exfi1821Yzgqj17DQYJwbomyI&show_text=true&width=500)

[style="border:none;overflow:hidden" scrolling="no" frameborder="0"](#)

[allowfullscreen="true" allow="autoplay; clipboard-write; encrypted-media; picture-in-picture; web-share"></iframe>](#)

Ong, W. (1988). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the world*. Routledge.

Pearce, M. E., Blair, A. H., Teegee, M., Pan, S. W., Thomas, V., Zhang, H., Schechter,

- M. T., & Spittal, P. M. (2015). The cedar project: Historical trauma and vulnerability to sexual assault among young Aboriginal women who use illicit drugs in two Canadian cities. *Violence against Women*, 2(3), 313–329.
- Perley, B. (2014). Living traditions: A manifesto for critical indigeneity. In L. R. Graham & H. G. Penny (Eds.), *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences* (pp. 32–54). UNP.
- Pham, D., & Gothberg, J. (2020). Autoethnography as a decolonizing methodology: Reflections on Masta’s “What the grandfathers taught me”. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(11), 4094-4103.
- Poerwandari, E. K. (2021). Minimizing bias and maximizing the potential strengths of autoethnography as a narrative research. *Japanese Psychological Research*, 63(4), 310–323.
- Proulx, J., & Perrault, S. (2000). *No place for violence: Canadian Aboriginal alternatives*. Fernwood Publishing and Resolve [co-publishers].
- Quinn, J. R. (2021, June 7). Expert insights: Why many Canadians don’t seem to care about the last effects of residential schools. *Western News*.  
<https://news.westernu.ca/2021/06/expert-insights-why-many-canadians-dont-care-about-lasting-effects-of-residential-schools/>
- Ray, L. (2016). ‘Beading becomes a part of your Life’: Transforming the academy through the use of beading as a method of inquiry. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 9(3 Special Issue: Indigenous Knowledge as a mode of inquiry), 363–378.
- Restoule, J-P., Gruner, S., & Metatawabin, E. (2013). Learning from place: A return to

- traditional Mushkegowuk ways of knowing. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 36(2), 20.
- Robinson, H. (1996). *Write it on your heart: The epic world of an Okanagan storyteller* (W. Wickwire, Ed.). Talon Books.
- Rordam, V. (1998). *Winisk: A Cree settlement on Hudson Bay*. Borealis Book Publishers.
- Rowe, G., Straka, S., Hart, M., Robinson, D., Robson, G., & Thomas Callahan, A. (2019). Prioritizing Indigenous Elders' knowledge for intergenerational well-being. *Canadian Journal on Aging / La Revue Canadienne Du Vieillissement*, 39(2), 156–168.
- Samatte, S. (2021). *13 Moons on a Turtle's Back*.  
<https://goodminds.com/blogs/news/free-resource-13-moons-on-turtles-back-info-and-cut-outs-books>
- Savin-Baden, M., & Howell Major, C. (2013). *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Settee, P. (2011). Chapter twenty-eight: Indigenous knowledge: Multiple approaches. *Counterpoints*, 379, 434–450.
- Simpson, L. (2013). *Dancing on our turtle's back: Stories of Nishnaabeg re-creation, resurgence and a new emergence*. ARP Books.
- Sinclair, R. (2009). Bridging the past and the future: An introduction to Indigenous social work. In R. Sinclair, M. A. Hart, & G. Bruyere (Eds.), *Wichihitowin: Aboriginal social work in Canada*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples*.

- University of Otago Press.
- Smith, M. J. (2004). *Placing Gitxsan/First Nations stories in text: Returning the feathers. Guuxs mak'am mik'aax*. University of British Columbia.
- Smylie, J., Olding, M., & Ziegler, C. (2014). Sharing what we know about living a good life: Indigenous approaches to knowledge translation. *Canadian Health Library Association, 34*, 16–23.
- Snowboy, H. (2010). *A voice from the wilderness: A Cree shaman's story*. Baico Publishing Inc.
- Solomon, J. (2022, June 3). *Reclaiming our language*. Ininimo Speak Cree Virtual Conference. <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100083478455801>
- Statistics Canada. (2011). *Town of Moosonee Language data*.  
<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dppd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=POPC&Code1=1390&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=Moosonee&SearchType=Begin &SearchPR=01&B1=A11&Custom=TABID=1>
- Stirling, S. (1997). *The grandmother stories: Oral tradition and the transmission of culture*. [Doctoral dissertation. University of British Columbia]. UBC.
- Strong-Boag, V. (2016). Women's suffrage in Canada. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.  
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/suffrage>
- Struthers, R., & Peden-McAlpine, C. (2005). Phenomenological research among Canadian and United States indigenous populations: Oral tradition and quintessence of time. *Qualitative Health Research, 15*(9), 1264–1276.
- Tachine, A. R., Yellowbird, E., & Cabrera, N. L. (2016). Sharing circles: An Indigenous

- methodological approach for researching with groups of Indigenous peoples. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 9(3), 277–295.
- Te Punga Somerville, A. T. P., & Justice, D. H. (2016). Introduction: Indigenous conversations about biography. *Biography*, 39(3), 239–247.
- The Canadian Press. (2023, January 4). Canada marks first National Ribbon Skirt Day. *Swift Current Online*. <https://www.swiftcurrentonline.com/articles/canada-marks-first-national-ribbon-skirt-day>
- The Canadian Press Staff. (2022, May 18). Timeline of events since finding of unmarked graves in Kamloops. *CTV News*. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/timeline-of-events-since-finding-of-unmarked-graves-in-kamloops-1.5908292>
- The Ontario Ministry of Education. (2013). *Social studies grades 1 to 6: History and geography grades 7 and 8 (Revised)*. Queen's Printer for Ontario.
- The Royal Canadian Geographic Society. (2018). *Indigenous peoples atlas of Canada*. The Royal Canadian Geographic Society.
- Timmons, V., Doyle-Bedwell, P., Lewey, L., Marshall, L., Power, B., Sable, T., Wein, F., & Puiras, J. (2009). *Retention of Aboriginal students in post-secondary institutions in Atlantic Canada: An analysis of the supports available to Aboriginal students*. Association of Atlantic Universities.
- Toulouse, P. R. (2018). *Truth and reconciliation in Canadian schools*. Portage & Main Press.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the*

- future. Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.* Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication. [www.trc.ca](http://www.trc.ca)
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.
- Victor, J. M., Goulet, L. M., Schmidt, K., Linds, W., Episkinew, J.-A., & Goulet, K. (2016). Like braiding sweetgrass: Nurturing relationships and alliances in Indigenous community-based research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 9(4), 423–445.
- Vowel, C. (2016). *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit issues in Canada.* Highwater Press.
- Wagamese, R. (2012). *Indian Horse.* Douglas & McIntyre.
- Warley, L. (2010). The reception of Indigenous life stories: The case of the days of Augusta. *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 22(3), 45–71.
- White, L. (2018). Who gets to tell the stories? Carlisle Indian School: Imagining a place of memory through descendant voices. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 57(1), 122–144.
- Whitinui, P. (2014). Indigenous autoethnography: Exploring, engaging, and experiencing “self” as a Native method of inquiry. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 43(4), 456–487.
- Wickwire, W. (2005). Stories from the margins: Toward a more inclusive British Columbia historiography. *Journal of American Folklore*, 118(470), 453–474.
- Wilson, J. (2016). Gathered together: Listening to Musqueam lived experiences. *Biography*, 39(3), 469–494.



- Wilson, L., Jeffrey, B., & Kelley, L. (1995). *The DEWLine: The distant early warning radar line*. <https://lswilson.dewlineadventures.com/>
- Wilson, S. (1996). *Gwich'in Native Elders: Not just knowledge, but a way of looking at the world*. Alaska Native Knowledge Network.
- Wilson, S. (2001). What is an Indigenous research methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 25(2), 175–179.
- Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is Ceremony*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Young, J. O. (2000). The ethics of cultural appropriation. *Dalhousie Review*, 80(3), 301–316.
- Zepeda, S. J. (2014). Queer Xicana Indigena cultural production: Remembering through oral and visual storytelling. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 3(1), 119–141.

Appendix A

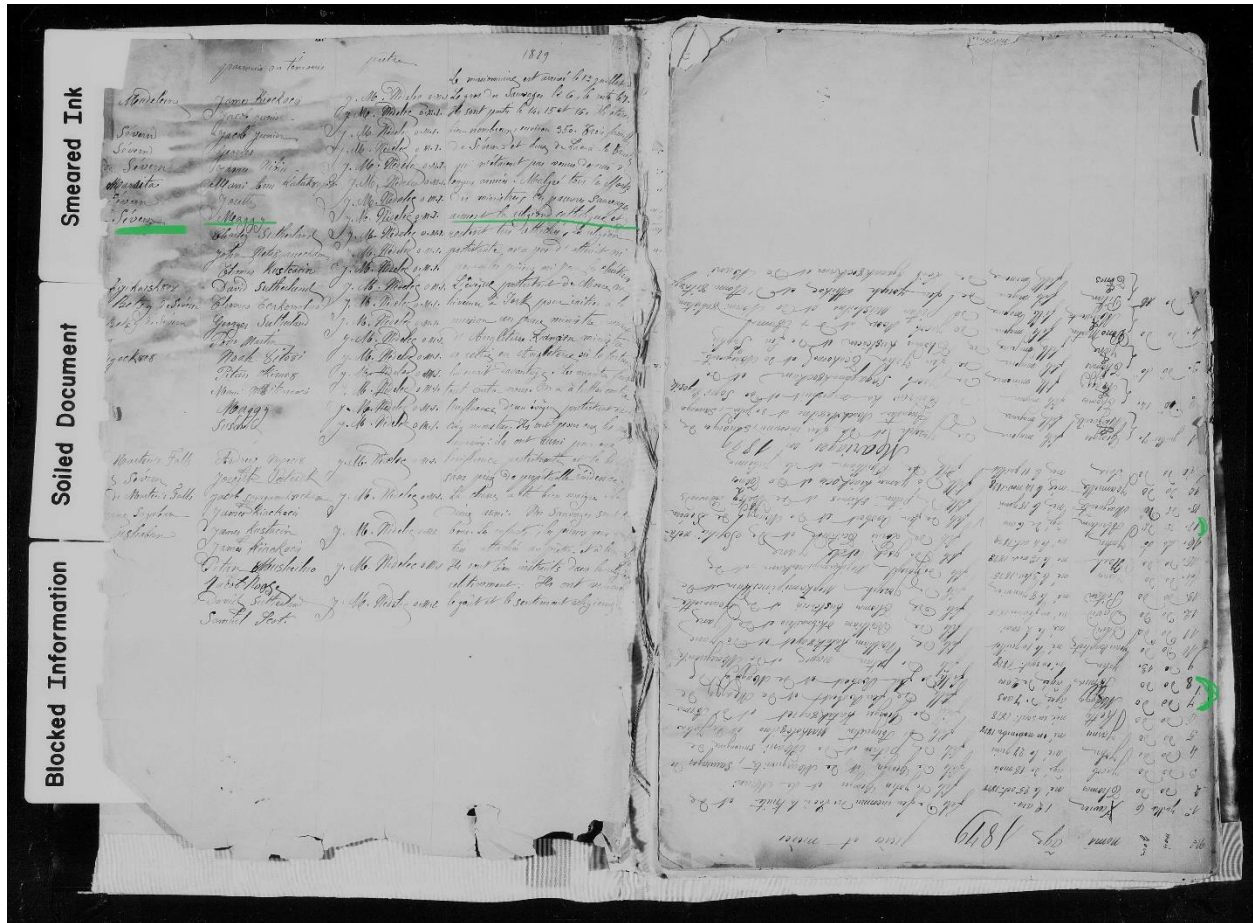
Number 6, Maggy, daughter of Robert and Maggy, baptized at age 7

Number 7, Anna, daughter of Robert and Maggy, baptized at age 2

Number 17, Abraham, son of Robert and Maggy of Severn, baptized at age 6 in 1879.

no.	mois	jours	nom	âge	1879	parents et mères
1.	juillet	6	Xavier	12 ans.		fil de son inconnu et de la trinite et de
2.	do	do	Thomas	né le 25 oct. 1877		fil de John George et de Marie
3.	do	do	Jacob	âge de 18 mois		fil de George et de Marguerite, Sauvages de
4.	do	do	John	né le 27 juin		fil de Piton et de Marie, Sauvages de
5.	do	do	John	né en novembre 1874		fil de Augustin Naskotesilno et de John
6.	do	do	Nettie	née en sept. 1878		fil de John Natakaspet et de Anna
7.	do	do	Maggy	âge de 7 ans		fil de John Robert et de Maggy de
8.	do	do	Anna	âge de 2 ans		fil de John Robert et de Maggy de
9.	do	13.	John	n. en sept. 1879		fil de Piton Marie et de Marguerite
10.	do	do	John Baptiste	né le 30 juillet		fil de William Natakaspet et de Marie
11.	do	do	David	né le 2 mai		fil de William Okimashio et de Marie
12.	do	do	David	né en février 1878		fil de Thomas Kustacen et de Jeanette
13.	do	do	Piton	né le 8 janvier		fil de Joseph Nankamipiesham et de
14.	do	do	John	né le 3 fév. 1875		fil de Joseph Nankamipiesham et de
15.	do	do	Mark	né le 12 mai 1878		fil de John Robert et de Marie
16.	do	do	John	né le 4 oct. 1879		fil de Louis Oatford et de Sophie netie
17.	do	do	Abraham	âge de 6 ans		fil de John Robert et de Maggy de Severn
18.	do	do	Marguerite	née le 15 juin		fil de Piton Thomas et de Marie Edwards
19.	do	do	Jeanette	née le 14 nov. 1878		fil de John Natakaspet et de Marie
20.	do	do	Lara	née le 11 juillet		fil de William et de Jeanette
Mariages, en 1879						
1.	juillet	7.	George	fil majeur		de Joseph et de son inconnu, Sauvages de
			Marguerite	fil majeure		de Augustin Naskotesilno et de John, Sauvages de
2.	do	14.	Thomas	fil majeur		de John Robert et de Sophie netie
			Maggy	fil mineure		de John Robert et de Maggy de Severn
3.	do	do	Thomas	fil majeur		de John George et de Marguerite
			John	fil majeure		de Thomas Kustacen et de son Sophie
4.	do	do	Demo Martin	fil majeur		de John Robert et de Anna
			Marguerite	fil majeure		de Piton Naskotesilno et de Marie Sabitani
5.	do	do	Piton	fil majeur		de John Joseph Okimashio et de Marie Sabitani
			Emes	fil mineure		de Louis Nankaspet et de Marie

On the opposite page and upside down is Maggy's testament of faith:



## Appendix B

Tâwihtin: And it sounds like... [she's looking through the book], *Some history, myths, and legends of the Swampy Cree* by George E. Kataquapit (2003). Just a sec. That, I used to hear about this. I heard this about um...It just started like saying this story was told by an Elder, Ernest Sutherland. He was one of the best storytellers. He has passed on now. He was really a good storyteller.

And it starts like this, [starts reading from page 135]

As they were walking in the wilderness. One of the fine starry night they gave that to the stars and pretended the stars were men. He chose the star for a husband. Good Woman chose the star that was rather dimmer. The Bad Women chose a star that was very bright. After choosing the husband star husbands, the stars they chose swoop down to earth, while they were sleeping. They were suddenly awakened by their star husbands and terrified at the sight of them.

The one Good Woman chose was young and very handsome. The Bad Woman's choice was rather ugly.

It was all wrinkled up and look very old. The women fled from the stars and continue their journey, after a while they came into a big river and were unable to cross it. So, they sat down by the bank to rest.

It was early Spring, and the people were coming down the river in their canoes to the village in the summering place. It was the Goose who first came around the bend up the river. "Hey, brother Goose. Give us a ride," cried the women. "Oh no, my canoe is full. Wait for our elder brother the Grebe. He will be the last person coming down the river," said the Goose. There were ducks of all kinds coming paddling down the river.

They all told the women to wait for their elder brother the Grebe. The loon also came paddling down the river. What a handsome man he was! The women were just tickled with admiration. There and then, they fell secretly in love with the loon. As he came paddling by, the women called out: "Hey, brother loon, give us a ride." "Oh no, my canoe is full. Wait for our elder brother, the Grebe. He is the last person behind me and he will be along shortly," said the loon.

And shortly thereafter, the Grebe came around the bend of the river. But such a little man and such a small and frail looking canoe. The canoe was dipping from side to side as the Grebe came paddling down the river. The women were giggling with amusement. "Is that their elder brother?" said one of them. "Of course it must be Shingabish (the Grebe)," said the other. They were wondering if they should get into his canoe at all. "Should we call him out?" said Bad Woman. "Of course. He is the last person coming down the river the people said," said Good Woman. Then the women called him out. "Hey, brother Grebe!" they called out. But he didn't even look up. "Hey, brother Grebe!" the women called out louder. "Eh!" whimpered the Grebe as he looked about. "Give us a ride," called out the women. "Oh no, my canoe is full," said the Grebe. "We will marry you if you give us a ride," said the women. Instantly at the saying, the Grebe swung his canoe to shore. Now, the Grebe, although of such small stature and uncomely appearance, he was the most powerful of the shaman and the craftiest of the birds. "But you have such a small and frail looking canoe that it will surely sink when we get in," said the women. "No, no, no" said the Grebe. "Naught the way it looks. I can put two bull caribous in it and it hardly displaces any water," he said. But Bad Woman could not believe in what he said and decided to play a joke on him. After her sister got in

carefully she jumped into the canoe thinking for sure she would go right through the bottom. She landed with just a thud, but the canoe hardly moved at all. She frowned as she stood there inside the canoe. The Grebe then swung out into the river and continued his journey.

About mid-afternoon, the Grebe swung to shore. "it is time to make camp. I have to go hunting and prepare some food before we get to the village. I won't have time to go hunting once we get to the village because there will be sacred dancing and feasting all the time," he said. After making a teepee, the Grebe said to the women: "I am going to swim out into the middle of the river and when I am out there you must say: "Our husband Grebe, dives for the beavers." And so he swam out to the middle of the river and called out the women: "Now say it." But the women did not want to call him husband but said to tease him instead: "Grebe the round bottom dive for the beavers!" (Grebe has no tail feathers so that its rear end is round.) "Oh no, I won't dive for the beavers if you tease me like that," he said. Finally, the women said: "Our husband Grebe, dive for the beavers." "Dumpwit!" went the water as the Grebe dived into the water. He was gone for a long time. It was now getting dark and the women were waiting inside the teepee. Eventually, they could hear the Grebe splashing about the bank. Presently he came into the teepee with two long strings of roots and gave each string to the women. "Pull the strings," he said. The women pulled the strings, but whatever was tied to the end was so heavy that the women could hardly drag the load. Then, in came the head of a huge beaver. Each string had some beaver stringed at the end. The women were happy and quickly started to skin and cook some beaver.

The next day, they prepared and smoked the rest of the beavers. The Grebe roasted the beaver tails and made skin bags of the beaver fur. After the beaver meat had been smoked, the Grebe put the meat into the beaver skin bags which he made. He put all the roasted beaver tails into one bag and put a special mark on it because he coveted the beaver tails and wanted to scheme a way to have all the beaver tails to himself.

After packing up all the smoked meat, they continued their journey down the river. As they were paddling down the river, they saw a bear walking along the shore. "Here, here, here, my doggie bear," called out the Grebe. "The bear is my little dog," he said as he swung his canoe to shore. But the bear just scrambled from the shore and trotted away into the bush. But the Grebe grabbed the bag containing the beaver tails and said: "I must feed my dog the bear. He must be hungry." He jumped out of the canoe and ran up the bank. "Here, here, here my doggie bear. You must be hungry," he said as he ran after the bear. He was gone for a long time and that's where he had the opportunity to eat all the beaver tails to himself.

Eventually, he came back to the bank wailing with pain. "I stepped accidentally on thorn bushes and my feet are full of thorns. Pull the thorns out," he said as he sat in his canoe and stretched his feet to the women.

Tâwihtin: For his crimes they see [end of story on page 143]

Appendix C

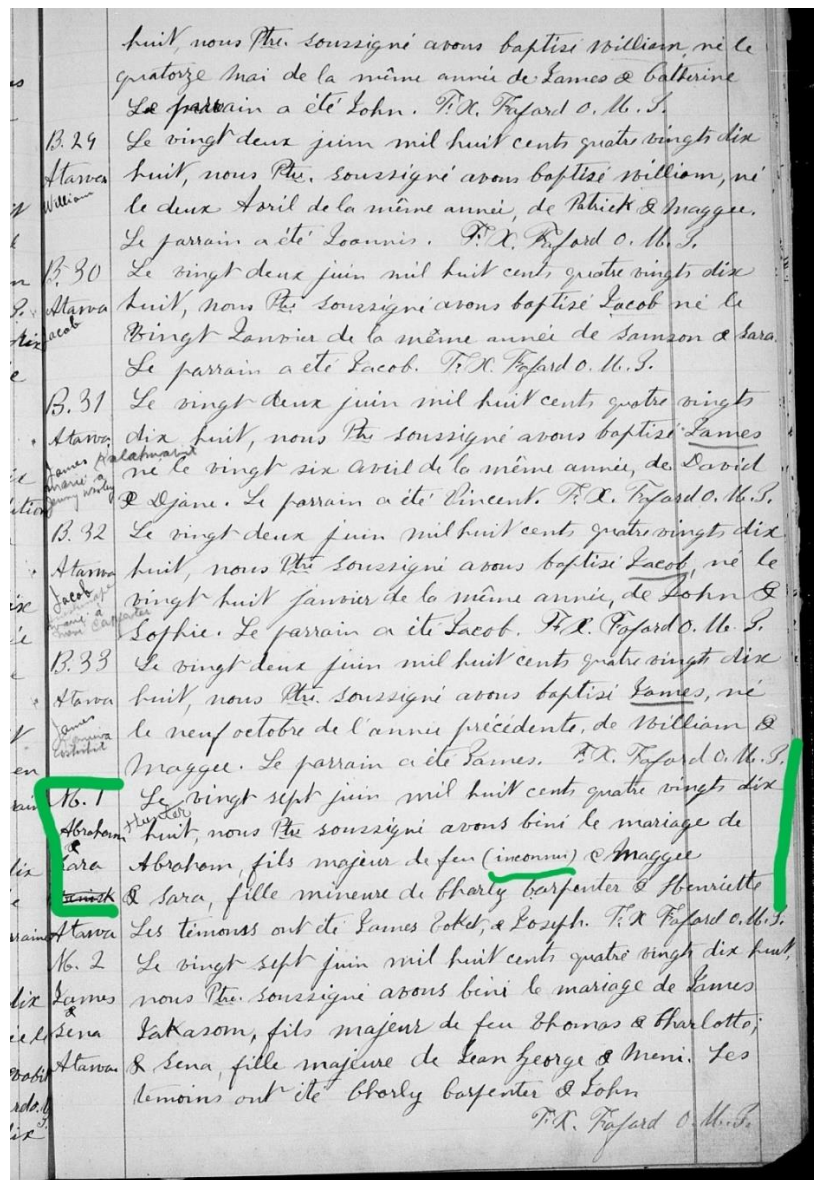
1) Albany – Northern Missions 1760- 1923 (but it only goes to 1907)

M 1. [Abraham and Sara written in the margin, and Hunter written between the lines.

Underneath their names Winisk is written but scratched out and underneath that is written

Atawa – the confusion over the place could be because Abraham is from Winisk, but Sara is from Attawapiskat]

Le vingt-sept juin mil huit cent quatre-vingt-dix-huit, nous Ptre soussigne avons béni le mariage de Abraham, fils majeur de feu (inconnu) & Maggee, et Sara, fille mineure de Charly Carpenter & Henriette. Les timons out ete James Toket, & Joseph. F.X. Farford. O.M.I.





## B. 60 [Christiana marie à Moses Koostachin in margin]

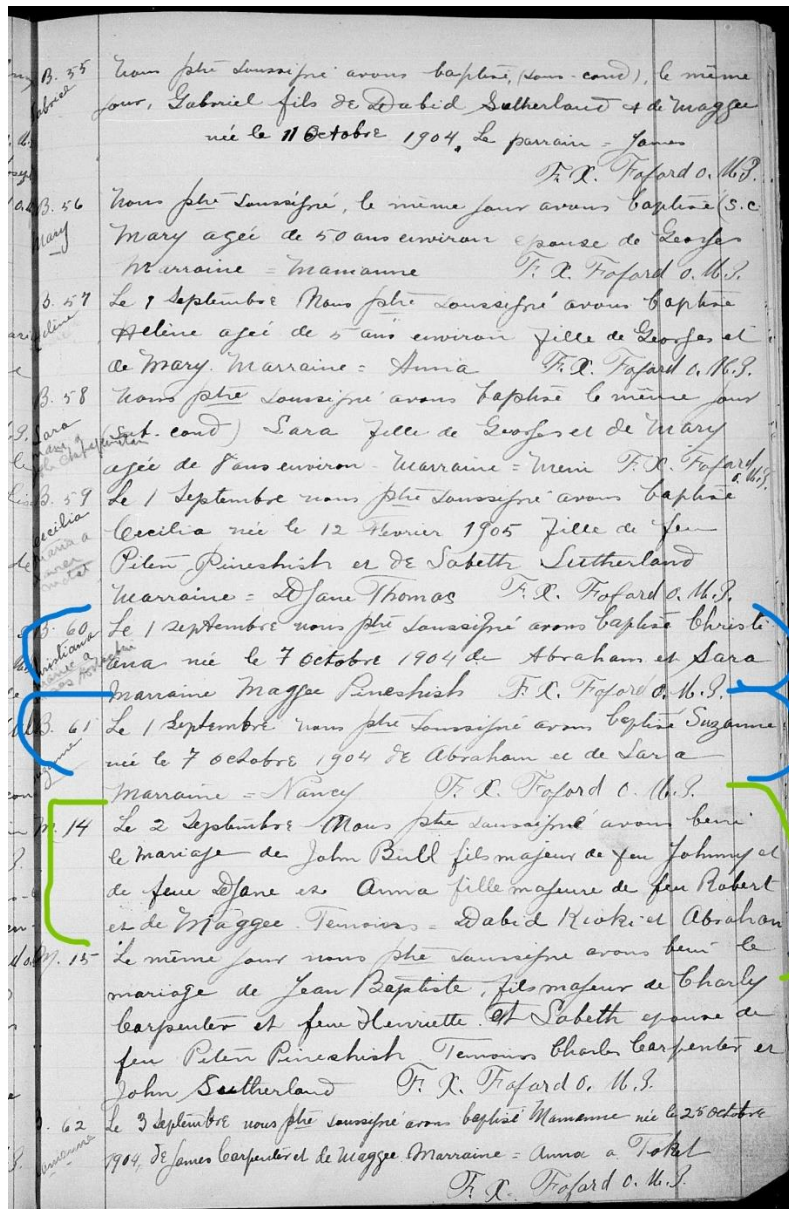
Le 1 Septembre nous Ptre soussigne avons baptisé Christiana née le 7 Octobre 1904 de Abraham et Sara. Marraine Maggee Pineshish F.X. Farford O.M.I.

## B. 61 [Suzanne in margin]

Le 1 Septembre nous ptre soussigne avons baptisé Suzanne née le 7 Octobre 1904 de Abraham et de Sara

## M. 14

Le 2 Septembre nous ptre soussigne avons béni le mariage de John Bull fils majeure de feu Johnny et de feu Djane es Anna fille de majeure de feu Robert es de Maggie. Temoins – Dabid Kioke et Abraham.



## Appendix D

Reflection on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021

May 27, 2021, Tk'emlups te Secwepemc Chief Roseanne Casimir officially makes a statement regarding the remains of 215 children buried in unmarked graves at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. I am knocked over and numb. I am horrified, yet I already knew that these things happened. And every little body and remains that they find will never account for the total children that are missing. Many students were drowned and burned as well. We know this from Residential School survivors' testimonies recorded in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report.

Canadians say it is unthinkable. But that is because they have been indoctrinated by their school system to not think about the atrocities that were happening concurrently with their own education. Each generation of Canadian and immigrant between 1831 and 1997 lived in Canada's growing country and economies while Indigenous children were dying, living through daily traumas, and losing themselves through abuse and attacks on their language and culture. I can only look at these facts for so long. If I stare too long, I get pulled down and begin to drown in despair and anger knowing what my mother, her siblings, parents, aunts and uncles and my cousins had to live through these atrocities. And the truth is that some of them didn't. Every breath in this knowledge tears at the fabric of my heart, making my blood struggle through caverns of grief.

I will be honest and say that I hated everyone on those early days after the announcement. I looked at all the Canadians that have benefited from these actions, including all of those who follow Christianity and hurl their assimilation of beliefs at

others. But I couldn't stay there. It is not a good place. I needed to do something to move these feelings along. I would educate.

People in our neighbourhood Facebook group were talking about cancelling Canada Day and they did not want to celebrate it. I thought, well, I could create an information station in our garage and driveway and invite people to come and learn. Once this idea came into my head, it began to take hold. I could do this. We already made our garage into a museum for our neighbour during the pandemic. I could create a resource list for people to educate themselves. We could invite local politicians, as well.

So, we did. I made the post in my local neighbourhood group and invited them to come to our driveway between 1:00 and 4:00 pm on July 1<sup>st</sup>. I worked day and night to get everything ready. I printed off the lists of the Prime Ministers and Ministers of Indian Affairs from Confederation to 1996 to demonstrate who was in power and who knew what was going on. It is an impressive list. It contains almost all of them in our history. And that is because Residential Schools actually existed for more years than Canada has been a country.

I brought most of my Indigenous books out on display. Many I had already collected because of my own teaching Aboriginal Education to Teacher Candidates. There were books on teaching children about Residential Schools. There were also books about various Indigenous cultures, significant individuals, and facts books, like the Indigenous People's Atlas of Canada.

I created a Google document that contains lists of books, links, and ideas for furthering your knowledge about our collective histories. I still update this document

when a new reading list or information is circulated on social media. [Doe's Google document](#)

And I had asked three friends if they could sit with me each for one hour in the afternoon. They are allies that would keep me safe if anyone arrived to make trouble. But that did not happen. Everyone who came, came to learn and were grateful for the opportunity.

<https://twitter.com/Wrterdoe/status/1411076125992890375>

On July 11, 2023, the twitter analytics on Doe's Google document were 14925 impressions.

Local municipal politicians came. Two came before the event to chat about Indigenous issues and possible future committee work. Five came throughout the day on July 1<sup>st</sup>. I was grateful that they came, but unsure of their intent: three came and spent most of their time talking to our Member of Parliament, Ryan Turnbull, who also came by. I am unsure if they even went into the garage where the information was. The fifth showed up later in the day, and she was extremely sincere and intent on doing what she can for Indigenous peoples in our area and in Canada.

Ryan Turnbull stayed for more than two hours. He looked through the garage, and talked to the politicians and neighbours who came by. They all listened while I shared my family's stories. Ryan was extremely sincere when we were able to have a one-on-one conversation while taking a photo with his family. Tears came to his eyes as he said there is work being done in the background, and they are doing as much as we can to move forward. I believed him.

Friends donated shade covers, both their own, and their friend's. Neighbours came to help set up and take down. Friends came to see the event who lived in Toronto to support me – and to learn as well. My family did everything they could in the week before, during and after the event.

My heart was full of good thoughts and responses from this event. I wouldn't say that I was healed, but I felt better doing something to educate my neighbours. Their responses were so genuine and thoughtful that it gives me hope that the tide will eventually turn towards a more equitable and honest world.

Things to come out of this event:

- A neighbour brought me a loaf of sour dough bread that her husband made as a thank you. I had not spoken to this neighbour from around the corner for years. When she came on July 1<sup>st</sup>, she brought her twin boys who would have been around 10 or 11 years old, and they read *The Secret Path* by Gord Downie on the lawn.
- I was asked to do a Keynote presentation for our Faculty Welcome Days at Lakehead University on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021. There were approximately 25 Faculty present (both Thunder Bay and Orillia locations).
- My neighbour also helped me to make a follow up video recording me reading what people wrote in the guest book. I released it on September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the first National Truth and Reconciliation Day.

<https://twitter.com/Wrterdoe/status/1443551399116148745>

- My neighbour across the street came by to see what I was sharing. Later in the summer, she came by to ask if I would do a talk about this topic for her work at

Tomson Reuters. It would be a virtual presentation on September 29<sup>th</sup>. There were 350 participants.

- I was asked by another person who attended this event to do a presentation for the Canadian Federation of University Women Oshawa and District Meeting on January 7, 2022. There were 45 participants.

I still have bouts of rage and despair, but doing something helps me move those feelings into productive action.

## Appendix E

**Wasaykaycheck and the shut-eye dance**

Omisimâw: I only hear the stories, the ones where Wasaykaychek was walking around, and he didn't have the weapon to, to kill animals. he saw a bunch of geese and ducks and loons and everything.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: Yeah, that's sort of story is clean and is for children, you know.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: But again, but again, he attacked...to get these, to get these birds together, and he made, he went to get some moss and put put it his sack, whatever. The sack he had.

Doe: Yeah,

Omisimâw: And he said that, You want to hear me singing and come I'll tell a story. I'm going to make a shelter and we can get all together in my shelter.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: You know?

Doe: Yes.

Omisimâw: Kind of thing. And then they start singing away after he finish all his shelter. He invites all the birds and all this...[inaudible] you know, those ducks and loons, and geese and wavies.

Doe: Mm hmm.

Omisimâw: And then he telling them to close their eyes. That's when he starts singing and tell them to dance and close their eyes. In the meantime, while their closing their eyes, he was killing some of those that the other ones didn't know.

Doe: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Omisimâw: That's how he got those geese.

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: He was killing them.

Doe: He was like wringing their necks.

Omisimâw: He was singing and wringing their necks, and then the other ones didn't hear, because they didn't see because he told them to close their eyes.

Dancing, their self singing away. [laughs]

Doe: Yeah.

Omisimâw: And then Loon opened his eyes. "Ah, this guy is killing us! And they all run out. And the one that is left, I guess, he kicked the loon right in the back.

That's why the loon he has, very skinny, I don't have [the words], he's got some kind of ...

Doe: Yeah, he's got like the feet, the feet are near his

Omisimâw: He's got a small back bone there.

Doe: Yeah, like the feet are really close to his bum.

Omisimâw: He kicked him.

Doe: Kick this butt in.

Omisimâw: Yeah.

[both laugh]



Doe: It's crazy.

Omisimâw: Yeah. Kicked his butt in for telling. (Session Five)

*Meegwetch!*

*Ninaskomin*

[I am grateful]